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Effective Leadership Practices in the Sustainability of
Professional Learning Communities in Two Elementary Schools

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

by

Debra W. Wolford

December 2011

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Keywords: effective principal practices, professional learning communities,
professional learning community sustainability, shared leadership

ABSTRACT

Effective Leadership Practices in the Sustainability of Professional Learning Communities in Two Elementary Schools

by

Debra W. Wolford

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the leadership practices of principals who sustain professional learning communities. The study was conducted using semistructured interviews with 2 elementary school principals from a noted professional learning community district in Henderson, Kentucky. A Professional Learning Community Assessment Survey was completed by the teachers in both elementary schools. Photographs of each school and a review of school documents triangulated the research of these 2 professional learning communities.

In interviews the principals described their roles in: (1) defining a professional learning community or PLC, (2) supporting and sustaining a PLC, (3) supporting professional dialogue opportunities in a PLC, and (4) identifying shareholders as an essential element in successful professional learning communities.

The teacher surveys helped to confirm the principals' perceptions and the roles of the principals in supporting and sustaining a professional learning community. The teachers defined the principal's role in supporting and sustaining a professional learning community as (1) involving staff in decisions, (2) incorporating teachers' advice to make decisions, (3) providing staff members access to key information, (4) the principal being

proactive, (5) enabling staff members to initiate change, (6) sharing responsibility and rewards, (7) sharing power and authority, and (8) promoting and nurturing leadership.

The effective leadership practices of both principals support successful and sustainable professional learning communities. The triangulation of data reinforced these conclusions: (1) both principals have effective leadership practices that support and sustain a PLC, (2) the majority of teachers from both schools who participated in the survey overwhelmingly approve of the leadership practices of their principals, (3) continued improvement in student assessment results over a period of years support the practices of the principals, and (4) effective leadership practices strengthen the professional learning concept of supporting and encouraging continued student and teacher progress.

The results from this study were intended as a reference for principals and school districts concerning the effective practices of principals to support and sustain professional learning communities.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my father Ray C. Walls. He knew the importance of an education and would be very proud of my accomplishments. You left this life 25 years ago. I still miss you and think of you often.

I would like to dedicate this educational journey to my children Michael and Lauren; thanks for your understanding and patience when I needed to read and work. I hope you will truly understand what it means to reach for your dream and work until you achieve it.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In the last 2 decades the roles of principal and teacher have changed significantly. Principals are being “called on to lead in the redesign of their schools and school systems” (Levine, 2005, p. 12), and teachers are asked to be active partners in supporting increased student achievement.

The managerial expectations that principals were required to meet in the past are only a small component of the leadership requirements needed for the overall effectiveness and success of today’s schools. Principals are expected to be managers, instructional and transformational leaders, and the connection from the school to the community. School reform is not new to education, but the principal’s role as a vital part of school reform is relatively recent. Principal leadership is considered to be the catalyst for any successful turnaround or reform of schools (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Principals, once regarded as merely managers, are now considered central to the task of building schools that promote improved teaching and learning for all students (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2001; Peterson, 2002).

Many schools in the United States have documented increased student achievement, according to Solution Tree (2010), through the school reform concept of professional learning communities (PLCs). DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) “define a professional learning community as *educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for*

the students they serve”[italics original] (p. 14). This study examines the leadership practices of principals who support successful professional learning communities.

Statement of the Problem

The pressure of school accountability for improving student achievement as measured by improved scores on standardized tests has grown in the last 2 decades and continues to grow at an accelerated pace. The stipulations placed on schools that do not meet federal benchmarks are sanctions no school or community wants placed on the school or school district. Schools are searching for a plan or school reform model that will ensure student test scores that meet No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements. Professional learning communities have been shown to support increased student achievement and improve instruction (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord, 1997). This study examines the effective practices of two elementary principals that support successful professional learning communities as well as the teachers’ responses to the Professional Learning Community Assessment in one school district in Kentucky.

Significance of the Study

This is a qualitative study of principal leadership practices that effectively support greater student and teacher achievement in successful professional learning communities. Principals in PLCs purposefully and thoughtfully plan to create conditions to build the capacity for student and teacher success (DuFour et al., 2010). Successful PLCs depend on effective leadership practices (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2001). Hipp and Huffman (2010) assert, “Principals need to be competent in facilitating change among seemingly disparate parts, distinct personalities and styles, and, at times, opposing priorities for a

common goal” (p. 140). It is the intent of this study to add to the educational community’s understanding of the role of the principal in developing effective leadership practices for sustaining a successful PLC.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to the Henderson County School District identified by Solution Tree as a PLC (Solution Tree, 2010). The study was further delimited by studying two elementary schools located within the Henderson County School District.

Research Questions

The overall guiding research question for this study is: What leadership practices are effective in the sustainability of professional learning communities? The study will address the following guiding questions:

1. How does the principal define a PLC?
2. How does the principal define his-her role in supporting and sustaining a PLC?
3. What structure or structures are in place for professional dialogue to occur in the school?
4. How do teachers define the principal’s role in supporting and sustaining a PLC?
5. What effects do principal leadership practices have on the sustainability of professional learning communities?

Limitations of the Study

Limitations in the study may affect the application of these results to other PLC sites. Those limitations are:

1. The list of schools provided by Solution Tree may not have been representative of schools across the United States.

2. The instrumentation used for interviews with the principals was not comprehensive. The open-ended questions and requests for further comments may not have addressed additional areas of principal concerns or practices that could have been analyzed in this study.
3. All teacher participants in kindergarten through fifth grade were encouraged to participate in the on-line survey, but not all responded.
4. The sample size of this study was small and, therefore, the results of this study may not be generalized to other schools or PLCs.

Definitions of Terms

1. Action orientation: “A predisposition to learn by doing; moving quickly to turn aspirations into actions and visions into realities” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 463).
2. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): “The individual state’s measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. ‘Adequate Yearly Progress’ is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts and schools must achieve each year” (United States Department of Education, 2004, p. 3).
3. Capacity building: “Capacity building involves the use of strategies that increase the collective effectiveness of all levels of the system in developing and mobilizing knowledge, resources, and motivation, all of which are needed to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning across the system” (Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006, p. 88).

4. Collaboration: “A systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 464).
5. Learning: “The acquisition of knowledge or skills through an ongoing action and perceptual curiosity. Members of a PLC engage in an ongoing study and continuing reflective practice characterized by an organization committed to continuous improvement” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 468).
6. Learning organization: “An organization that is continually expanding its capacity to create its future” (Senge, 2006, p. 12).
7. Mission: “The fundamental purpose of an organization. Mission answers the question, ‘Why do we exist?’ ” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 468).
8. No Child Left Behind (NCLB): The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB was signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. NCLB’s premise was based on four principles: accountability for student results, more choices for parents for their child’s education, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on instruction based on scientific research (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).
9. Phenomenology: “A phenomenological study describes the meanings of a lived experience. The researcher . . . puts aside, all prejudgments and collects data on how individuals make sense out of a particular experience or situation” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 26).

10. Professional Learning Community (PLC): “We define a professional learning community as educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 14).
11. Shared Vision: “When people truly share a vision they are connected, bound together by a common aspiration . . . Shared vision is vital for the learning organization because it provides the focus and energy for learning” (Senge, 2006, p. 192).
12. Supporting: “to maintain (a person, family, establishment, institution, etc.) by supplying with things necessary to existence; provide for” (Random House Dictionary, 2010).
13. Sustainability: “Sustainability involves the capacity to self-organize flexibly, the art of conversation, and the depth and breadth of leadership participation, enculturation, and pacing” (Lambert, 2003, p. 84).
14. System thinking: “Is a discipline for seeing the *structures* that underlie complex situations and for discerning high from low leverage change” (Senge, 2006, p. 69).
13. Vision: “The picture of the future we seek to create” (Senge, 2006, p. 192).

Statement of Researcher Perspective

In my 25 years of teaching, I have taught with eight different principals in five different elementary schools in one county. Each had disagreement in individual leadership style; some were more effective than others in supporting student success and teacher satisfaction. None of the principals followed the guidelines of a professional

learning community in which a vision and a mission of a school had any meaning other than a statement posted in the school building or in a school document. Teachers in these schools worked without collaboration from colleagues, were solely responsible for their student's progress, grade-level meetings did not exist, and the valuable information contained in student outcomes was not shared or used.

The Reading First Grant under the No Child Left Behind Act was implemented in my school's county. The grant required reading coaches to work with teachers in assisting with the improvement of classroom instruction. Most teachers viewed this new concept with much distrust and skepticism. Many principals did not understand or support any of the initiatives of collaboration, new forms of data, or methods to implement the results of the student data with teachers.

As a reading coach under the Reading First Grant, the researcher understands how difficult change can be. Collaboration and shared leadership are new concepts for many teachers and administrators. The Reading First coaching experience provided the incentive for this researcher to become an educator who could provide the leadership practices necessary to establish professional learning communities. The prospect of implementing a school improvement concept that will enable school communities to improve student and teacher learning now and in the future warrants further study. Researchers have provided valuable documentation and insights into effective and successful PLCs as shown in the literature review of this study.

I had envisioned a successful school under a professional learning concept. The PLC concept is an ever-evolving improvement plan for schools and has no conclusion. I was interested in learning from successful professional learning communities that were

supported by effective leadership practices; the research provides insights through interviews, surveys, and observations from personnel in two elementary schools. I will share the findings with other educators who strive for continued student and teacher improvement with effective principal leadership practices. It is imperative to understand the foundation of PLCs and how principal practices can be an essential part of a successful professional learning community. My knowledge of effective principal leadership practices is not a weakness but a valuable asset to the methodology and findings of this study. I made every effort not to influence the research study.

Overview of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, research questions, limitations of the study, definitions of terms, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature beginning with a section on the role of the principal, a review of principal leadership practices from the 1950s through today, presentation of the concept of professional learning communities, and a discussion of effective leadership practices that support professional learning communities. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the research methodology and includes the research design, population information, research questions and hypothesis, the instruments used in this study, and the data analysis. Chapter 4 consists of data analysis, and Chapter 5 includes a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The pressures to ensure increased student achievement were intensified with the mandates from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. NCLB greatly affected the entire school system structure including the job description of a school principal. The new role of the principal has transformed from being primarily a managerial position to an instructional, collaborative, distributed leadership position responsible for student and faculty learning and facilitating their successes.

This chapter explores the educational literature that examines the changes in the role of the principal, defines a professional learning community, illustrates the benefits and essential characteristics of professional learning communities, presents guidelines for building a PLC, and discusses leadership in PLCs and in sustaining professional learning communities, and a summary.

Changes in the Role of Principal

Many changes have occurred in the role of the principal in the last 3 decades. Once known as lead teachers, principals performed tasks such as building maintenance while having the responsibilities for teaching students, transitioned to routine administrator positions (Rousmaniere, 2007). Principal responsibilities by the 1960s and 1970s had grown to managing federally funded programs and supervising curricular initiatives (Kafka, 2009). Principals were seen as “potential change agents” (Kafka, 2009, p. 8) because of their increased management of federal programs and their role in

maintaining community connections. In the 1980s research by Edmonds (as cited in Kafka, 2009) established a relationship between successful schools and strong administrative leadership. Administrators were expected to be instructional leaders and a primary source of knowledge for the school's programs (Kafka, 2009).

The research of Goodwin, Cunningham, and Eager (2005) suggested that the duties of a principal have increased tremendously to the point that the role as an administrator has become an "accumulation of expectations that have increased the complexity of the position until it has reached a bifurcation point where change is inevitable" (pp. 2-3). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has demanded that principals be accountable for the success of their schools and all their students. Principals are asked to support students, parents, district administration, society, and communities as in the past but with the added pressures of improving students' test scores. Numerous demands are made on a principal's time and attention. They assume the roles of "managers, administrators, supervisors, instructional leaders, and politicians" (Kafka, 2009, p. 12).

Many changes in the principalship can be reflected in the ways principals view their positions as transformational, instructional, and collaborative leaders through distributed leadership. Principals of today view their role as supporters of student and faculty learning. A school reform known as professional learning communities could enable principals to support student learning in the classroom as well as promoting the continuing process of learning for their teachers and staff.

Defining a Professional Learning Community

The concept of learning communities was supported by the work of Senge (2006). He described a learning organization “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 further explained that when relationships form to connect with an “organization’s essence, a community develops” which shares “common aims and shared meaning” (p. 307). Senge further defined the learning community as a place at the heart of a learning organization where people are continuously discovering and creating their own sense of reality. Although Senge’s work was describing business organizations, educators have taken his writings and applied them to the discipline of education. There is no universal definition of a professional learning community; however, many educators provide various ways of describing a PLC. The idea, once implemented in the business sector, has evolved into a powerful concept for education through the work of Hord who defined it as a professional staff directing their efforts toward student learning (1997). Sergiovanni (2009) defined a learning community as:

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)

Lieberman described a learning community in an interview with Sparks as “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” (Sparks, 1999, p. 53).

A professional learning community is an ongoing process of school reform intended to establish a school-wide culture focused on building and sustaining efforts to improve student success and teacher leadership. Teachers and administrators seek to work collaboratively to share learning and to act on that learning to fulfill the goal of improving student achievement (Hord, 1997). The key for PLCs is a focus on learning, not a focus on teaching (DuFour, 2004). DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) defined a professional learning community 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)

DuFour (2004) explained three core principles of a PLC as the assurance students are learning, providing a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results. This process requires teachers to: (1) change traditional practices and revise assumptions, (2) stop excusing unfavorable data and stop limiting improvements because of outside factors such as student discipline or staff morale, and (3) focus on student learning. The premise of the professional learning community model is that students are not just taught but that they learn.

Elmore (2004) suggested the focus should be on instructional practices, asserting that (1) it would be impossible to improve student performance without improving the quality of teaching and learning in the classrooms and (2) that schools should focus on content and pedagogy in their professional development to improve instructional practice.

Morrissey (2000) posited, “Rather than becoming a reform initiative itself, a professional learning community becomes the supporting structure for schools to continuously transform themselves through their own internal capacity” (p. 10).

Professional learning communities require that the entire learning community work collectively and collaboratively to improve student performance. Reeves (2004) asserted that if teachers reflected and examined their professional practices and accepted an accountability of the impact of their teaching practices on student achievement, they would be a transformative power in education. Reeves’s statement about the reflective practices of teachers was further supported by DuFour’s (2004) three crucial questions that focus the work of PLCs: (1) What is it that we want our students to know? (2) How do we know when our students are acquiring the intended knowledge? and most importantly, (3) how we will know when they do not acquire the intended knowledge? DuFour et al. (2008) stated that professional learning communities:

Stimulate the shared mission, vision, collective commitments, and goals; the collective inquiry; the collective teams focused on learning; the action orientation; the commitment to continuous improvement; and the focus on results that we believe are critical to the survival and success of public schools. (p. 12)

Benefits of a Professional Learning Community

The benefit of a professional learning community as noted by DuFour et al. (2008) is “to better achieve results for the students they (teachers) serve” (p. 14). “The very essence of a *learning* [italics original] community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 15). Educators in successful PLCs have made a commitment to the vision of helping all students learn. The shared mission, clear direction, and collective values guide the goals of the PLC through a moral purpose

that clarifies why every day's work is so important (DuFour et al., 2008). "The PLC concept is specifically designed to develop the collective capacity of a staff to work together to achieve the fundamental purpose of the school: high levels of learning for all students" (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005, p. 18). "In a PLC, that unifying principle asserts that we have not fulfilled our fundamental purpose until *all* [italics original] students have learned at high levels" (DuFour et al., 2005, p. 15).

The benefits of professional learning communities are not solely based on student achievement but also on greater professional satisfaction. Teachers in PLCs are supported by the shared responsibility of interdependency for student success, reduction of isolation for teachers, collaboration among the faculty, improved classroom instruction, higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism (DuFour et al., 2008).

The vision of increasing student achievement and acquiring greater professional satisfaction "will help sustain the effort and energy needed for the difficult work of implementing change" (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 143). "The stakes are high, but success could redefine public education and education professions and enable us to reach unprecedented levels of quality, equity, and achievement" (Schmoker, 2005, p. xiv).

Essential Characteristics of Professional Learning Community

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) were among the first to postulate the five essential characteristics of PLCs: (1) shared values and norms, (2) a clear and consistent focus on student learning, (3) reflective dialogue, (4) make teaching practices public, and (5) focusing on collaboration. These characteristics are very similar to the five components of a PLC published by Hord (1997): (1) supportive and shared leadership, (2) collective creativity, (3) shared values and vision, (4) supportive conditions, and (5) shared personal

practice. DuFour et al. (2008) identified six characteristics of PLCs as: (1) shared purpose and vision, (2) a collaborative culture with a focus on learning, (3) collective inquiry on best practices about teaching and learning, (4) action orientation, (5) a commitment to continuous improvement, and (6) results orientation. For the purpose of this study, the six characteristics identified by DuFour et al. (2008) are used.

Building a Professional Learning Community

The six characteristics identified by DuFour et al. (2008) are essential components for building and sustaining professional learning communities and supporting the process of school reform. DuFour et al. (2008) emphasized that the difficulty of the PLC concept is implementation of the practices, not convincing educators of the worthiness of the reform.

The learning community must share a purpose and clear direction with aid from the participants in the community. This focus addresses the moral purpose and collective responsibility of the entire community and according to Bezzina (2005) the essential starting point in learning organizations is a shared and commonly owned vision. The practices of the school or the culture are deeply engrained in “the assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations and habits that constitute the norm for that organization” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 90). West-Burnham (1997) maintained that for any process in a school to have integrity it has to be clearly intertwined with the agreed values of the school personnel. Blanchard (2007) suggested that if the change is not aligned with the current culture, the existing culture must be altered to support the new initiative or the results of the initiative will not be sustainable. Without undergoing considerable cultural shifts a

school or district cannot operate as a professional learning community (DuFour et al., 2008).

The cultural shift built in PLCs involves and revolves around relationships. Lambert reflected on relationships by saying, “If we do not understand each other as equal – in the sense of having something of value to bring to the process – we cannot form relationships that contribute to growth and purpose” (Lambert et al. 2002, p. xvii-xviii). Relationships are the core of professional learning communities. When members create meaning and knowledge together, the culture of professionalism is more focused and consistent with the new shared purposes for teaching and learning for educators; it is a community (Lambert et al., 2002).

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory researchers, Hord and Rutherford (1998), identified the following as strategies in transitioning into a professional learning community: (1) the faculty and staff unite to a purpose of interest and energy to join in a community to benefit students, (2) there is an initial force, whether internal or external, to develop a community of professional learners, (3) a climate of authority and decision-making by all constituents to work together to reach goals exists, and (4) there is an undeviating school-wide focus on the needs of students as a compelling motivator to a successful professional learning community. There are no blueprints available for a school to become a professional learning community. Missions and visions are unique to each school as each school is an individual community.

DuFour et al. (2004) offered some guidelines for cultural shifts in a PLC as: (1) a shift in purpose of a school to a PLC would reflect a focus from teaching to learning, (2) an emphasis on what was taught to what is learned, (3) coverage of the content to a

demonstration by the students to content proficiency, and (4) a move from providing teachers with state blueprints and curriculum guides to engaging the faculty in collaborative teams to share knowledge about their views on the essential curriculum for their school. If schools were to become learning organizations, they would operate as genuine communities that draw on the collective power of a shared vision and value relationships that focus on the continuing care for, and development of, their human resources in pursuit of continuous improvement (Demming, 2000).

Professional learning communities' visions and values are embedded in day-to-day interactions among members and become the norm of the organization. These collective behaviors are made possible by the mutual trust and respect shared among its members. According to Wald and Castleberry (2000), "Shared purpose and values serve to enhance the cohesiveness among staff, connect the school community to its higher purpose, and reenergize staff when the going gets rough" (p. 14). The changes in the mission and vision of the school provide the philosophy for the school and enable the school community to make the required changes to become a professional learning community.

The changes in the mission and vision of the community will support the changes that must occur within and between its members to enable a collaborative culture with a focus on student learning. This school climate encourages and supports risks of sharing and debate among its members. DePree (1997) suggested that taking risks offers circumstances to increase the potential of the school and these risks develop learning. Risks taken by the school community are based on solid relationships where belonging, trust, and diversity are valued and, therefore, create open and active connections (Wald &

Castleberry, 2000). Sergiovanni (2006) stated that connected communities have meaningful and significant relationships, are united by a common set of values and ideas, and move the community from a sense of 'we' to 'I.' Huffman and Hipp (2003) found in their research that, although the school community was very innovative in creating structures, communication systems, and resources, school reform will have little effect on creating a PLC if the culture of the school's relationships is not built on trust, respect, and a sense of fellowship.

These teams of educators working in PLCs differ from traditional school educators in the following ways: (1) teachers are never alone when confronted with the difficulties of teaching, (2) colleagues share their knowledge and learning and, in turn, reciprocate, (3) everyone has help in achieving goals, (4) everyone benefits from the processes aligned with the learning by students, and (5) everyone supports and operates within the system of accountability and are expected to make contributions to the improvement of their teams and school (DuFour et al., 2008). These teachers no longer teach in isolation nor are they expected to work independently to support student success. These educators work together to support a collaborative culture that fosters cooperative problem-solving and achieving common goals; these are interdependent relationships. It is only when schools and school districts create interdependent relationships that they can expect to have the collective capacity to impact student achievement in a positive manner (Elmore, 2004; Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Sergiovanni, 2006). Building a collaborative environment is the single most important factor for sustaining successful schools according to Eastwood and Louis (1992).

Fullan (2001) warned that unless educators in collaborative cultures “are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong” (p. 67). If collaborative teams are focusing on moral purpose, great ideas, student achievement, and obtaining the viewpoints of all members, the group will be focusing on the right things (Elmore, 2004; Fullan, 2001). When collaborative teams are focused on the things that really impact learning, they can be very effective forces in professional learning communities (Elmore, 2004; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). DuFour et al. (2008) suggested that collaborative teams focus on answering the following four questions: (1) what do we want our student to learn, (2) how will we know if they are learning what we deem most essential, (3) how will the community respond if the students do not learn, and (4) what will the community do to enrich those students who are proficient? DuFour et al. (2008) described teams who focused on these questions as teams who worked to improve teaching school-wide and set their goals to improve student achievement would improve learning in their communities:

“It comes as no accident that the word *learning* [original italics] is positioned at the center of the term *professional learning community* [original italics]” (Cowan, 2003, p. 57). Learning is at the heart of a professional learning community for students as well as faculty members. The Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) joined together to create the Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle (PTLC) to support communities in aligning the curriculum, instruction, and assessment to state standards. The cycle consists of six steps: (1) study, (2) select, (3) plan, (4) implement, (5) analyze, and (6) adjust. These

steps were created to support teams with embedding strategies to increase learning in their communities (SEDL, 2005).

The PLTC supports aligning the curriculum with state standards, improving teaching strategies, aligning assessments with state standards, and fostering an effective collaboration within the learning teams (SEDL, 2005). This process offers a step-by-step guide for professional development from the district and school levels, provides learning teams with the expertise to improve pedagogy knowledge and skills, and creates a guide to building a collaborative professional learning community. This cycle provides an ongoing process for team learning and building, learning by doing the hard work of developing and sustaining the learning processes for teachers, and concentrating on the end result of increased student learning (SEDL, 2005). This PLTC process is embedded in the culture of a professional learning community, and, to be successful, must be supported by effective leadership. Fullan (2001) stated, “There is the explicit and intimate link between knowledge building and internal commitment on the way to making good things happen” (p. 81).

The Principal as School Leader

School studies first conducted in the 1970s found that effective schools had high expectations, clear and focused academic goals, frequent monitoring of student learning, and a safe and orderly environment. These school conditions could not exist without strong administrative leadership from the principal (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, 1991). “The principal plays a critical role in the development of professional learning communities, forging the conditions that give rise to the growth of learning communities in schools” (Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996, p. 19). Leithwood

et al. (2004) found that among school factors, leadership is second only to teaching, and there is no documented instance where schools were successful or became successful without powerful leadership. “Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst” (Leithwood et al., p. 5).

In a qualitative meta-analytic approach that reviewed 69 studies, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) found effective school leaders have a powerful influence on the academic achievement of the student overall. Leadership in professional learning communities was identified by Byrk, Camburn, and Louis (1999) as the strongest facilitator in establishing professional learning communities. Fullan (2007) asserted, “It should be clear, then, that school improvement is an organizational phenomenon, and, therefore, the principal as leader is key” (p. 167).

Based on their research of PLCs, Huffman and Hipp (2000) found a clear need for shared and supportive leadership and a need for leaders to provide supportive conditions such as time, communication, problem solving, and learning for successful schools. A study by Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) focused on the impact of principals in creating professional learning communities in six schools and summarized that leaders of PLCs who practiced a more democratic type of leadership style are more supportive of a collaborative work culture “where everyone is a learner and a leader” (p. 40).

Many researchers have made recommendations regarding the best dimensions or keys to the responsibilities of the principalship. Hallinger and Murphy (1985) submitted three leadership dimensions: (1) defining the school’s mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) promoting a positive learning climate. Leithwood et al.

(2004) suggested these four ideas as keys to the role of a successful principal: (1) setting directions for a clear course with high expectations, (2) using the data to monitor progress, (3) providing teachers and others with the resources to succeed, and (4) making the organizational process work by ensuring that conditions exist to support teaching and learning. Other researchers such as Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, and Cravens (2007) developed a model consisting of six components: (1) high standards for student learning, (2) a rigorous curriculum, (3) quality instruction, (4) a culture of learning and professional behavior, (5) connections to external communities, and (6) performance accountability for internal and external measures. Goldring et al. (2007) also noted these key processes for successful principals: (1) planning, (2) implementing, (3) supporting, (4) advocating, (5) communicating, and (6) monitoring.

In 2008 the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) developed a set of six standards known as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC).

These standards for school leaders are designed to promote the success of all students by:

- facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning
- advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program
- ensuring management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment
- collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources
- acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner
- understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2008) set specific performance guidelines for principal practice in learning communities to “lead student and adult learning, lead diverse communities, lead 21st century learning, lead continuous

improvement, lead using knowledge and data, and lead parent, family and community engagement” (p. 13).

In her qualitative analysis of studies from 1985 until 2003, Cotton (2003) summarized 25 principal behaviors that affect student achievement. Marzano et al. (2005) used a meta-analysis of school leadership research to identify 21 responsibilities required of school leaders. Marzano et al. (2005) found that Cotton’s (2003) 25 principal behaviors and the 21 responsibilities of school leaders were quite similar; relationships existed between principal behaviors and increased student achievement.

Principals today have an extremely complex job; it can be very difficult to demonstrate each of the principal behaviors noted by Cotton (2003), responsibilities expressed by Marzano et al. (2005), and the ISLLC (2008) standards successfully. Fullan (2007) stated that the increasingly unreasonable demands of the principalship have made the job an “impossible position” (p. 168).

Over the years, many leadership dimensions have developed to provide guidelines for effective principal leadership. Leadership dimensions have evolved to enhance support of student achievement and teacher efficacy such as: (1) instructional leadership, (2) transformational leadership, and (3) collaboration through distributed leadership. This study briefly reviews these leadership dimensions.

Instructional Leadership

The term instructional leadership is thought to be linked to a report on school effectiveness called the Coleman Report – *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman et al. 1966). This study was commissioned by the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in response to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The report

attributed student achievement to factors largely beyond the control of a school – specifically parental income and educational levels. In response to the report, a reform to improve academic success for all students began the effective schools movement in the 1970s (Lambert et al., 2002; Ruffin, 2007). During the 1970s principals were spending more of their time working with federal programs instead of allocating a significant amount of their time to managing instructional activities (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985, p. 219). The new school reform required the principal’s focus to be on instructional matters. Edmonds (1979) found that principals have a strong influence on student achievement. Edmonds analyzed and compared data in Detroit schools to determine the characteristics of effective schools and noted that school atmosphere, a climate of high expectation for student achievement, and strong principal leadership were essential for sustaining a school community. This study was very important in the shift of the importance of principal roles from program compliance to responsibility for increased student achievement. Hallinger and Murphy’s (1985) study helped to define the principal’s role as an instructional leader and showed that in successful schools principals were involved in closer supervision and evaluation of instruction.

These studies helped to shape the future of principals as instructional leaders, but as Reitzug’s (1997) study found principal preparation programs were preparing educators as instructional leaders of the 1970s not as instructional leaders of the future. Reitzug (1997) conducted an analysis of 10 textbooks used for principal preparation programs from 1985 to 1995 to understand why new principals viewed their position as having the ultimate authority in instructional matters at schools. The analysis indicated that principals were portrayed as an “expert and superior,” the teacher as “deficient and

voiceless,” teaching as “fixed technology,” and supervision as a “discrete intervention” (Reitzug, 1997, p. 326). Although many of the textbooks reviewed in the study discussed principal-teacher collaboration in the supervisory relationship with principals, the principal was seen as superior to teachers. School reform was depicted as a top-down approach to leadership.

Twenty-five years ago principal training programs were based on management and business techniques. Today educators still rely on the research of the business management field to improve the leader’s role in educational institutions but have learned to adjust the business research findings to meet the needs of education. Changes in the principal’s role in the past 25 years have refined the position as instructional leader (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979; Cotton, 2000, 2003; Edmunds 1979; Goodlad, 1979; Knuth & Banks, 2006; Marzano, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1992, 1994).

Instructional leadership has dominated educational reform since the 1980s (Marzano et al., 2005). Hallinger’s (2003) research developed a conceptual model of instructional leadership composed of three dimensions: (1) defining the school’s mission, (2) managing the instructional program, and (3) promoting a positive school-learning climate. In 2003 Hallinger’s description of an instructional leader focused on coordinating, controlling, and supervising instruction in the school and developing the curriculum. A study completed by Ruffin (2007) emphasized the importance of transforming principals as instructional leaders. According to Ruffin (2007) instructional leadership is a complex dimension, and procedures for its implementation in schools are dependent on many factors. One view of an instructional leader includes any activity related to observing teaching and learning behaviors regarding classroom supervision

(Ruffin, 2007). This position places the principal in a situation of holding high expectations for teachers and students, providing close supervision of instruction, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, and holding a dominant position over teachers. The second dimension of an instructional leader is the concept of shared instructional leadership between the principal and teachers who are committed, professionally involved, and innovative (Sheppard, 1996).

Sheppard's view of instructional leadership is corroborated by Little (1982) who found that successful schools engage teachers in continuous discussion about the teaching practice and use frequent and mutual observations. These teachers planned, designed, researched, studied, and evaluated teaching materials, and they were active in collegial work (Little, 1982). These opportunities to engage in collegial efforts are reflective of the work of professional learning communities. Little's study is supported by Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1995) in their findings on ways that professional learning communities can be identified: (1) collaboration, (2) deprivatization of practice, (3) reflective dialogue and conversations about teaching, (4) focus on student learning and progress, and (5) shared value. Reitzug's (1997) research supports the idea that professional learning communities result as the establishment and responsibility for the organization is shared by the community of teachers, administration, and other staff members; the role of the principal is not limited to the supervision of the teachers.

Instructional leaders of today are quite different from the instructional principals of the 1980s. DuFour et al. (2008) offered another image of instructional principals from Hallinger (2007); they maintained, "Schools do not need instructional leaders; they need *learning leaders* [italics original], leaders fixated on evidence of learning" (p. 321). In

the 21st century according to Reitzug (2007) principals participate as collaborative inquirers along with teachers – a concept that is reflective of the characteristics of professional learning community leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership emerged as one of the approaches to school leadership employed in response to the challenge in the 1970s and early 1980s to improve schools. According to Hallinger (2003), transformational leadership was adopted by the educational community in part as a reaction to some of the inadequacies of the instructional leadership model. Transformational leadership became an important approach to leadership as documented in Burns's 1978 work entitled *Leadership*. Burns's (1978) work linked leadership to followership needs and distinguished between transactional (exchanges that occur between leaders and followers using extrinsic rewards) and transformational leadership (a connection between leader and the follower that raises motivation and morality) approaches. He defined transforming leadership as "when one or more persons *engage* [italics original] with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, p. 20).

Bennis and Nanus (1985) expanded the meaning of transformation leadership to include a vision for the organization, developing commitments and trust among workers, and facilitating organizational learning. Bass (1985) and Bass and Avolio (1992) espoused a model of transformational leadership that includes four categories: (1) idealized influence, (2) inspirational motivation, (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration. Transformational leadership is a model based on leaders influencing

others where commonly they aspire to be the best. Hipp (1997) found that transformational leadership had the greatest impact on teacher efficacy and those principals who recognized: (1) increasing teacher capacity, (2) promoting teacher empowerment, (3) recognizing the accomplishments of teachers, (4) providing support, (5) managing student behavior, and (6) promoting a sense of community. Blaze (1990) and Thurston, Clift, and Schacht (1993) supported transformational leadership as an effective approach for school principalship. Leithwood (1994) described transformational leadership as “second order” change as it was aimed primarily at: (1) changing the organization’s normative structure; (2) exhibiting sensitivity to organizational building, (3) developing a shared vision, (4) creating productive work cultures, and (5) distributing leadership to others.

Today school reform demands the best from leaders, teachers, and the entire community. The demand for educational reform has again empowered components of transformational leadership (Horn-Turpin, 2009). According to Leithwood (1993) transformational leadership is especially appropriate for meeting the challenges facing our schools today as they attempt to influence organizational structure and culture and support the people willing to risk change. School reform requires reculturing of schools and a commitment to a common vision by principals, administrators, teachers, and the school community. Transformational leadership offers guidance in uniting the school community with morality and emotional and social bonds; these are far more powerful motivators (Etzioni, 1988). Sergiovanni stated that transformational leadership focuses on “arousing human potential, satisfying higher-order needs,” and builds the commitment and performance of both followers and leaders (2006, p. 164). The key component to

transformational leadership according to Bass and Avolio (1992) was change in today's school environment. Transformational leadership is more effective with followers involved in stressful situations (House, 1976). The impact of NCLB has placed additional stress on educational organizations to meet the requirements of the Act and, therefore, educators are more accepting of transformational leadership, according to House (1976).

Burns (1978) asserted that the important task of transformational leaders is to focus more on a culture of shared vision and less on doctrine. Sergiovanni (2007) defined a school's culture as "the values, beliefs, and expectations that administrators, teachers, students, and other share" (p. 77) and proposed that transformational leadership works because teachers and students are more likely to be influenced by the culture of the school than by bureaucracy of an educational system. Stolp and Smith (1997) found that successful school reform begins with the school's culture and stakeholders' perceptions of that culture.

Transformational leadership is linked to student achievement as reported in many studies including Chin's meta-analysis (2007), Leithwood (1993), Lontos (1993), Marks and Printy (2003), Sergiovanni (1990), and Verona and Young (2001). Transformational leadership is a practice, with results supported by research, found to have a positive impact on the culture of the school and student achievement – two elements of a professional learning community.

Instructional and Transformational Leadership

“Although a variety of conceptual models have been employed over the past 25 years of research into educational leadership, two major approaches have predominated: instructional leadership and transformational leadership” Hallinger (2003, p. 2). These dimensions of leadership have both common and dissimilar characteristics.

Instructional leadership focused on a top-down approach to leadership and a first-order for change (setting school-wide goals, direct supervision of teaching, and coordination of the curriculum) is based on a managerial or transactional relationship to the staff. In contrast, transformational leadership is a bottom-up approach to leadership and a second-order target for change focusing on the school cultural climate, increasing the capacity of educators, and linking personal goals to broader organizational goals with a transformational relationship to the staff (Hallinger, 2003). Common characteristics of instructional and transformational leadership models include: (1) creating a shared purpose, (2) focusing on a school climate of high expectations and improvement on teaching and learning, (3) focusing the activities of the school on intellectual stimulation and staff development, (4) principals maintaining a visible presence, and (5) modeling the values representative of the school (Hallinger, 2003).

The approach of choice in the 1980s was concentrated on instructional leadership. In the 1990s transformational leadership became more influential than instructional leadership in improving schools. Today the educational system is once again refocusing on improving teaching and learning, and, therefore, principal training programs are concentrating on instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2003).

Transformational leadership is needed in order to invite the teacher's commitment to support the necessary changes to improve instruction and student achievement (Sheppard, 1996). Instructional leadership if perceived by teachers to be supportive will enable them to grow in commitment to the reform, increase professional involvement, and demonstrate a willingness to innovate (Sheppard, 1996). The studies of Marks and Printy (2003) and Hallinger (2003) demonstrated that instructional and transformational leadership is needed to increase student achievement in schools. Marks and Printy (2003) stated:

When the principal elicits high levels of commitment and professionalism from teachers and works interactively with teachers in a shared instructional leadership capacity, schools have the benefit of integrated leadership; they are organiz[s]tions that learn and perform at high levels. (p. 25)

Shared Leadership

Scholars have questioned the validity of expecting principals to meet the challenges of the principalship alone. Lambert et al. (2002) argued that "the days of the lone instructional leaders are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for the entire school without the substantial participation of other educators" (p. 37). Reforming schools requires the support of all members of the school organization, especially teachers. "Our investigations of shared instructional leadership show that principals alone cannot provide sufficient leadership influence to systematically improve the quality of instruction for the level of student achievement" (Printy & Marks, 2006, p. 130).

The concept of shared leadership has grown in importance in leadership approaches (Murphy, 2002). This emphasis on shared leadership results primarily from

the impact teacher and principal leadership have on the learning in schools (Printy & Marks, 2006). Shared leadership is described in three shifts of leadership thinking according to Fletcher and Kauffer (2003). The first shift in leadership was described as distributed and interdependent wherein the leadership sets the practices or tasks that can be carried out by various people in the organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). The second shift has occurred as leadership became embedded in social interaction. This leadership method is created by leaders and followers (Burns, 1978). Drath and Palus (1994), Wenger (1998), and Printy and Marks (2006) all described this shift as a “dynamic, multidirectional, collective activity that takes place in and through relationships and webs of influence among individuals who have common interests and goals” (p. 3). The third shift was leadership within the process of learning by individuals and groups in which the end result is shared understanding (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Printy, Marks, & Bowers, in review).

Hoy and Miskel’s (2008) view of shared leadership is that it “occurs when the formally appointed leaders share the leader behaviors with members of the work group” (p. 443). Fletcher and Kauffer’s (2003) findings made no mention of leaders sharing behaviors with members in any of the three shifts of shared leadership approaches.

Principals are critical of developing shared leadership by deciding how they engage their teachers in school initiatives and concerns (Printy & Marks, 2006). “Principals create conditions for teacher interaction, including structures and policies that formalize ways in which teachers are expected to work together and processes for doing so” (Printy & Marks, 2006, p. 128). Principals use and encourage processes that support democratic decisions within the school community by setting goals and expectations. As

leaders, principals support teacher interactions to provide a sense of accountability to the collaborative process. When teachers interact frequently and share leadership responsibilities with principals, “strong norms and standards for their professional work take shape over time” (Printy & Marks, 2006, p. 129). Principals who inspire and motivate teachers are more likely to share leadership with teachers (Printy & Marks, 2006). Teachers alone cannot improve teaching and learning. Leadership is also required to take an active role in instruction and to regard teachers as “professionals and full partners” (Printy & Marks, 2006, p. 130). “Where schools have the benefit of shared instructional leadership, faculty members offer students their best efforts and students respond in kind; they are organizations that learn and perform at high levels” (Printy & Marks, 2003, as cited in Printy & Marks, 2006, p. 130). The relationships of principals and teachers in a shared instructional leadership are reciprocal. Principals monitor student achievement closely while acknowledging the expertise of teachers, and teachers accept the innovation and improvement pressures through extensive observations. The process of shared leadership must be continuous to achieve ongoing student success.

The shared leadership approach is not without its problems. Principals need to be open and clear about the guidelines for shared leadership and be prepared to provide directive instructional leadership on occasions (DuFour et al., 2008). Some teachers expect to share leadership in all facets of school policy. “Collaboration, sharing and distribution should not, however, involve pretence that all staff can be involved in all decisions” (Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2008, p. 13). One position of shared leadership is to focus on the importance of placing value on the expertise of the faculty not the formal positions of authority (Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2008).

Other difficulties with shared leadership are deficiencies in teacher training in shared leadership strategies. If teachers are expected to take an equal part in leadership, the school must provide the training capacity and resources to ensure successful leadership roles (DuFour et al., 2008). Elmore (2004) referred to this relationship as *reciprocal accountability* – “for every increment of performance I demand of you, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation” (p. 93).

Principals need to be aware of the tension that can be created from shared leadership with teachers. Principals view the need for innovation and change while teachers push for coherence and stability. Deal and Peterson (1994) referred to this condition as *leadership paradox* – the contradicting tensions support and complement one another. Principals value the expertise of teachers yet monitor their effectiveness closely through student achievement. Teachers accept the need for innovation and improvements in their teaching while also accepting the need for supervision of their instruction sometimes through colleagues instead of the administrator (Printy & Marks, 2006). Printy and Marks (2006) observed that principals and teachers found ways to complement each other through the unifying vision statements of the school. Teachers and principals are united in the vision of giving every student the best education possible (Printy & Marks, 2006). Lambert offered this description of the participation of teachers and principals in shared leadership: “Inquiry, reflection, conversation, and change focused on improved student learning are the processes by which beliefs and assumptions are challenged and decisions are made” (2002, p. 139). The tensions of learning between and among teachers and administrators through inquiry and conversations change the instruction students receive and successes they become. “With these conditions, teachers

learn to be better teachers and student achievement increases” (Printy & Marks, 2006, p. 125).

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership has recently gained prominence in the area of educational leadership. Distributed leadership was defined by Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, and Louis (2007) as “The sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across individuals and roles throughout the school organization [and] depends not only on individuals’ performing leadership functions effectively but also on new relationships among people doing this work” (p. 2). Spillane and others (Spillane & Sherer, 2004; Spillane et al., 2001, 2003) focused on the characteristics of distributed leadership as leaders and followers change roles periodically when the situation necessitates.

Evidence is mounting in relation to trust in the school community as an attribute that promotes student achievement and improvement (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). The research of Bennett, Wise, Woods, and Harvey (2003); MacBeath (2005); and Smylie et al. (2007) stressed the importance of trust in an organization practicing distributed leadership. Trust, a critical factor in the development of distributed leadership (Smylie et al., 2007), “is based on the interdependence of the relationships of the members of the organization” (Angelle, 2010, p. 14). The culture of trust in a school is dependent on the relationships of all parties: administrators, teachers, parents, and students. Organizational trust is the foundation for those elements necessary for successful distributed leadership; that is, collaboration, communication, joint problem solving, and honest feedback (Smylie et al., 2007). Honesty is important in a school community because it is the

foundation for collective activity, mutual assistance, and joint accountability (Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

Trust according to Tschannen-Moran (2004) is the glue and lubricant for organizations. Kramer and Cook (2004) describe trust in three ways. First, trust can reduce the transaction costs of interactions among individuals and organizations. Trust reduces the need for defense mechanisms, monitoring for sources of a threat, or bureaucratic controls, and lowers the risks associated with assisting colleagues with school instruction or school matters. Second, a benefit of trust is that of ‘spontaneous sociability’ which refers to cooperation, unselfish behaviors “that enhance collective well-being and further the attainment of collective goals” (Kramer, 1999, p. 583). Third, trust can benefit the relationships with administrative and supervisory leadership (Kramer & Cook, 2004). “Trust can also promote organizational citizenship – that is, individuals making contributions beyond formal job requirements without expectation of recognition or compensation” (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000, p. 583).

Copland (2003) stipulated three preconditions that must exist in an organization if distributed leadership will succeed: (1) the development of a culture within the school that embodies collaboration, trust, professional learning, and reciprocal accountability, (2) strong consensus regarding the important problems facing the organization, and (3) a need for rich expertise with approaches to improving teaching and learning among all those working in the school.

Distributed leadership is sharing organizational tasks with those who hold the greatest expertise (Copland, 2003). “If leadership is a practice shared by many then it must be distributed among those who are in the right place at the right time (situation)

and among those who have the unique competence to get the job done correctly (ability)” (Sergiovanni, 2006, p. 184). This idea of distributing leadership according to the situation and the ability of members is similar to the Job Characteristics Model (JCM) developed by Hackman and Oldham in 1980. They contended that if the work closely reflects the core job characteristics (task variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback on performance and the outcomes of the work), the meaningfulness and responsibility will be enhanced by employees, and performance and productivity will improve (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Smylie et al. (2007) adapted the JCM model to categorize the characteristics for distributed leadership into three elements. First, the extent members are asked to perform work they find meaningful, for which they will assume responsibility, and will understand the results of the work; second, ways the meaningfulness, responsibility, and knowledge relate to the learning opportunities; and third, “how distributed leadership work is performed will relate to outcomes achieved” (Smylie et al., 2007, p. 472).

Smylie et al. (2007) reported three elements learned from their research: (1) “Trust clearly matters in the development of distributed leadership” (p. 499), (2) “That the relationship between trust and distributed leadership development appears to be dynamic and reinforcing” (p. 499), and (3) “Administrative leadership – particularly, principal leadership – is crucial to the development of distributed leadership” (p. 500). Louis, Kruse, and Marks (1996) stated that the leadership of professional learning communities must delegate authority, develop a collaborative decision-making process, and step back from being the central problem solver. Professional learning communities

support and require a distributed leadership process to engage and use the strengths of the members of the learning organization.

Sustaining Leadership Capacity

The key to sustaining leadership in a professional learning community is to understand the process is never-ending. “To practice a discipline is to be a lifelong learner. You never arrive; you spend your life mastering disciplines” (Senge, 2006, p. 10). Leaders must be adaptable to state and federal requirements, district leadership, and the ever-changing needs and unpredictable demands of students, communities, and teachers. Sustainability requires the capacity for self-renewal and the discernment of the members of the learning community to represent various levels of knowledge along the professional learning community continuum, and to sustain “the energy and commitment of staff who are actively involved in the school” (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 72).

Leadership must be aware of the uncertainty and the need for flexibility to sustain the focus of professional learning communities. School capacity is built on relationships, but not in its entirety – essential structures are also important to the community (Lambert et al., 2002). If school capacity is built solely on relationships it will become too soft; if it is built on “essential structures – such as governance, teams, learning cycles, shared decision-making models – [that] are too rigid” and will break-down under social pressures (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 93). A balance must exist between relationships and the need for essential structures for the success of PLCs.

In a collective community of learners members create a new type of energy, synergy, which is “a form of fellowship that regenerates energy rather than draining it” (Lambert, 2003, p. 93). Synergy in a school resonates a feeling of calm and less distress

when internal conflicts arise (Lambert, 2003). “Synergy in schools arises from conversations, collegial work, and action; it is the by-product of true collegiality” (Lambert, 2003, p. 76). Synergy does not have to be created; it is already there through people’s deep concern about their environment (Senge et al. 1999). Successful learning communities use this synergy to build capacity and meet the visions for their schools (Lambert et al., 2002). Leaders can legitimize this effort by “clearly affirming, in a vision . . . the link between the company’s [school’s] core mission and sustainability – which works best if the issue is personally motivating to them as well” (Senge et al., 1999, p. 531). Leaders must reinforce the efforts of the professional learning community by supporting the vision and mission of the school through conversations between and among the learning community, communications with the public, and through the tangible and visual support of school efforts.

Lambert et al. (2002) reflected on communities in motion to understand the primary energy source of a community. Leadership must support and extend partnerships, flexibility, diversity, and coevolution in learning communities (Lambert et al., 2002). Partnerships “are essential if information and learning opportunities are to enter and leave the culture of the school” (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 50). “Flexibility is basic to communities in motion if fluctuations, feedback, and surprises are to lead to change rather than disorientation in schools” (Lambert et al., 2002, p. 50). Lambert et al. (2002) declared that:

Diversity introduces the opportunity for participants to think and act in more complex ways. Such cognitive complexity involves the ability to understand and work with multiple perspectives; the capacity to think systemically; the yearning for reciprocity; and the ability to access, generate, and process vast sources of information. Diversity in the learning environment improves our possibilities for

developing such complexity and therefore the possibilities for variance and productive dissonance. (p. 50)

Another source of energy for a learning community lies in coevolution – the idea of working together in a collaborative professional culture through shared leadership, conversations, common language, the use of stories (Lambert et al., 2002). Through this coevolution community members work both independently and interdependently, are self-directed and interconnected, and respond to school ecosystems (Lambert et al., 2002). Through coevolution a shared purpose will evolve through dialogue to support a learning community. Leadership needs to understand the importance of this type of energy – partnerships, flexibility, diversity, and coevolution – to sustain professional learning communities (Lambert et al., 2002). Sustainable development often aligns personal values with school values to bring synergy to the effort of PLCs (Senge et al., 1999).

Two concepts that are crucial to sustaining the efforts of PLCs are (1) breaking the long journey into incremental steps and (2) remembering to celebrate the small, short-term wins that lead to success (Blanchard, 2007; DuFour et al., 2008; Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Schaffer & Thomson, 1998). “It is not merely the achievement of small victories but the recognition of those victories and the people behind them that sustain momentum for change” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 426).

Summary

The research and literature reviewed illustrated the changing role of principal leadership in public schools to meet the ever-changing needs of students, increase student

achievement, meet the requirements of state testing, meet the requirements of the NCLB Act, and increase the capacity of teacher learning.

The Professional Learning Community school reform model has been shown in numerous studies to have positive effects on student score increases, teacher collaboration, and teacher leadership and indicates a clear relationship between student success and sustained professional learning communities (Berry, Johnson, & Montgomery, 2005; DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, & Towner, 2004; Hord, 1997; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Phillips, 2003; Strahan, 2003; Supovitz, 2002; Supovitz & Christman, 2003; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2006). Effective principal leadership and practices play a significant role in the creation and sustainability of professional learning communities (DuFour et al., 2005; Fullan, 2001; Leonard & Leonard, 1999).

Chapter 3 addresses the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore through qualitative research methodology the leadership practices of principals who sustain professional learning communities. The two elementary schools in this study have been identified by Richard DuFour and Associates as effective professional learning communities. It is the researcher's intention to provide school leaders insight into the effective practices of these principals who sustain professional learning communities.

This chapter discusses the research questions that guided this study, the identification of the participating schools, the interviews, the questionnaire, the document review process, the data collection procedures, the data analysis, and the cross referencing of the data from the two schools studied.

Research Design

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological design approach in order to use textual descriptions through the review of official school documents and questionnaires and through transcripts of the interviews with the principals to find the meanings or essence of the lived experience. "Phenomenological studies investigate what was experienced, how it was experienced, and, finally, the meanings that the interviewees assign to the experience" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 352). This approach to the research provided a contextual, explanatory, and evaluative form of qualitative research that should allow an understanding of the practices principals

employed in sustainable professional learning communities. Contextual descriptions function as a method to describe and feature phenomena in the participant's own words. "It therefore offers the opportunity to 'unpack' issues, to see what they are about or what lies inside, and to explore how they are understood by those connected with them" (Ritchie, 2008, p. 27). Explanatory forms of qualitative research qualify how well the process works with information about the processes as well as the outcomes of the investigation. According to Ritchie (2008), qualitative methods "can also contribute to an understanding of outcomes by identifying the different types of effects or consequences that can arise from a policy and the different ways in which they are achieved or occur" (p. 29). Evaluative forms of qualitative research are intended to exhibit "actual, rather than intended, effects," use "the evaluators' perceptions and expertise to draw conclusions," and are responsive "to diverse stakeholder perspectives" (Ritchie, 2008, p. 30). Qualitative research makes valuable contributions to research because of the exploratory, interactive, and interpretivist nature of inquiry. A qualitative approach to this research was the method best suited for exploring the central research question of this study: What leadership practices are effective in the sustainability of professional learning communities? The study will address the following guiding questions:

1. How does the principal define a PLC?
2. How does the principal define his/her role in supporting and sustaining a PLC?
3. What structure or structures are in place for professional dialogue to occur in the school?
4. How do teachers define the principal's role in supporting and sustaining a PLC?

5. What effects do principal leadership practices have on the sustainability of professional learning communities?

This study identified the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each principal in each professional learning community and will provide valuable information to other school systems interested in implementing PLCs or improving their own professional learning communities.

Purposeful Sampling

The two elementary schools included in this study were chosen based on their identification through research related to professional learning communities by DuFour and others (2004, 2008, 2010). These schools have met the requirements of a PLC: (1) demonstrated a commitment to PLC concepts, (2) implemented those concepts for at least 3 years, (3) presented clear evidence of improved student learning, (4) explained the practices through an application process, (5) structures, (6) culture of the school, and (7) documented evidence indicating the steady improvements in Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) scores published through the Kentucky Department of Education. According to Creswell (2003), “The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites (or document and visual material) that will help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (p. 185). These schools provided evidence of sustainable professional learning communities and successful practices of effective principal leadership. Merriam (1998) said, “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and, therefore, must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). The two elementary schools were chosen as purposeful samples for this study

because they are small enough to permit an in-depth understanding of the sustainability of an established PLC school and large enough to make possible an in-depth understanding across two separate elementary schools located in the same county.

Very important to the research data of sustainability was that one of the schools has seen one superintendent change, six different principals, and over 50% of their teacher population change since beginning the PLC process in 2000. DuFour et al. (2010) stated, “Nevertheless, the focus on learning, the commitment to working collaboratively, and the use of results to drive continuous improvement are stronger today than ever before” (p. 68). These substantial changes are relevant to the sustainability of a PLC at this school.

Validity and Reliability

I triangulated data through the research instruments, throughout the process of conducting principal interviews, and with the results of the teachers’ on-line survey. Triangulation “is the cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical schemes. To find regularities in the data, the researcher compares different sources, situations, and methods to see whether the same pattern keeps recurring” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 374).

The instrument used for the teacher survey, Professional Learning Community Assessment (Appendix H), has been used in many published studies, has proven to be a valid assessment of PLCs, and has produced reliable data concerning teacher opinions on: (1) shared and supportive leadership, (2) shared values and visions, (3) collective learning and application, (4) shared personal practices, (5) supportive conditions and relationships, and (6) supportive conditions and structures (Appendix H).

The validity of the interview questions were confirmed by the dissertation chair and committee. The same interview protocol (Appendix F) was used for each interview to ensure the reliability of the interview data. The reliability of the interview transcripts was confirmed by each principal interviewed, thus supporting the researcher's initiative to ensure the accuracy of the interview data.

School documents provided by the school were reviewed to provide both validity and reliability to the document review data. School documents provided access to grade-level meeting agendas, schedule of meetings with a roster of members in attendance, and school, parent, and community communications indicating the frequency of those communications. Documents reviewed from each school were school newsletters, faculty newsletters, parent newsletters, and minutes from grade-level meetings. Each document was logged (Appendix K) and descriptions of the documents were given to support triangulation and a more accurate view of each school.

I used a journal to document reactions from interviews, tours of the school, and observations of students and teachers at each school. These comments, as documented in the study, added to the triangulation of the study and the validity of other research methods used in this study.

Visual data were important to the study triangulation to provide additional support in finding codes to describe the principals' practices in each of the two elementary schools. A description of each photograph was documented (Appendix L) to supply reliable information concerning the time, school location, and reactions of the researcher to each photograph.

The methods used by the researcher provide internal validity of data to capture the participants' constructions of reality of the PLC. "Validity must be assessed in terms of interpreting the researcher's experience, rather than in terms of reality itself (which can never be grasped)" (Merriam, 1998, p. 167).

External validity rests primarily with the reader's assessment of the value and believability of the study's findings. This assessment by the reader resides in the researcher's ability to provide sufficient data through the use of coding and drawing accurate conclusions concerning the total data collected (Merriam, 1998).

This study was enhanced by using 8 of the 10 strategies to increase the validity of the research as noted by McMillian and Schumacher (2006): (1) prolonged and persistent field work, (2) multimethod strategies, (3) participant language with verbatim accounts, (4) low inference descriptors as used in the document logs, (5) mechanically recorded data, (6) participant researcher (use of recorded perceptions), (7) participant review, and (8) negative or discrepant data (p. 324).

Data Collection

To ensure that all requirements were met, approval to begin this study was obtained by the Institutional Review Board of East Tennessee State University prior to any data collection (see Appendix A). Permission from the school district superintendent (see Appendix B) was obtained before any principal interviews were conducted, and permission from each principal was granted (see Appendix C) before the surveys were sent to each teacher in kindergarten through fifth grade.

Interviews

The primary source for this study was the detailed, semistandardized, one-hour interview of the principal at each of the chosen schools. The questions used in the interviews were closely aligned with the questions guiding the investigation (see Appendix D). Interviews provide “an opportunity for detailed investigations of each person’s personal perspective, for in-depth understanding of the personal context within which the research phenomenon is located, and for very detailed subject coverage” (Ritchie, 2008, p.58).

The nature of asking the principals the same standardized questions in the same order may constrain and inhibit the conversational tone during the interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). I made every effort to connect with each principal by establishing trust, being genuine by maintaining eye contact, and using voice tonation to elicit more valid data than from a rigid approach to the interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

The researcher received permission to perform the study from the district superintendent. The principals at the two schools were contacted to discuss the study, seek permission for an interview, and solicit permission to email surveys to each kindergarten through fifth grade teacher. Permission was received from each interviewed principal for all study activities. The transcripts of the interviews were checked for validity and reliability, were emailed to each principal, and were verified for accuracy. The researcher made field notes following each interview to enhance and clarify the interviews and observations.

The semistructured interview began with a brief introduction of the researcher and a brief overview of the study and its content. Each principal was presented with an

informed consent document to sign (see Appendix G). Principals were reassured that their confidentiality and anonymity would be protected. The researcher obtained permission to use the digital recorder to assure interview accuracy. Each principal was reminded that he/she could decide to stop the interview process at any time.

I proceeded with the interview by asking demographic questions. These questions serve as data about the individual interviewed but also serve to establish rapport, focus the attention of the interviewee (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), and make the interviewee feel more at ease with the interview process.

The interview guide (Appendix F) was used for this study. The interviews were digitally taped for accuracy. The digital recording device was used to document the researcher's impressions and thoughts immediately after each interview. This additional documentation proved especially useful during the coding process.

Immediately following each interview I made extensive notes regarding the "interview session – self reflections on his or her role and rapport, the interviewee's reactions, additional information, and extensions of interview meanings" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006 p. 156). The period following each interview is critical to document the "reflections and elaboration" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 156) and to improve the quality of the interview, the interview data, the experience with the interviewee, and validity of the interview.

Survey

All teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade were invited to complete the survey to give the study a broad spectrum of feedback from teachers into effective principal practices at their schools. The survey instrument used for teacher feedback was

the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PCLA) – Revised form (see Appendix H) used by permission from the author, Dianne Olivier (see Appendix I). This instrument was originally created in 2003, revised and copyrighted in 2008, and has been used in many research studies; Hipp and Huffman (2010) recently applied this instrument in their research. Information from this instrument was used to gain insight from the entire faculty on shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions, structures, and relationships of the school professional learning community. The teacher surveys were coded from each school and by the number of years taught by each participating teacher. The teacher participants were notified by the principal concerning the study and through a personal letter sent to them through the school (see Appendix D) containing a hyperlink to a web-hosted site (Survey Monkey). An introduction to the survey letter (Appendix J) for teachers preceded the actual on-line survey.

Information from these surveys provided a deeper understanding of the school's learning system along with analysis of school documents, photos of each school, and interviews with each principal.

Document Review

Documents at each school were reviewed to triangulate and detect any discrepancies in the data obtained from the interviews and teacher surveys. They also provide additional categories for further analysis (see Appendix K). The collection of documents was guided by inquiry, intuition, and by other findings of PLC research. The researcher reviewed documents and artifacts supplied from each school such as agendas from faculty and group meetings, school schedules, principal correspondence, community

and parent newsletters, and other documents shared by the principals. Documents published by the Kentucky Department of Education School Report Card website, and the school's website were reviewed.

Visual data

Data collected for each elementary school included photographs from inside and outside the school to capture the setting of the school and full visual representation of the school's climate and culture. Glesne (2006) and Schwartz (1989) suggested that photographs can enhance observations and provide historical background into the study. Photographs of the principal's work space, collaborative meeting places, and the school in general were taken, and descriptive notes were added by the researcher to provide richer data detail about the school (see Appendix L). Any photographs taken that could identify the school or participants were destroyed. The goal was to collect data to provide a more in-depth understanding of what is valued by the school, the school culture, and the school's surroundings.

Data Analysis

Principal interviews, surveys from the teacher populations, visual data, field notes, and recorded observations were analyzed using qualitative methods. According to Creswell (2003):

The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data. (p. 190)

I first read and listened to the entire transcribed copy of each interview and researcher interview notes. The researcher must become familiar with the entire data set;

this “is a crucial activity at the start of the analysis” according to Ritchie, Spencer, and O’Connor (2003, p. 221). After reviewing the data, the researcher identified reoccurring themes and issues linked to the study’s guiding questions. These themes and issues lead to the development of a conceptual framework or index to code the data gathered from transcribed interviews, field notes, surveys, reflections, and photographs. Using the index enabled the researcher to label the data and sort the information deemed vital from the study’s research documents. This process of labeling themes and issues brought about a deeper understanding of the evidence collected and gave the researcher a detailed picture for later analysis. I proceeded with the analysis by creating thematic charts to summarize, condense, synthesize, and refine the data for “later interpretative stages of analysis” (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 237). As the analysis progressed, the researcher, using the data from both schools, cross-referenced the coding and themes to indicate the similar and dissimilar relationships between the two schools. Finally, the analyses led to explanations of the practices of principals that contributed to sustainable professional learning communities.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative research the inherent nature of the research raises issues of ethical considerations. Qualitative research is based on observations, with emotionally connected means of finding the meanings of lived experiences and the social, historical, and cultural meanings of the situations or actions. The role of the researcher in qualitative research is one of detachment and a concentrated effort to be free of bias. The qualitative researcher realizes the total immersion into the experiences and feelings of the individual or group will reveal an understanding and interpretation of the experience that will enable

the researcher to notice even the most minute meanings of the experience. At the same time, great consideration must be given to avoid preconceptions and report the results in an unbiased viewpoint. Without the in-depth emotional immersion into the individuals' or groups' experiences, the meaning and interpretation would be lost. Qualitative researchers "devise roles that elicit cooperation, trust, openness, and acceptance" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 334). The qualitative method of research, through its method of observation and personal interviews, puts the client in a fragile and precarious position. The researcher must value the rights of the client to privacy and keep the identity of the client untraceable. The role of the researcher is to realize that the trust placed in the researcher by the client is sacred. The researcher must honor the participants' voluntary participation in the research study with total anonymity and confidentiality by coding the names of the participants and locations of the schools.

Summary

Chapter 3 presented the phenomenological design approach methodology and procedures followed in this study. The study, composed of a purposeful population sampling component, was verified and documented. The methods of qualitative research analysis used in this study were explained. Strict adherence to ethical protocol and validity were followed and documented in this research study. The results of this phenomenological designed research are given in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis Of The Data

The purpose of this study was to construct a theoretical framework explaining the practices of principals who manage effective sustainable professional learning communities and to provide insight into the practices of two school leaders who have sustained professional learning communities. This study involved analyzing textual descriptions from interviews with two principals, reviewing school documents, examining photographs, and conducting an analysis of the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) survey that was completed by kindergarten through fifth grade teachers at two elementary schools in Henderson, Kentucky. The purposeful sampling of two elementary schools was based on their designation as a noted professional learning community by Richard DuFour and Associates. The central research question of this study was: What leadership practices are effective in the sustainability of professional learning communities? Research questions used to guide this study were:

1. How does the principal define a PLC?
2. How does the principal define her role in supporting and sustaining a PLC?
3. What structure or structures are in place for professional dialogue to occur in the school?
4. How do teachers define the principals' roles in supporting and sustaining a PLC?

5. What effect do principal leadership practices have on the sustainability of professional learning communities?

School Demographics

Teachers in School A and School B were invited to complete an on-line survey through Survey Monkey. School A has 13 teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade and five support teachers resulting in 18 teachers responding to the on-line survey with 100% participation. School B has 22 teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth grade, and 100% of the teachers responded to the survey. These data provided an adequate response from all grade-level teachers in both schools. The surveys were completed by the teachers in less than one week from the date the teachers received the invitation to participate.

School A has eight (42.1%) teachers who have more than 15 years experience but only three (15.8%) have taught at School A the entire length of their careers. School B had six (27.3%) teachers who have taught more than 15 years, but none of those years were spent at School B (they are veteran teachers but new to School B). School A had two (10.5%) teachers who have taught 11 to 15 years entirely at School A. School A has the more experienced staff by the margin of two teachers. Both schools have 50% and more of the teacher population who had taught 1 to 5 years (see Appendix M).

School A

The School

School A is one of eight elementary schools located in the Henderson Kentucky School District. This rural school is comprised of 271 students in preschool through fifth

grade. The student population consists of 268 Caucasians and three African Americans with 51 disadvantaged students (No Child Left Behind Adequate Yearly Progress Report). The student-to-teacher ratio is 17:1, and the system's expenditure per student is \$6,836. This school made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) beginning in 2001-2002 and continued through the 2010 school year. School A became a Title I school in the 2003-2004 school year. The attendance for the 2009-2010 school year was 96.4% (Kentucky Department of Education).

The faculty is considered to be highly qualified with 100% of teachers participating in content-focused professional development. School A has 4.3% of teachers working with emergency or provisional certification. Bachelor's degrees are held by 30.4% of the teachers; 17.4% have a master's degree, and 52.2% are Rank I certified (Kentucky Department of Education).

In 2009, School A received the Superintendent's Cup Award and placed first in all three local competitions. Fifth graders scored 100% in the proficient or distinguished status in both reading and math on the Kentucky Core Content Test (KCCT).

School A is one of eight elementary schools in this Kentucky district to be identified as a Professional Learning Community by Richard DuFour & Associates as noted on the *All Things PLC* website. This district in Kentucky is one of nine districts identified as a PLC district in the United States by DuFour & Associates (*All Things PLC*).

The Principal

The principal at School A has been in education for 18 years; she was a teacher for 10 years in grades four, five, and six, and a principal for 8 years – 5 of those at School

A. When asked what lead her to become a teacher, her reply was, “That was something I always wanted to do. I used to play school as a kid and it never occurred to me to do anything else.” She became a principal because, “The principals I worked with as a teacher encouraged leadership in me and gave me opportunities to take some leadership roles as a teacher and encouraged me to expand on that and become a building level administrator” (Principal A Interview).

The principal of School A sought the position of building administrator because:

I was looking for a specific type of school after having been at the junior high for eight years and I knew I wanted to go back to elementary, and when I moved to this area when I remarried I was looking for a rural school, smaller school, and one that had the potential for some real growth and progress. I wasn't really looking for one that was at the top of its game but one that had the potential to get there, and [school name] fit that bill; plus they hired me! (Principal A Interview).

School B

The School

School B has the second largest number of elementary students in the district and is the larger of the two researched schools with 513 students. The student ethnic population is predominately Caucasian with 18 African-American and two Hispanic students. There are 114 disadvantaged students with 48 members of the school population identified as having a disability (No Child Left Behind). The student-to-teacher ratio is 16:1 and the system's pupil expenditure is \$6,211. School B made AYP beginning in the 2002-2003 school year and continued to meet that benchmark in the 2009-2010 testing year. The attendance for the 2009-2010 school year was 95.9% (Kentucky Department of Education).

The teaching staff at School B is highly qualified with 100% of the faculty participating in content-focused professional development. The professional qualifications of the teachers indicate 22% with bachelor's degrees, 58.5% have acquired master's endorsement, and 19.5% are Rank I employees.

School B has received several prestigious honors. In 2009 the school received the Governor's Cup Award and placed first in the region in Future Problem Solving. This school received the 2009 National Blue Ribbon School Award by meeting the status of a high performing school as measured by the Kentucky Commonwealth's Assessment.

The Principal

The principal of School B formerly owned a travel agency that she sold in order to become an educator. She has been in education for 16 years, beginning as a classroom teacher for 4 years; later in her career she was a reading specialist, a Reading Recovery certified teacher, and a curriculum specialist. She has been a building administrator in School B for 3 years; this is her first principalship. She stated that she wanted to become a principal because "I've always felt that I had some leadership capabilities and that I am a decision-maker; I think I am. I recognize the strengths in people and I feel like I have the capability of bringing out their talents. I felt like it was just, you know, my destiny" (Principal B Interview).

Research Questions and Emergent Themes

The principal interviews, teacher surveys, photographs, and school documents provided triangulation of the data and gave insights into the concepts of how effective principals lead effective professional learning communities through: (1) the school's mission, (2) the school's goals, (3) faculty/principal relationships, (4) collaborative

meetings, (5) embedded professional development, (6) coaching (7) shared and supportive leadership, (8) supportive structures, and (9) an urgency to improve student successes. These concepts emerged through the coding and analysis of the data. The research questions provided the basis for information about effective principal practices in successful and sustainable professional learning communities.

Principals Define a Professional Learning Community

In response to the research question regarding the way these principals described a professional learning community, several themes surfaced: (1) promoting and nurturing shared leadership, (2) having a shared vision, (3) collaborating to analyze data to improve teaching and learning, (4) coaching, (5) supporting best practices, (6) encouraging professional development, (7) exhibiting program commitment, (8) fostering relationships, (9) maintaining a dialogue, (10) risk taking, and (11) seeking the shared responsibility of stakeholders.

Promoting and Nurturing Shared Leadership

Shared leadership was one of the first concepts stated in the definition of a professional learning community by Principal B:

I think it is a school system that has high expectations for everyone, and that builds leadership capacity in all the educators, and believes that all children can learn at high levels. I feel like that at our school everyone is part of the decision-making process through our committee work and through our grade-level teams, and through our coaching. We all have a say and make the decisions on what are the best practices for students. I think that all of our staff supports the shared leadership because we make the decision together.

Principal A agreed with Principal B on the definition of a professional learning community and added:

It's when all the stakeholders are a part of a child's education come together to do their part to assure that student achievement is at the forefront. And it is all of the staff working together, communicating together and doing what's best for that child, and also the classified personnel as well as the parents and the child itself knowing what their role is in their education and accepting that.

The data obtained from the teacher survey corroborated Principal A's and Principal B's perceptions of promoting and nurturing shared leadership in five statements from the survey: (1) staff members are involved in making decisions, (2) the principal incorporates advice from the staff members, (3) power and authority are shared democratically with the principal, (4) decision-making is through committees across grade levels, and (5) leadership is promoted and nurtured.

In School A eighteen (95%) of the 19 teachers responding, and in School B eighteen (86%) of the 22 teachers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that they are involved in making decisions about most school issues (see Appendix M).

In School A 100% and in School B twenty-one (95%) teachers agreed or strongly agreed that power and authority are shared democratically with the principal.

One hundred percent of the teachers in School A and in School B agreed or strongly agreed that decision-making is through committees across grade levels.

The principal from School A stated in the interview that she had a team of teachers last year who involved the grade-level teachers more in the decision-making process; this year she did not have the same type of team and it has made a difference in the teacher input in decision-making at her school. She stated:

I think that you have to build more capacity in your teachers to take on leadership roles . . . sometimes just in an effort to be efficient I tend to just make decisions about things and move forward. Before, I have involved as many people as I probably need to. And so I'm going to reinstate a different type of leadership

team next year rather than just trying to rely on my intervention team to give teachers more involvement in the decision-making because I think that has suffered by not having that same team together this year. So, you know, I want to make sure that I'm making decisions based on having the information I know from all my staff.

The statement from the principal in School A might explain why three (13.6%) teachers chose to disagree with the statement that decisions were made through committees across grade levels.

In School A seventeen (89%) of the 19 teachers polled, and in School B 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members (see Appendix M).

Shared Vision

The principal from School B indicated in the interview that she understands that a professional learning community has “a clear vision for high expectations and success for everyone” (Principal B Interview). Three statements on the teacher survey incorporated the teachers' replies about a clear vision for their school: (1) data available to reach a shared vision, (2) members share visions for student learning, and (3) decisions are made with attention to the school's values and vision.

One-hundred percent of the teachers from School A and School B agreed or strongly agreed that data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.

In School A seventeen (94%) of the 18 teachers responding and in School B 100% of the teachers agree that staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.

In the survey School A and School B had 100% of the teachers indicating agreed or strongly agreed that decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision (see Appendix M).

Collaboration in Analyzing Data to Improve Teaching and Learning

Principal B stated and Principal A agreed that, "I feel like that at our school everyone is a part of the decision-making process through our committee work and through our grade-level teams."

The teacher survey data results in School A were seventeen (89%) of the 18 teachers responding and in School B 100% agreed or strongly agreed that staff members collaboratively analyze data. Of the faculty in School A and in School B 100% agreed or strongly agreed that teachers analyze student work to improve teaching and learning through a collaborative process.

Coaching

Principal B stated and Principal A agreed, "I feel like that at our school everyone is part of the decision-making process . . . through our coaching."

Three statements on the survey indicated the teachers' support of the concept of coaching in their respective schools: (1) peers observe and offer encouragement, (2) staff members receive feedback on instructional practices, and (3) opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.

Fourteen (78%) teachers from School A and sixteen (72%) teachers from School B responded that they agreed or strongly agreed that opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement. All teachers completing the survey responded to the statement.

School A had fourteen (72%) of the 18 teachers responding and School B had sixteen (73%) of the 22 teachers responding as agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement: Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.

One teacher in School B included her opinion in the comments section of the “Share Personal Practice” portion of the survey. She stated, “[The] Staff have been offered opportunities to observe peers; however, few have participated” (see Appendix M).

Teachers from School A and School B reflected on the statement: Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring in this manner; in School A fourteen (78%) and in School B twenty (91%) teachers agreed or strongly agreed. All teachers completing the survey responded to the statement.

One teacher from School B commented on opportunities to coach and mentor saying, “Each grade-level team has one hour of common team planning time each week where these activities are encouraged” (see Appendix M).

The principals from both schools stated that an hour once a week is usually used for collaboration time with the curriculum specialist. The principal of School B stated:

. . . then they have a district planning time, an enrichment time that is every Wednesday for 60 minutes, and then we have staff meetings every Thursday, and on a Thursday that we don’t have staff meetings that is their grade-level planning time which is, I require that they[do] at least 45 minutes of planning if we don’t have a staff meeting.

The principal of School A stated “they have [planning] every day for 45 minutes and then the once a week for the full hour. That collaboration time is [when] the curriculum specialist meets with them every week.”

School structures such as collaboration time are scheduled and sometimes used for collaboration between teachers and the curriculum specialist. Sometimes the coaching and mentoring is conducted during the day in School B:

So, I've been using a coaching model with those particular teachers and recognizing their strengths and between myself and my curriculum specialist, and my assistant principal we all do the walk-throughs, and then I use a good bit of the coaching model from [program name] for my evaluations and so then I take them into, if I have a teacher that I feel like we need to develop some of her teaching – her instruction, I take them into the other classroom and we do an observation together and we talk about that particular teacher's strengths and some of the strategies that we use and then we pick out one that she's familiar with and she would be comfortable with and then I go in and see her model that. And sometimes I'll use myself or curriculum specialist or assistant principal to model for her. (Principal B Interview)

Time exists at School A and at School B for collaboration. The 1 hour that is scheduled once a week for collaboration is primarily used for the interaction of the teachers with the school's curriculum specialist. The coaching and mentoring in School B occurs during the school day with the support of the principal, the curriculum specialist, or the assistant principal.

Best Practices

The principal from School B stated that the staff has “a say and make the decisions on what are the best practices for students” (Principal B Interview).

One-hundred percent of the teachers from School A and School B agreed or strongly agreed that staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.

In School A seventeen (94%) and in School B 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: Staff members work together to seek knowledge,

skills, and strategies and apply this new learning to their work. All teachers from both schools completing the survey responded to the statement (see Appendix M).

Both principals agreed that some teachers needed help with teaching and expanding their knowledge of successful teaching strategies. School A's principal stated, "Those that tend to just do what they have always done rather than add the variety." It is interesting that School A's principal voiced this concern and the only disagreeing response from the survey on this statement came from one teacher from School A.

School A and School B responded with 100% who agreed or strongly agreed that staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices. One teacher in School B commented on the statement concerning the reviewing of student work as: "Student work is shared in a general way (hanging for display), but there is not a "share time" (parentheses and quotation marks added by teacher). Each grade-level team has one hour of common team planning time each week where these activities are encouraged" (see Appendix M).

Professional Development

The principal in School A shared the outcome of her most recent professional development session or faculty meeting:

But I run the afterschool faculty meetings and I'm in charge of the professional development for that. Now, we talked a little bit about yesterday's staff meetings where I had different staff members sharing some strategies. Two of my new teachers have just completed three full days of literacy training with Carolyn Downing and the rest of the faculty has been working with her and her strategies for several years. So I had them to select their top two or three strategies that they learned that they have found to be most effective in the classroom in the last few weeks or months since they have started going to the workshops, and they shared those with the teachers yesterday. My curriculum specialist shared a couple of strategies, and then I also shared some differentiation strategies so, and some websites we revisited the Waltke's Web to make sure everyone was aware of that

website that a teacher in Tennessee put together or district. It started from a teacher that correlates to our reading series so I determine what the staff meetings are going to be about and select different people or provide it myself. (Principal A Interview)

This was one example shared by School A's principal of providing professional development for her staff.

In School A sixteen (89%) teachers and in School B seventeen (77%) teachers agreed or strongly agreed that school staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems. In School A 18 teachers responded and in School B 22 teachers responded to the survey (see Appendix M).

Program Commitment

In the interviews, both principals responded favorably with supporting opinions of the programs for each school and their impact on student progress. The principals discussed some programs that were different in each school and how the programs have supported learning at their schools. Principal A indicated that the reading program at her school was different from the two other schools in her district. She stated, "They [School B and another school in their district] are our top two schools in reading at all times so I know they are definitely doing something very well there." The principal at School A also talked about how well the math program was working for her school: "Yes, we have always done [program's name] Math Strategies and they have been very effective" (Principal A Interview).

The staff from School A and School B were asked to reflect on the following statement: School members are committed to the programs that enhance learning. One

hundred percent of School A and School B's teachers agreed or strongly agreed to this statement.

Programs continue to change based on student data and teacher needs as stated by the principal in School B. "One program that we've adopted this year for kindergarten was [program name]." The principal gave the following reasons for adding this particular program:

We just felt like that our kindergarten that because we have a reading interventionist and a math interventionist, but not for kindergarten. Because we use our special ed. teacher, our aids, we use everybody that's in there. But we felt like that they needed some program that was ready to go so they didn't have to spend the time pulling and gathering materials. We feel like that's been a good investment for us. (Principal B Interview)

The principal from School A indicated ways her school has changed the support of the math program in her building. She stated they had used several programs to support math concepts but the program they are using now is making a difference in student improvement.

It just makes those connections. Yes, we have always done [program name] math strategies and they have been very effective. But you're right – this just goes a lot deeper. And it I think a lot of it is the cement that then helps them see the correlation between addition and subtraction, between multiplication and division. You know what I mean; they are just starting to understand numeracy at a whole deeper level because of the calendar math I think. How numbers relate to one another. (Principal A Interview)

These statements reflect how School A and School B are continually changing the programs used at their schools based on student needs from data outcomes. The process of choosing the programs used by each school was not shared in the interviews.

Relationships

Building relationships is an important concept in a professional learning community according to Principal B. She stated, “I think that probably the foundation of our beliefs system is relationships. It is not probably, it is!” She added, “And I think that the work we have done with building relationships with the staff and the students has helped us to have a clear vision for high expectations and success for everyone.” Her strength as a leader in building relationships is shown in this quote: “I have just always been, one of my strengths for me has always been that I can develop relationships and that I can usually help people to feel confident about themselves” (Principal B Interview).

School A’s principal added, “And it is all of the staff working together, communicating together” (Principal A Interview). Both schools are good examples of principals and teachers working together to create meaningful relationships.

The majority of teachers responding to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the principals’ perceptions of relationships in their schools as evidenced in responses to three statements on the survey: (1) collegial relationships exist, (2) caring relationships exist, and (3) relationships support honesty and respect.

One-hundred percent of the teachers in School A and School B agreed or strongly agreed that collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.

School A had 100% of the teachers and School B had twenty-one (95%) of the teachers indicating agree or strongly agree that caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect. All teachers taking the survey responded to the statement.

It is interesting that the principal from School B made several comments about supporting relationships with her teachers during her interview saying, “I think that the work we have done with building relationships with the staff and the students has helped us,” and “I think that probably the foundation of our beliefs system is relationships. It is not probably, it is!” (Principal B Interview). Every staff member except one in School B responding to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the principal (see Appendix M).

In schools with a larger staff it can be harder to establish caring relationships among the entire population, but not for School B. The school had 95% of the faculty agree or strongly agree. Of the two elementary schools in this research, School B has the larger population of teachers.

Principal A did not indicate through the interview the value of relationships in her school, but 100% of her staff stated that caring relationships exist.

In School A and School B 100% of the teachers agreed that relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning. All the teachers polled in the survey from both schools responded to the statement.

Dialogue

School A’s principal stated in the interview that her school has:

. . . discovered that sometimes, after a few years of some good progress, complacency might set in. Teachers no longer feel like they have to do all of the strategies with fidelity that they were doing before, some short cuts were being taken, and so we are having some of those tough conversations. (Principal A Interview)

The responses show 100% of School A and School B’s teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the staff members engaged in dialogue that reflected a respect for

diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry. School A had 18 teachers responding, and School B had 22 teachers responding (see Appendix M).

Risk Taking

The principal of School A shared her thoughts concerning the teacher's willingness to take risks as:

I want those free exchange of ideas and I want them to have the comfort to be able to say, "I really don't know how to get from here to here or to do this," and they will say that to my curriculum specialist and then she can help them or come to me and say, "Here's what they need." They will not admit that to me. Very, very few of them will take that risk. (Principal A Interview)

The principal from School B shared her perspective on teachers taking risks saying, "I feel like my teachers, I have an open door and I feel like we can talk about anything and that they know that they can trust me and that I am reasonable" (Principal B Interview).

In School A 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that a culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks; in School B twenty (91%) of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed to this statement. In School A 17 teachers responded and in School B 22 teachers responded to the statement.

Shared Responsibility of Stakeholders

The principal from School A stated that in professional learning communities "all the stakeholders are a part of a child's education come together to do their part to assure that student achievement is at the forefront" (Principal A Interview).

In School A fifteen (83%) of the 18 teachers polled agreed or strongly agreed, and in School B twenty (91%) of the 22 teachers polled agreed or strongly agreed that

stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement (see Appendix M).

The principal from School B voiced her concern about the lack of parent participation:

But on a day-to-day basis, that parents feeling like this is an open door and their coming in and out of the school and being a part of their child’s education, and being a part of those events we have in the evening. We do not get a good attendance. (Principal B Interview)

In School A fourteen (83%) of the 17 teachers responding, and in School B seventeen (77%) of the 22 teachers responding agreed or strongly agreed to the statement concerning shared responsibility and accountability with stakeholders for student learning (see Appendix M).

The School Report Card (KDOE) published by each school documents the number of students whose parents-guardians had a least one teacher conference during the 2009-2010 school year, the number of parents-guardians serving on school committees, and the number of hours parent-guardians volunteered at their school (see Table 1).

Table 1

<i>Volunteer Hours Compared Between School A and School B</i>			
2009-2010 school year	Number of students whose parent-guardian had at least one teacher conference	Number of parents serving on school committees	Number of volunteer hours of parents-guardian
School A	234	2	842
School B	406	7	2,300

School A had 234 parents-guardians and School B had 406 parents-guardians attend at least one parent conference. The School B had more volunteer hours than School A. Each school had .01% of the parent population represented on school committees (KDOE School Report Card, School A and School B) as shown on Table 1.

School A's principal sends a weekly newsletter to parents via students and by email to enrolled parents. She stated:

. . . that's my link to be able to communicate with my families what I want them and the way I want them to know and understand. So, I make sure that, that's priority with me. [Yes and] We also copy a stack of extras and leave them on the table in the lobby and also post one on my parent bulletin board so if it doesn't make it home, and we email them also to the families that have said that they would like a copy by via email as well. I keep it short and sweet and I keep it simple to read; they are in little blocks and maybe I'll have six or seven tidbits of information including upcoming events. But it has really helped. One of the things that usually comes out in parent surveys and staff surveys is that communication has improved a lot, and I think the newsletter's key. (Principal A Interview)

The principal from School B stated the weekly newsletter would make a difference in communicating with parents. School B's principal expressed an interest in sending a weekly newsletter to parents: "Yeah, I would just like to, I bet that really is a good piece between the school and the home. It's direct communication" (Principal B Interview).

According to the results of the KDOE School Report Card, School A has more active parent-guardian support, more parent-guardian-teacher conferences, but School B has more volunteer hours than School A (Kentucky Department of Education).

The Principal's Role in Supporting and Sustaining a PLC

The principals of School A and School B shared their thoughts about their responsibility in supporting and sustaining a PLC through the following concepts: (1)

scheduling interventions (2) encouraging teacher accountability for student achievement, (3) coordinating the principal and curriculum specialist's efforts, (4) goal setting, (5) analyzing data, (6) promoting parental and community involvement, and (7) supporting great instruction.

Scheduling Interventions

The principals in School A and School B stated their success in supporting and sustaining a PLC was partially through scheduling and remediation. The principal in School B reported that her school has 90 minutes of uninterrupted instruction in reading and math. She continued:

We also have various Math in Focus [strategies] adopted in our school improvement plan as well as the district plan, accelerated math and accelerated reading. Combined with that we also have our RtI, which is our response to intervention for reading and for math. We have an interventionist for each. Also in our scheduling we have just revamped some of our scheduling since December when we did our mid-year MAP [Measure of Academic Progress] assessment. Each grade has combined all the students and broken them into skill groups and their intensive groups that meet anywhere from 30 to 55 minutes a day for intensive work in a specific RIT range. (Principal B Interview)

The principal from School A reported the schedule at her school was similar to School B with this exception:

It is similar in nature to [principal's name] except that we that we departmentalize in the fourth and fifth grade for a couple of subjects. And our K-3 is self-contained including interventions and ability grouping, and we're doing the flexible ability grouping as she mentioned but within the classroom this year. We used to cross over and do it grade-level wise so that we ability-grouped within the grade-level, and we are trying something different this year and having it be more self-contained. (Principal A Interview)

In School A fourteen (82%) of the 17 teachers responding, and in School B twenty (91%) of the 22 teachers responding supported the principals perceptions that the school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice (see Appendix M).

Principal support in Response to Intervention (RtI) was very evident in both principal responses in the discussion of scheduling instruction in their respective schools.

Scheduling the RtI instruction into an already crowded day is hard for most schools.

School A and B found a way to support interventions when needed to support student academic growth.

The principal from School B explained how the interventions have changed this year:

There are just some that just need – they need a specific area. We also did it in math and focus, because, and not in every grade in math and focus. Our primary grades in first and second felt like that they had some students that were really grasping and ready to move on. So they felt they could become a better teacher and the students could become more fluent in this particular concept if they broke them down into areas. First they looked at their RIT ranges and then they also looked at their math and focus assessments. And so now they have divided the students into four different; if there are four teachers there are four different groups. And if one needs more practice or modeling they're there, and if another group has moved on geometric shapes they are there. I think they are really excited about what they're seeing. (Principal B Interview)

The principal in School A expressed how scheduling has helped provide support for her RtI program.

Now they [interventionist and Title 1 staff] will pull, sometimes if it works out with both teachers, from a grade-level to take the tier three students from both classes at one time. I just have two at most grade-levels, and to have that but it's hard to make sure, of course, that can't be during the core reading or core math time, so, the grade-levels have collaborated to make sure their schedules are **very similar** throughout the day so they are teaching math at the same time, reading at the same time. We have the 90 minute reading block. Our math block is 60 minutes at the intermediate and 90 at the primary. But the interventionist coming at a time that is not core reading and math as we talked about, frequently takes the place of social studies or science. (Principal A Interview)

Both principals expressed their support of a highly successful computer program. School B's principal stated:

Three times a week, all students receive a 40 minute –everybody receives a 40 minute block one time a week and a 30 minute block the other two times – that is K-5. And the way we work that is that we split up every six weeks we do, no sorry, every nine weeks if we're working it in reading, and the next nine weeks it's in math unless it's specific to the child. You know, if the child is in 99 percentile then a lot of the stuff they're doing is enrichment. It's a very effective program. (Principal B Interview)

School A's principal stated their intervention program to be the key to meeting the needs of lower performing students:

Our intervention program is a key way that we meet the needs of our students that are below grade-level and most of that instruction is provided by our interventionist, and she has an instructional assistant and then we have a retired teacher that we hired back. We actually had two earlier this year that shared the job and then we're down to one now. (Principal A Interview)

Neither principal discussed the process of choosing the RtI programs during the interviews. It is quite evident that the programs they have chosen are supporting the remedial needs of their students as well as the needs of the student enrichment population as shown in the School Report Cards (KDOE).

School A and School B have three structures in place to support continued student progress: (1) staff and administrative support of the RtI program and goals, (2) technology and materials to support the student population success, (3) creative scheduling of Response to Interventions throughout the school in kindergarten through fifth grade. Their continued success on state assessments supports the structures used in both schools. Each principal in collaboration with staff continually assesses any changes needed in intervention technologies and materials based on student outcomes.

Supporting students with remediation and enrichment needs may be one reason why both schools' overall scores have continued to improve as the testing data shows from 2002 to 2010 school years on the KDOE School Report Card (KDOE).

The continued success of meeting the needs of their students was evaluated by teachers in both schools through responses to three statements on the survey: (1) the sharing of innovation actions of the teachers and the principal, (2) school goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades, and (3) staff members work together to address and search for solutions to diverse student needs.

The teacher survey confirms the principals' statements concerning the ability of the schools to meet the needs of the students. In School A 100% of the teachers supported the principal's shared responsibility and rewards for innovative actions. School B teachers strongly supported this statement with nineteen (95%) of the teachers indicating agreed or strongly agreed.

All responding teachers in School A and School B supported the statement, "The school's goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades." The teacher's responses agreed with the perceptions of both principals (see Appendix M). All responders at both schools supported the statement, "Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs" (see Appendix M). The statements of the principals and teachers were overwhelmingly upheld by the students' success as reported on the School Report Cards reports from 2002 to 2010 school years (KDOE).

Teacher Accountability for Student Achievement

Both principals indicated that one reason their PLCs have been successful is by holding the teachers responsible for student achievement. Principal B shared:

And I think that probably the most important thing I can do is to make sure that they know that I'm always holding them accountable for the review of the student work. (Principal B Interview)

Principal B shared the way she approaches accountability in her school saying, “But it has to be, I just feel like it has to be in a comfortable way, in a nonthreatening way” (Principal B Interview).

Principal B was a curriculum specialist in the same school where she is currently the principal. She was very knowledgeable about teacher abilities and accountability before she assumed the role of principal.

School A’s Principal considered her success in supporting teachers saying, Accountability for teachers has improved since I have been there, I think (Principal A Interview).

The district requires teachers to assess student progress through MAP testing three times a year, Star Reading and Star Math assessments throughout the year, 9-week benchmark testing, and weekly testing to monitor students’ remedial progress. Teachers meet with their curriculum specialist and in most instances with the principal to discuss student outcomes on assessments and possible interventions to promote improved student progress. The accessibility of the principal to attend the grade-level meetings was not consistent in both schools (Principal A and Principal B Interviews).

In School B the teachers have grade-level meetings and are accountable to the principal. The principal was asked in the interview who leads the grade-level meetings; Principal B explained, “They are lead by that particular grade-level. We have grade-level notebooks where they write their notes of what takes place during that particular meeting” (Principal B Interview).

Coordination of Principal and Curriculum Specialist Efforts

The support and coordination of efforts between the principal and curriculum specialist was a topic of discussion many times in both principals' interviews. Principal A used her curriculum specialist to ensure student success in the following ways: (1) assessment analyst, (2) strategy implementation, (3) professional development, (4) collaboration, and (5) as a teacher confidant. Several quotes from the Principal A interview acknowledge the role of the curriculum specialist in supporting student achievement. In teachers' meetings this principal used the data created by the curriculum specialist in this manner:

One of the things we look in the data very carefully is, and that I showed you yesterday, was when we looked at the graphs the curriculum specialist creates, is assuring that our students who are scoring in the 92nd percentile or above on that three times a year MAP test maintain or increase that percentile ranking because if attention is not given to that, they are not. (Principal A Interview)

Principal A also uses her curriculum specialist to implement new strategies to improve student progress:

I'll be taking notes; we were at a school for a walk-through earlier this week and I came back and made my list of things to think about, implement, and try, and discuss with my curriculum specialist based on that. (Principal A Interview)

Principal A also stated that she used her curriculum specialist during professional development with her teachers saying, "My curriculum specialist shared a couple of strategies and then I also shared some differentiation strategies" (Principal A Interview).

Principal A also depends on the curriculum specialist to collaborate with the teachers noting, "That collaboration time is [when] the curriculum specialist meets with them every week," and "My curriculum specialist just always has things she wants them

for and I have kind of let her schedule their time on those Mondays” (Principal A Interview).

Teachers at School A express their teaching needs to the curriculum specialist when they do not feel comfortable sharing those ideas with the principal. Principal A stated previously that she wanted a “free exchange of ideas” with her staff, but her staff felt more comfortable sharing their needs with the curriculum specialist.

Principal B uses her curriculum specialist to support her efforts to provide professional development and as a coach to support and sustain improved instruction. Principal B noted that she uses the curriculum specialist as part of a collaborative team to provide professional development:

If I’m required to take their full time [during grade-level meetings], I let them know, if it will be 20, 30, or 60 minutes, or my curriculum specialist, or my assistant principal because we plan that by the month as to what things we need to meet with them about. (Principal B Interview)

School B’s principal also uses her curriculum specialist as an additional person on the staff to coach teachers and to provide information about walk-through data:

So, I’ve been using a coaching model with those particular teachers and recognizing their strengths, and between myself and my curriculum specialist and my assistant principal, we all do the walk-throughs, and then I use a good bit of the coaching model from [program name] for my evaluations and so then I take them into, if I have a teacher that I feel like we need to develop some of her teaching her instruction, I take them into the other classroom and we do an observation together and we talk about that particular teacher’s strengths and some of the strategies that we use and then we pick out one that she’s familiar with and she would be comfortable with and then I go in and see her model that. And sometimes I’ll use myself or curriculum specialist or assistant principal to model for her. (Principal B Interview)

Principal B also uses her curriculum specialist to provide additional long-term support to improve teacher instruction by having her “to go in and check and recheck” the progress of the teacher (Principal B Interview).

Their respective curriculum specialists provide valuable resources for both principals to improve instruction and student progress in successful professional learning communities.

Goal Setting

Goal setting was a priority for Principal A in supporting and sustaining a PLC:

And it’s the goal setting and I think that is a critical piece . . . is that individual goal setting with the students after they take their fall assessment and looking at what is a realistic goal and how are you going to keep track of your progress to get there. (Principal A Interview)

The principal from School B thinks that supporting and sustaining PLC reveals its success in the end product as she shared, “I always discuss with the kids that it is about; it’s the finish line” (Principal B Interview).

An important part of sustaining and supporting a PLC is having the shareholders become actively involved. Students are an important part of the professional learning community and setting their individual goals for success appears to be an important element in a successful PLC. According to the survey teachers also see stakeholders as an important part of a successful PLC. In School A fifteen (83%) of the 18 teachers responding and in School B twenty (91%) of the 22 teachers responding agreed or strongly agreed that stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement (see Appendix M).

Analyzing Data

Both principals depend on the data obtained from multiple assessments to determine the need for student intervention and enrichment and to assess how grade-level instruction is progressing. Many times during the interviews the principals noted methods for basing their interventions on analyzing the data from the various assessments.

Principal B mentioned very early in the interview the assessments the school used throughout the year and at the end of the nine week marking period:

At the beginning, we do the math testing, benchmarking, Aimes Web, Star Reading, and Star Math – we do those assessments every marking period. And then, once we determine where kids are falling, then we do some more intensive in reading and math where other students do enrichment; that’s done within a grade-level. (Principal B Interview)

Principal B also referred to the analysis of the data as decision points: “It [the assessment] is able to set decision points so that the students reach mastery or they continue to have more practice if they don’t reach mastery” (Principal B Interview).

Principal A shared ways in which their intervention program helped students improve, but the data revealed some problems with classroom instruction:

. . . what we have found out by our data [is] that our intervention program is very effective. We’re moving students out of tier three into two and out of two into one. But, we moved almost as many kids from just above grade-level to just below as we moved out – but some discouraging data. So what it’s saying is that our intervention program is successful; it is getting kids back into the core; however, we are not either differentiating enough at the core or making sure that those kids that are at grade-level but not very far above are getting as much support as they need. (Principal A Interview)

The principal from School A shared notebooks of data reports that she consulted often to assess student growth, monitor program success, and review teacher

accountability. Both principals used the data assessments created by their curriculum specialists for their own progress monitoring of student success, teacher progress, and as a collaboration tool for grade-level meetings.

Teachers also agreed with their principals that staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices. The survey outcomes reported that School A had seventeen (94%) of the 18 teachers responding and School B had 100% of the 22 teachers responding that they agree or strongly agree that the data from multiple assessments were used to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices. From both schools, 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed that staff members collaboratively analyze student work as shown in the survey results and support the principal statements from the interviews (See Appendix M).

Parental and Community Involvement

Principal A sends home a weekly newsletter to parents-guardians to inform them of school activities and to provide helpful information to support their child's progress. She noted in parent and staff surveys that the newsletter has improved the communication between school and home. "One of the things that usually comes out in parent surveys and staff surveys is that communication has improved a lot, and I think the newsletter's key" (Principal A Interview).

Principal B has been concerned about parent and community support and involvement is an area that needs some additional work:

I don't what the solution is. I do, I work really hard with our parents and I think that's part of the PLC that is effective, is the communication I have with parents of kids that really have some needs. And I work closely with parents whenever

we have any types of discipline issues. It is very important to me to bring the parent on board and we solve these problems together. (Principal B Interview)

Principal B stated that at this point in education the parent and community relationships are different from years past:

We have to recognize that it's a different time but we also have to change some of the, I mean, it is a different time. We have some concerns that are bigger than they have ever been. If I can't get those parents in here and change some of their parenting, then it is going to be very difficult for their child to be successful. (Principal B Interview)

The principal at School B liked the two ideas initiated at other schools in her district. She wanted to research the possibility of beginning a weekly "Backpack Buddies" program such as the one in School A. The program combines the efforts of local churches, the school, and county resource programs to provide food and books for lower income families. She would also like to begin sending home a weekly newsletter to improve the relationship between school and home. "Yeah, I would just like to, I bet that really is a good piece between the school and the home. It's direct communication from you [the principal]" (Principal B Interview).

Support Great Instruction

The principals at both schools work to improve classroom instruction through grade-level meetings and professional development meetings. Principal B uses a coaching model with teachers and her curriculum specialist to support collaboration between teachers to improve instruction.

The teachers have a district-wide enrichment time every Wednesday for 60 minutes and staff meetings on most Thursdays. On Thursdays when regular staff meetings do not occur Principal B stated she requires the faculty to have 45 minutes of

planning by grade levels. The teachers at grade-level meetings are held accountable through “grade-level notebooks where they write their notes of what takes place during that particular meeting.” Principal B stated the grade-level meetings “absolutely, highly beneficial!” for improving classroom instruction. Both principals attend some grade-level meetings but Principal B makes it a priority to attend as many grade-levels meetings as possible. Principal B stated, “Yes, I always, always if I’m not meeting with them I always make an appearance” (Principal B Interview).

Principal A stated she would like to attend more of the grade-level meetings than she presently attends.

I come and go I need to do more of . . . making sure I’m visible at least every week when they meet during that time; I need to do that. And I probably need to facilitate those meetings more often. (Principal A Interview)

Principal B intervened to improve classroom instruction through her coaching program. She uses walk-throughs to monitor teacher instruction. If the assistant principal, curriculum specialist or the principal

. . . feel like we need to develop some of her teaching, her instruction, I take them into the other classroom and we do an observation together and we talk about that particular teacher’s strengths and some of the strategies that we use and then we pick out one that she’s familiar with and she would be comfortable with and then I go in and see her model that. (Principal B Interview)

Through this type of coaching, Principal B is monitoring and improving instruction in her school as noted on the Kentucky Department of Education website.

Principal B also used her curriculum specialist to cover classrooms so teachers may visit other teachers in their building. She concluded that “everybody was an expert and some of the best professional development was right here in our building.” She

stated that this model has worked very well for her school and “it really opened the door” for her teachers to collaborate about instruction (Principal B Interview).

Structures to Support Professional Dialogue in the Schools

Professional dialogue is embedded in the structure of both School A and School B. The teachers, principal, and curriculum specialist have multiple opportunities available during the school week for dialogue to occur in their schools. All staff members are involved in faculty meetings when they occur – usually once a week. Teachers meet with their grade-level teams once a week to discuss student assessment outcomes and the remedial needs of students. Teachers also meet with the curriculum specialist once a week to discuss assessments and strategies to improve instruction. Teachers have compatible planning times during the week to support dialogue opportunities between grade-level teachers (Principal A and Principal B Interviews).

Principal A and Principal B referred to the discussions they have with their staff as having conversations with the faculty concerning student work. Principal B stated, “And I think that probably the most important thing I can do is to make sure that they know that I’m always holding them accountable for the . . . conversations that we have about the student work” (Principal B Interview).

Principal A also discussed having conversations with her faculty concerning the data that showed that many children were moving out of intervention programs but just as many were moving from the core program in the classroom to remedial programs. She referred to the dialogue between the staff as “difficult conversations.”

So we are starting to have some of those difficult conversations about how much responsibility is it of the classroom teacher to ensure that those students are making the progress that they need. And the same conversations are taking place

around the enrichment and acceleration for students who are above grade-level. (Principal A Interview)

The teacher survey asked participants to reflect on this statement: “A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.” In School A 18 teachers responded in this manner: twelve (66.7%) agreed, five (27.8%) strongly agreed, and one (5.6%) disagreed. In School B 22 teachers responded; of those responses, fourteen (66.7%) agreed, five (23.8%) strongly agreed and two (9.5%) disagreed. In School A 94% and in School B 90% of participating teachers agreed or strongly agreed that opportunities and structures exist for open dialogue to occur in their schools (see Appendix M).

According to the teacher survey, 100% of both school staffs agreed or strongly agreed that staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry (see Appendix M).

Teachers Defining the Principal’s Role in Supporting and Sustaining a PLC

The teachers were asked to respond to seven statements on the survey concerning their principal’s role in supporting and sustaining a PLC. The majority of the teachers from both schools replied in support of their principal on these key concepts: (1) involving staff in decisions, (2) incorporating teachers’ advice, (3) providing staff members access to key information, (4) behaving in a proactive manner, (5) encouraging staff members to initiate change, (6) sharing responsibility and rewards, (7) sharing power and authority, and (8) promoting and nurturing leadership.

Involving Staff in Decisions

The teachers in School A and School B responded to the statement, “Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.” All teachers taking the survey from both schools responded to the statement. In School A eighteen (94.7%) agreed or strongly agreed and in School B nineteen (86.4%) agreed or strongly agreed. One (5.2%) teacher in School A disagreed and three (13.6%) in School B disagreed (see Appendix M).

Principal Incorporates Teachers’ Advice

In School A thirteen (68.4%) of the 19 teachers responding agreed and six (31.6%) of the teachers strongly agreed resulting in 100% of the teachers polled being in support of the statement, “The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.” In School B fifteen (68.2%) of the 22 teachers responding agreed, six (27.3%) strongly agreed, and one (4.5%) disagreed with the statement. The overwhelming response from both schools was in support of the efforts their principals make to take advice from staff members to make decisions (see Appendix M).

Staff Members Have Access to Key Information

One-hundred percent of the teachers participating in the survey responded to this statement: “Staff members have accessibility to key information.” School A responses were eleven (57.9%) agreed, and eight (42.1%) teachers strongly agreed. School B responses were twelve (54.5%) agreed, nine (40.9%) strongly agreed, and one (4.6%) disagreed. In School A 100% agreed or strongly agreed, and in School B 95.4% agreed or strongly agreed with the principal’s perceptions that she shares key information.

The Principal is Proactive

The teachers were polled on this statement in the survey: “The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.” In School A ten (52.6%) teachers agreed and nine (47.4%) strongly agreed. In School B twelve (54.5%) agreed, nine (40.9%) strongly agreed, and one (4.6%) disagreed. The majority of the teachers from both schools agreed or strongly agreed that their principal is proactive and addresses areas needing support (see Appendix M). All teachers from both schools taking the survey answered the statement.

Staff Members Initiate Change

Teachers from School A and School B were asked to respond to this statement: “Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.” In School A thirteen (68.4%) agreed, five (26.3%) strongly agreed, and one (5.3%) disagreed with the statement. In School B the response was thirteen (59.1%) agreed, seven (31.8%) strongly agreed, and two (9.1%) disagreed that staff members initiate change. All teachers from both schools taking the survey responded to the statement.

The Principal Shares Responsibility and Rewards

The statement on the survey, “The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions,” received the following responses from School A and School B. In School A 100% agreed or strongly agreed – six (31.6%) agreed and thirteen (68.4%) strongly agreed. In School B 95% of the teachers responded favorably to the statement – eleven (55.0%) agreed, eight (40.0%) strongly agreed, and one (5.0%) disagreed. All 18 teachers from School A and all 22 teachers from School B responded to the statement (see Appendix M).

The Principal Shares Power and Authority

In School A the majority of the teachers responded favorably to the statement, “The principal participates democratically with the staff sharing power and authority.” Ten (55.6%) agreed, six (33.3%) strongly agreed, and two (11.1%) from School A disagreed with the statement. Eighteen teachers participating in the survey from School A responded to the statement. In School B sixteen (76.2%) agreed, four (19.0%) strongly agreed, and one (4.8%) disagreed that the principal shares power and authority with the staff. School B had 21 teachers responding to the statement (see Appendix M).

Leadership is Promoted and Nurtured

The teachers from School A and School B participating in the survey responded to this statement: “Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.” School A, with 19 teachers, responded in this manner: eight (42.1%) agreed, nine (47.4%) strongly agreed, and two (10.5%) disagreed. School B, with 22 teachers taking part in the survey, responded in this manner: sixteen (72.7%) agreed and six (27.3%) strongly agreed. School B had 100% of the participating teachers in the survey indicating agree or strongly agree that leadership is promoted and nurtured at their school (see Appendix M).

The majority of teachers participating in the survey from School A and School B support their principal’s role in sustaining a professional learning community.

The Effect of Principal Leadership Practices on the Sustainability of Professional

Learning Communities Research

Principal A

Principal A has been the principal of School A for 5 years. She stated she wanted to become the principal of School A because the school showed potential. “I was looking

for a rural school, smaller school, and one that had the potential for some real growth and progress” (Principal A Interview). In the 5 years of her principalship, the school has shown improvement from 2005 to 2010 in CATS scores (KDOE). In the interview, she noted the areas in her school where she had made improvements: (1) teacher expectations, (2) success breeds success, (3) teacher accountability, (4) improved instruction, and (5) appropriate resources.

Teacher expectations. Principal A stated in the interview that she perceived when she first came to the school, teacher expectations of the students’ potential for achievement was low:

Expectations were just too low; that was the bottom line in our building, and once kids started performing on a level that teachers hadn’t expected before they were like, “Wow, I had no . . . ” they said this word for word. “I had no idea that second graders could do that.” “I had no idea that first graders could do this.” So then I said, “Let’s see maybe that’s not as far as they can go. Have you thought about . . . have you tried this?” And pretty soon they started expecting more and students started performing more. And I think that was the bottom line of what happened. It’s contagious. (Principal A Interview)

Once teacher expectations of what the students could achieve was raised, the student outcome on the CATS tests increased as shown on the School Report Card (KDOE). The scores on state testing have steadily increased in School A in the 5 years of her principalship.

The opinions expressed by the teachers taking the survey showed fifteen (83%) teachers agreed or strongly agreed and three (16.7%) disagreed with the statement, “Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.” Eighteen of 19 teachers responded from School A to the

statement. The majority of teachers taking the survey support the staffs' high expectations that serve to increase student achievement (see Appendix M).

Success breeds success. Principal A noted that once the school had experienced one successful year, more continued. "It's true, and the success breeds success because once my teachers started seeing some accomplishments from students that they hadn't expected." School A received the Superintendent's Cup in 2009 which is indicative of the success the students at School A are capable of achieving. Principal A stated:

When our academic teams started having some success for the first time in our history and . . . won the Superintendent's Cup. My gosh, we can compete with those bigger schools! But doing that one year that did more for us as far as building confidence in the **students** more than anything else we'd done because we could say to them, "I know you are only in second grade right now, but we're going to need you on our academic team when you're in fourth grade, you are smart and we need smart kids." (Principal A Interview)

The success of School A has been reflected in the increased success of student outcomes, student confidence in their ability to succeed, and the teachers' belief that students can succeed at high levels.

Teacher accountability. Principal A has made a difference in the perceptions of the staff in quality classroom instruction. The accountability of teachers to take responsibility for student success has improved in the past 5 years.

You know my philosophy is; "Do your job." You have a job to do, it's an important job; it's a very important job, and if you don't do it – well, there is a victim, and that is the student in your classroom and we can't afford to have that. So, I think it has elevated expectations. (Principal A Interview)

The principal of School A made some changes in classroom groups this year for teacher accountability purposes:

. . . we are trying something different this year and having it be more self-contained. Part of that is accountability; I needed to find out where some

strengths were, and where some areas of less than strengths were in some of my teachers. (Principal A Interview)

Teacher and student achievement depend on the expectations of the leadership in School A. The leadership provided by Principal A has made a difference in the success of improved teacher accountability and greater student achievement.

Improved instruction. Principal A stated she does not currently have the support of her entire staff to improve instruction. She is working to achieve the support of her entire staff:

I have the non-team players and those that tend to want to just do what they have always done rather than add the variety, and use other staff members as models. And I think that is just an on-going battle with trying to expand those horizons. (Principal A Interview)

She is working through professional development sessions to gain more support for improved instruction from her staff. “That is one of the reasons why we do the sharing in staff meetings where we have other teachers sharing what is working for them” (Principal A Interview).

The teacher survey asked the participating teachers to respond to this statement: “School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.” School A responded in this manner: thirteen (72.2%) agreed, three (16.7%) strongly agreed, and two (11.1%) disagreed with the statement. Eighteen of 19 teachers participating in the survey responded to the statement.

Staff members responded to this statement in the on-line survey: “Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, and strategies and apply this new learning.” Eighteen teachers responded to the statement and seventeen (94%) agreed or strongly agreed and one (5.6%) teacher disagreed.

Principal A is working to encourage and improve teacher instruction through professional development sessions. The majority of the staff – 88.9% of the 18 teachers responding – support learning together and 94% of the 18 responding staff seek knowledge and strategies and apply the new learning (see Appendix M).

Appropriate resources. Appropriate resources were an important component of the leadership provided by Principal A. She has made changes in two areas in the last five years: (1) scheduling student interventions and (2) the curriculum specialist’s role in improving instruction.

Scheduling student interventions. Principal A, in an effort to support the greatest student improvements, hired additional staff to support the intervention program:

Our intervention program is a key way that we meet the needs of our students that are below grade-level and most of that instruction is provided by our interventionist, and she has an instructional assistant and then we have a retired teacher that we hired back – we actually had two earlier this year that shared the job and then we’re down to one now. (Principal A Interview)

Principal A supported the teachers in creating their schedules to be very similar to permit the interventionist to work with students from the same grade-level at the same time. The principal and the staff worked together to support the best intervention schedule to increase student success.

The teachers from School A were asked to respond to this statement: “The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.” All teachers polled responded to this statement and 100% agreed or strongly agreed (see Appendix M). For example, Principal A creates the school’s intervention schedules to intertwine with support teachers and classroom teachers’ schedules to schedule support efficiently for struggling students.

Curriculum specialist's role in improving instruction. Principal A uses the support of the curriculum specialist to improve and support good instruction in her school. The principal uses the curriculum specialist as a professional development person and a data analyst.

The curriculum specialist conducts the professional development for the teachers at least once a week and sometimes during faculty meetings. Principal A facilitates the time between the curriculum specialist and the teachers. "That collaboration time is [when] the curriculum specialist meets with them every week." The curriculum specialist also makes presentations during some faculty meetings. "My curriculum specialist shared a couple of strategies and then I also shared some differentiation strategies" (Principal A Interview).

The curriculum specialist uses the assessments taken by the students and creates data for the principal and the teachers to review. Principal A has these assessments in notebooks in her office and refers to them often to make decisions based on the data to improve student achievement.

Principal B

Principal B has been the principal of School B for 3 years and, although she took the principalship over from a successful and experienced person, this principal has supported continued gains in student achievement. She is a collaborative principal and seeks new and innovative ways to support increased student learning and improved classroom instruction. Her knowledge of the teachers and the curriculum prior to becoming principal has enabled her to have a deeper understanding of the needs of students and teachers. She has shown leadership in this PLC by supporting these effective leadership strategies: (1) relationships, (2) collaboration with and respect for teachers, (3) utilization of a coaching model, and (4) celebrations.

Relationships. Relationships are very important to the Principal of School B. Principal B attributes part of the success of the school to relationships. “And I think that the work we have done with building relationships with the staff and the students has helped us to have a clear vision for high expectations and success for everyone.” Principal B stated in the interview that building relationships is her leadership strength. “I have just always been – one of my strengths for me has always been that I can develop relationships and that I can usually help people to feel confident about themselves.” The principal added:

Well, another component that has been very important to us is the celebration and success and students you know the personal relationship that we have developed and that they know we all work hard and we don’t ask anything of them that we wouldn’t ask of ourselves. (Principal B Interview)

Her leadership strength is in building relationships. “I always used that to my advantage and it came very easy for me to be able to make friends and to talk to people and that is really what I use as an administrator” (Principal B Interview).

The PLCA survey asked the teacher participants to respond to this statement: “Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.” Twenty-two teachers responded in this manner: fifteen (68.2%) agreed, seven (31.8%) strongly agreed making the results that 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed.

Teachers were also asked to respond to this statement: “Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.” School B responded with eleven (50%) agreed, ten (45.5%) strongly agreed, and one (4.5%) disagreed. Ninety-five percent of the 22 teachers polled agreed with the principal’s statements concerning relationships (see Appendix M).

Collaboration with and respect for teachers. Principal B has a collaborative type of leadership and shows respect for her teachers. “The dynamics of the school, the culture of this school has changed a lot since I’ve become principal. The other principal – she is extremely, extremely effective – but our styles are very different.” She has an open door policy with her teachers but says, “I feel like my teachers, I have an open door and I feel like we can talk about anything and that they know that they can trust me and that I am reasonable.” She discussed the importance of working with her teachers:

We make a decision together as to who is going to have those particular positions and it’s based on a decision by a particular grade-level or not specially a grade-level or department. I think that all of our staff supports the shared leadership because we make the decision together. (Principal B Interview)

She treats her teachers as professionals and values their opinions and decisions:

I think I feel like that the teachers – I don't question things from certain teachers because they are professionals. Sometimes they just want to come and tell me something like "I did this because of such and such." I say, "I understand that, I'm not questioning you," and I feel like I have to let them, they have to understand that I trust them and they are highly effective. Because sometimes I feel like if they are questioned too much that – they don't feel the trust in cases where I have to question, I will. (Principal B Interview)

She discussed her leadership style in the interview as:

You know that [collaboration] is my leadership style. I feel like it is important for me because I'm a communicator and I feel like it is important for me to talk to them about my ideas that I have and ask for, a lot of times I will start with the ideas that they have and what they're thinking. There's a lot of discussion and I feel like to come to a consensus as a group. (Principal B Interview)

She demands accountability by the teachers to keep instruction improving but addresses these problems in a respectful manner.

The PLCA survey asked the teachers to respond to three statements concerning collaboration with the staff. The teachers reflected on this statement: "Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues."

School B responded in this manner: fifteen (68.2%) agreed, four (18.2%) strongly agreed and three (13.6%) disagreed with the statement. Twenty-two teachers responded to the statement.

The teachers were asked to respond to this statement about collaboration in their school: "The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions."

Fifteen (68.2%) teachers agreed, six (27.3%) teachers strongly agreed, and one (4.5%) teacher disagreed; 22 teachers responded to the statement.

The survey asked participants to respond to this statement: "A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff." Twenty-two teachers in

School B responded the statement in this manner: fifteen (68.2%) agreed, six (27.3%) strongly agreed, and one (4.5%) disagreed. The majority or 95% of the teachers in the survey agreed or strongly agreed that a collaborative process exists in their school.

All teachers participating in the survey responded to all three statements concerning collaboration and 86.4% and 95.5% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the principal's perceptions related to collaboration between the principal and the staff (see Appendix M).

A coaching model. The principal in School B employs a coaching model to improve classroom instruction. She explained how she implemented the coaching model:

So, I've been using a coaching model with those particular teachers and recognizing their strengths and between myself and my curriculum specialist, and my assistant principal, we all do the walk-throughs, and then I use a good bit of the coaching model from [program name] for my evaluations and so then I take them into, if I have a teacher that I feel like we need to develop some of her teaching her instruction, I take them into the other classroom and we do an observation together and we talk about that particular teacher's strengths and some of the strategies that we use and then we pick out one that she's familiar with and she would be comfortable with and then I go in and see her model that. And sometimes I'll use myself or curriculum specialist or assistant principal to model for her. (Principal B Interview)

She has gained support from her teachers with this approach. She used this model when she was a curriculum specialist for School B and found the approach to be very beneficial for teachers. As a principal she stated that through this method "it really opened the door that maybe that maybe they felt inhibited." She stated this method appreciated all teachers. "We felt like even with one teacher who really wasn't a strong teacher that teacher had good technology skills, and that teacher could train us in using technology in the classroom and it really developed that teacher" (Principal B Interview).

Celebrations. Principal B supported teacher and student successes through celebrations:

Well, another component that has been very important to us is the celebration and success and students, you know, the personal relationship that we have developed and that they know we all work hard and we don't ask anything of them that we wouldn't ask of ourselves. We all get in there and do the work together and I think my staff knows I will be here as long as it takes to be here, and I will do whatever it takes to support them in the classroom, and they will do whatever it takes to support the student – now that's the majority. We have some areas that we always have to work on. You can't ask any more of them than you are willing to give of yourself and in the same way with the students. We celebrate. My statement to my teachers and to my students is, we work hard and we play hard. It feels good when we get to play because it feels great; they love it, you know, how they do when they have been successful. It's so exciting and probably the biggest thing I say to a child is you feel good about yourself and be proud of yourself and when they smile and say they are. That's a good feeling. (Principal B Interview)

The PLCA survey asked the participating teachers to respond to this statement: “Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.” School B responded with seven (31.8%) teachers indicating agreed and fifteen (68.2%) teachers indicating strongly agreed. All 22 teachers participating in the survey responded to the statement, and 100% agreed or strongly agreed that celebrations of achievement occur in their school (see Appendix M).

Celebrating their success has been the foundation for School B to promote future successes. The data from the Kentucky Department of Education website posting the results of the CATS testing have shown a steady improvement in student achievement in School B.

Summary

Through the principals' interviews, PLCA teacher survey, photographs, and documents, themes emerged to help explain what practices effective principals use to support and sustain successful PLCs at two elementary schools. The findings showed similarities and differences between the administrator's practices and the perceptions of the staff members at each school. Chapter 5 examines the research findings further and presents conclusions based on the interviews and the teachers' survey results.

CHAPTER 5

Summary Of Findings And Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the leadership practices of principals who sustain professional learning communities. The study relied on interviews of two elementary school principals who lead professional learning communities, the research instrument (Professional Learning Communities Assessment or PLCA), photographs, and school documents to provide insight into effective leadership practices these principals employed to sustain professional learning communities.

Through the analysis of the interviews and the teacher surveys, some concepts surfaced that supported successful and sustained professional learning communities, and other concepts arose that hindered certain aspects of professional learning communities becoming more successful.

Theoretical Framework

The data obtained through interviews with the principals enabled me to construct a theoretical framework for a PLC. This framework showed the concepts that promote and sustain professional learning communities. The teacher survey instrument helped to confirm the principals' perceptions in each of the guiding research questions.

Principal A and Principal B described a professional learning community as: (1) promoting and nurturing shared leadership, (2) sharing a vision, (3) collaborating to analyze data to improve teaching and learning, (4) supporting a coaching concept, (5) supporting best practices, (6) providing professional development, and (7) committing to

school programs. Both principals also described a PLC as: (1) supporting honest and respectful relationships, (2) supporting dialogue opportunities, (3) supporting risk taking, and (4) supporting the shared responsibility of stakeholders.

The principals of both schools defined their roles in supporting and sustaining a PLC as: (1) scheduling intervention, (2) encouraging teacher accountability for student achievement, (3) coordination of the principal and the curriculum specialist's efforts, (4) goal setting, (5) analyzing data, (6) parental and community involvement, and (7) supporting shared leadership.

The principals supported professional dialogue by providing opportunities for staff members to meet in grade-level teams, with the curriculum specialist, and during some faculty meetings.

The teachers' survey responses defined how the principals in each school assisted in supporting and sustaining the PLC by: (1) involving staff in decisions, (2) incorporating teachers' advice to make decisions, (3) providing staff members access to key information, (4) the principal behaving in a proactive manner in addressing areas where support is needed, (5) enabling staff members to initiate change, (6) sharing responsibility and rewards, (7) sharing power and authority, and (8) promoting and nurturing leadership. The teachers also identified the following characteristics as contributing to a PLC: (1) the school's focus on student learning beyond test scores, (2) the ability of the staff members to plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs, and (3) using the data from multiple assessments to examine the effectiveness of instructional practices.

The teacher survey results revealed teachers' perceptions that practices in both schools met the staff's expectations for collective learning and shared practice to increase student achievement. However, in School A 18% disagreed and in School B 9% of the responding teachers disagreed that school schedules supported increased student learning or collective learning and shared practice between teachers.

Shareholders are an essential element in supporting student success in a professional learning community. Both principals indicated their concerns about the lack of support received from stakeholders in the community to support increased student achievement. These concerns were reiterated in the results on the teacher surveys.

Study Findings

The research questions used to frame this study examined the perceptions of principals and their staffs in five areas: (1) principals defined a professional learning community, (2) principals defined their role in supporting and sustaining a PLC, (3) structures to support dialogue in each school, (4) teachers defined the principal's role in supporting and sustaining a PLC, and (5) the effect of principal leadership practices on sustainability of a professional learning community.

Principals Defined a Professional Learning Community

Principals from both schools identified a PLC as: (1) promoting and nurturing shared leadership, (2) sharing a vision, (3) collaborating to analyze data to improve teaching and learning, (4) supporting a coaching concept, (5) supporting best practices, (6) providing professional development, (7) committing to school programs, (8) supporting honest and respectful relationships, (9) supporting dialogue opportunities, (10) supporting risk taking, and (11) sharing responsibility with stakeholders.

The responses of teachers from both schools supported the perceptions by Principal A and Principal B that shared leadership is supported and nurtured among staff members. Teacher responses to the statement indicating “agreed” and “strongly agreed” were 94.8% from School A and 86.4% from School B. One comment from a teacher in School B was that staff members have many opportunities to participate in decision-making activities; however, a large number of the staff do not participate. Staff members are involved in making decisions on most school issues through committees, faculty meetings, and grade-level meetings.

The schools participating in this research showed evidence of a shared vision highly supported by each principal and the majority of staff members. In School A 50% agreed and 50% strongly agreed and in School B 27.3% agreed and 72.7% strongly agreed that policies and programs are aligned to the school’s vision. In both schools data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision. In School A 29.4% of the teachers agreed and 64.7% strongly agreed, and in School B 27.3% agreed and 72.7% strongly agreed that their school supports a shared vision.

The principals of both schools indicated that they collaborated with the curriculum specialist and teachers to analyze student data and monitor student progress. The teachers in both schools verified their principal’s perceptions through their responses to the survey and overwhelmingly supported the statement that staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning. In School A 63.6% and in School B 61.1% of the teachers strongly agreed, while in School A 36.4% and in School B 38.9% agreed. The scores of weekly tests, 9-week benchmark tests, and

yearly state tests reinforce the principals' interview statements and teachers' responses on the survey in both schools.

The principals of both schools identified coaching as a component in a professional learning community. The concept of coaching was strongly supported by Principal B. Principal A is the only resource used for coaching to improve best instructional practices in School A. The majority of teachers from both PLCs supported coaching in their schools. School A's survey results showed 78% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed, and in School B 91% of the teachers endorsed the efforts of their school to improve best practices through coaching.

The additional support of the assistant principal, curriculum specialist, the coaching expertise of the principal in School B, and the use of a coaching model supported the teachers in School B more than School A. The coaching model used by Principal B supports an important PLC concept of providing opportunities and supporting relationships to improve effective instructional practices.

Principals of both schools gave examples about how they supported the best instructional practices associated with a PLC. These principals use: (1) multiple sources of data, (2) observations of teacher instructional practices, and (3) appropriate instructional materials to support effective teaching practices.

The teacher survey results supported the perceptions of the principals in advocating best teaching practices. The majority of teachers in both schools supported the statement: staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices. One-hundred percent of the teachers in School B

agreed or strongly agreed and in School A 94.4% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed. One teacher in School A disagreed with the statement.

Principal A and Principal B commented about the valuable information supplied by the curriculum specialists to analyze the data from multiple assessments. Both principals use the support of their curriculum specialists to increase the effectiveness of instructional practices and provide professional development sessions for their staff. One hundred percent of the teachers responding from both schools supported analyzing multiple data sources to aid student achievement. Both professional learning communities used data to drive instruction to increase student successes.

Both principals stated the importance of observations to improve best practices in their PLCs. Principals use their own observations and those of the teachers to support improved instruction. Principal B also uses the observations of her assistant principal and curriculum specialist to monitor and support best instructional practices. The teacher survey results from School A were: 55.6% agreed, 22.2% strongly agreed, and 22.2% disagreed. School B's results were: 59.1% agreed, 13.6% strongly agreed, and 27.3% disagreed. The majority of teachers responding from both schools agreed or strongly agreed that opportunities existed for staff members to observe peers.

In each of the interviews the principals shared the importance of choosing the most appropriate materials to support the needs of the students and teachers in their schools. The principals discussed the use of computer technology and supplemental materials to aid in providing for the needs of their students. The results of the survey for teachers in School A were: 77.8% agreed or strongly agreed and 22.2% disagreed. In School B 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed. The majority of teachers from

both schools supported the statement that appropriate instructional materials are available to the staff.

Both Principal A and Principal B use their curriculum specialist to support their efforts to provide professional development (PD) for their teachers. Principal A indicated that teachers on her staff who attended conferences or classes make presentations to the staff during faculty meetings. Teachers sharing with their peers was an excellent way to provide meaningful professional development for the staff. Both principals provide professional development during faculty meetings, and on occasion Principal B provides PD during grade-level meetings.

Teachers in School A responded to the survey statement that professional development focuses on teaching and learning as follows: 94.4% agreed or strongly agreed and 5.6% disagreed; in School B 100% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Principal A and Principal B discussed the importance of using successful programs to support improved student achievement. All responding teachers from both schools agreed or strongly agreed with the perceptions of the principals that staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.

Principals in both schools identified relationships as an important element in a PLC. All responding teachers from both schools agreed or strongly agreed with the perceptions of their principals that relationships exist among staff members to support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.

In the interviews, both principals supported the need for dialogue to occur in their schools to support and increase student achievement. One-hundred percent of the teachers

in both schools supported the statement that staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.

The teachers participating in the survey responded to the statement that opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue at their respective schools. Of the responding teachers in School A 94.5% agreed or strongly agreed and one (5.6%) disagreed. In School B 90.5% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed and two (9.2%) teachers disagreed. The majority of the teachers from both schools agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Both principals expressed their support of the staff in taking risks to improve student successes. Principal A discussed ways in which the curriculum specialist acted in the capacity of a mediator between the principal and the staff when the teachers did not feel comfortable sharing their needs and weaknesses directly with the principal. Principal B indicated that the staff would discuss their needs and weaknesses directly with the principal because of their mutual trust relationship. One-hundred percent of the teachers in both schools agreed or strongly agreed that a culture of trust and respect existed for taking risks at their respective schools.

Principal A and Principal B noted in their interviews the importance of stakeholder support to increase student achievement. The principals shared the need to have more stakeholders involved and actively participating in school activities to support student achievement. Teachers shared some of the same concerns through the teacher survey and were asked to express their opinions on three questions concerning stakeholders in their PLC.

Teachers were asked to respond to the statement that stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement. In School A 83% agreed or strongly agreed, and in School B 91% agreed or strongly agreed. In School A 16.7% of the teachers disagreed and 9.1% of the teachers in School A disagreed.

The PCLA survey recorded the teachers' opinions concerning the involvement of stakeholders in their communities. Teachers were asked if stakeholders assumed shared responsibility and accountability for student learning. Eighty-two point four percent of the teachers in School A agreed or strongly agreed, and in School B 77% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. However, 17.6% of the teachers in School A and 18.5% of the teachers from School B disagreed; 4.5% of the teachers from School B strongly disagreed. Teachers in School B shared the principal's concerns about stakeholder involvement and commitment to support increased student achievement. Principal B stated in the interview that working with stakeholders to become more involved with the student's progress was one of her greatest concerns. It is worthy to note that this question on the PCLA elicited the only "strongly disagreed" votes from teachers on the survey.

Teachers responded to the statement that school staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems. In School A 88.9% and in School B 77.3% agreed or strongly agreed; 11.1% from School A and 22.7% from School B disagreed with this statement.

These professional learning communities would like to have more opportunities to learn together with stakeholders, become equal partners in setting high expectations for

student achievement, and share responsibility and accountability for student progress.

The demands on educators for increased student achievement have increased. Increased student progress in a professional learning community depends on the commitment made by all stakeholders to become more accountable and involved in the school and school community.

Principals Defined Their Role in Supporting and Sustaining a Professional Learning Community

The principals at both schools defined their roles in supporting and sustaining the PLC at their schools by: (1) scheduling interventions, (2) promoting teacher accountability for student achievement, (3) coordinating the principal and curriculum specialist's efforts, (4) setting goals, (5) analyzing data, (6) inviting parental and community involvement, (7) supporting shared leadership, and (8) engaging in dialogue that reflects diverse ideas leading to continued inquiry. The principals have successfully supported the students in obtaining the skills needed to reach proficiency as shown in weekly assessments or 9-week benchmarking periods, and with increasing the rate of student success in tested academic areas as shown in the results of each school's report card.

During the interviews the principals shared comments about the difficulties of scheduling interventions to support increased student achievement. Principal A discussed ways in which support personnel had worked in the classrooms during remediation times in support of the instructional goals of the classroom teacher. She also shared that in some grade-levels the support teachers were able to combine the two sections of a grade-level and provide instruction to meet the needs of students.

Principal B discussed a method whereby her teachers provided remediation wherein each teacher in a grade-level takes a select number of students needing a skill to her classroom to support increased student achievement. Through the combined efforts of all the teachers in a grade-level, they were able to meet the needs of all students.

Scheduling student remediation can be a daunting task for most schools. These schools have worked collaboratively to provide innovative ways to meet the needs of the students in their respective schools. Professional learning communities collaborate together to find creative ways of scheduling support to meet the remediation needs of students including students who have reached benchmark in a skill and those students who have reached advanced proficiency.

Both principals supported the needs of students through teacher accountability. These principals foster effective instruction through classroom observations and by analyzing student data. Principal B also strengthens teacher accountability through grade-level meetings and additional classroom observations by her assistant principal and curriculum specialist.

The principals in both schools effectively coordinate their efforts and the efforts of their curriculum specialists to support continued student improvement. The principals and curriculum specialists base their support of teachers on student data outcomes and teacher observations. The principals of both schools collaborate with their curriculum specialists to plan for professional development sessions with teachers for increased student achievement.

New goals of student mastery are set by the district and schools each year. These professional learning communities have shown through weekly assessments, nine-week

benchmarks, and yearly assessments that students are able to reach new levels of achievement each year.

Principal A and Principal B use the results of student data to drive instructional decisions for their schools. The principals receive support from their curriculum specialist to provide data analysis for the instructional staff and to aid with making administrative decisions. The effective decisions made by each principal are verified by the continued student successes recorded in the weekly and 9-week assessments as well as the yearly tests required by the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Principal A noted that she uses student data to provide information concerning effective teacher instruction and to make decisions for teacher placement.

Both principals acknowledged in their interviews the vital roles parents and community have in increasing student achievement and stated, with a sense of urgency, the need for parental support and involvement for student success. Without the support of all stakeholders student achievement is limited. Principals have continued to focus on new methods to increase parent and community involvement in their schools. Weekly newsletters from Principal A have been shown to increase parental and community knowledge about how to support improved student achievement as documented in the yearly parent and community survey. Both principals noted in their interviews that they continue to seek new methods and solutions to increase support and involvement from the parents and the community in supporting student needs.

Shared leadership is supported in both schools through providing opportunities for the staff to be involved in making school decisions and by providing the staff with key information to make decisions effectively.

Structures to Support Dialogue in Each School

The principals of School A and School B advocated in their respective interviews the importance of “conversations” or “difficult conversations” in their schools. These conversations help the staff to reflect and move forward in their abilities to increase student achievement. All participating teachers from both schools supported the statement on the survey that staff members engage in dialogue that reflects diverse ideas leading to continued inquiry.

The difficulties of supporting teachers in continued inquiry were documented by the results of the survey through the statement that a variety of opportunities exists for collective learning to occur through open dialogue. In School A 5.6% and in School B 9.5% of the responding teachers disagreed with the survey statement. The majority of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed and both principals supported the importance of dialogue to increase teacher and student achievement; however, some teachers would like more opportunities for dialogue to occur. Dialogue between educators is an essential element for professional learning communities to increase and sustain their support for teacher growth and increased student success.

Teachers Defined the Principal’s Role in Supporting and Sustaining a Professional Learning Community

The teacher survey revealed differences between the two principals’ efforts to support and sustain a professional learning community. The principals discussed their differing leadership styles in the interviews. The teachers at both schools noted the differences in leadership through the degree of support for each of these statements: (1) involving staff in decisions, (2) incorporating advice from staff members to make

decisions, (3) providing staff members access to key information, (4) the principal behaving in a proactive manner in addressing areas where support is needed, (5) the principal sharing responsibility and rewards for innovative actions, (6) enabling staff members to initiate change, (7) the principal participating democratically with power and authority, and (8) leadership being promoted and nurtured among staff members. The results from the following statements in the teacher survey also noted the differences in leadership in both schools: (1) the school's focus on student learning beyond test scores, (2) the ability of the staff members to plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs, and (3) using the data from multiple assessments to examine the effectiveness of instructional practices. The data from the teacher surveys from the two schools differed in which statements they agreed, strongly agreed, and disagreed concerning their principal's role in supporting and sustaining professional learning communities.

Both principals had different leadership styles as verified by the principal interviews and teacher survey responses. It is worthy to note that both principals were consistently able to meet the needs of more than 86% of the teacher populations in shared and supportive leadership practices to support and sustain a professional learning community. Each principal used her strengths and resources as a leader to support the needs of teachers and students in a PLC.

In School A the teachers replied to these four statements with 100% support – agreeing or strongly agreeing that: (1) the principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions, (2) the principal provides staff members access to key information, (3) the principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed,

and (4) the principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions. Two of these statements reflect the principal's successful efforts in sharing key information and including the staff in school decisions. The principal encourages the staff to form a cohesive community with her in order to share the responsibility for decisions and rewards of innovative ideas. The principal uses the data thoughtfully which enables her to be proactive in addressing student needs in an efficient and effective manner.

One hundred percent of the teachers in School B who participated in the survey agreed or strongly agreed that leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.

Principal A received less support from her staff in these two areas: (1) the principal participates democratically with staff power and authority and (2) leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members. Concerning the statement that the principal participates democratically with staff power and authority, the results for School A were 11.1% in disagreement (two teachers) and 89.9% who agreed or strongly agreed.

Principal A discussed the changes she had made, eliminating one committee, which reduced the opportunities for her staff in decision-making. This could have had an impact on the teachers' views regarding their opportunities to share democratically in the decisions made by their principal. The principal indicated that she has plans to reinstate the committee next year and further support her staff in school decision-making opportunities. Principal A did not mention in the interview ways in which she supports and nurtures leadership in her school. The survey results showed 10.5%, or two teachers, disagreed and 89.5% agreed or strongly agreed that leadership was promoted and nurtured in their school.

The following statements received 95% agreed or strongly agreed votes from all 22 participants in School B: (1) staff members have access to key information, (2) the principal behaves in a proactive manner in addressing areas where support is needed, and (3) the principal incorporates teacher's advice to make decisions. Ninety-five percent of the 21 participants in School B supported the statement that the principal participates democratically with staff power and authority. Ninety-five percent of the 20 participants from School B indicated agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that the principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions. The majority of teachers responding from School B supported their principal's practices in shared and supportive leadership.

The teachers responding to the survey from both schools were asked if opportunities were provided for staff members to initiate change. In School A 94.7% agreed or strongly agreed and 5.3%, or two teachers, disagreed. In School B 90.9% agreed or strongly agreed and 9.1%, or two teachers, disagreed. The majority of teachers responding supported their principal's efforts to provide opportunities to initiate change in their PLCs.

The Effect of Principal Leadership Practices on the Sustainability of a Professional Learning Community

This study has shown how the principals from the two schools are alike and how they differ in their leadership strengths, their support of teachers in key PLC concepts, and their impact on student achievement. Each school has proven to be successful as represented by the results of assessments given at different periods of the year and the yearly results of increased student achievements as shown in each School's Report Card.

School A and School B have their own unique professional learning community cultures with the goal of supporting and increasing student achievement.

Recommendations for the School District Practice

Effective practices are vital for successful and sustainable learning community. These recommendations for the school district and the principals provide needed additional support to schools in this study. The data collected and analyzed in this study suggested the following recommendations for the school district and principals by the researcher.

School District:

- The district should provide needed opportunities for grade-level teachers in smaller populated schools to collaborate with other schools in the district to increase teacher best practices and support increased student achievement.
- The district should provide more support and instruction concerning effective PLC leadership practices for principals. Effective seminars exist to provide ways to improve an existing PLC community and reduce complacency that may occur in successful PLCs.

Principals:

- Principals should provide needed ample opportunities for all teachers to take part in decision-making for the school community.
- Peer observations, vital for the success of a PLC, should have designated times that are devoted exclusively to these activities during the school calendar. Principals need to provide scheduled times for these observations to occur.

- Principals should provide instruction for teachers in observing and giving effective and meaningful feedback to peers on observations.
- Principals should provide times for collaboration with staff, parents, and other stakeholders to find ways to become more effectively involved with the responsibility and accountability of improving student achievement.
- Principals should provide time for celebrations and include all stakeholders in the successes of the principal, teachers, and students throughout the year.
- Principals should provide school surveys which contain valuable information to monitor staff perceptions of PLC concepts. It is cost-effective for principals to use the PLCA or a similar instrument to receive needed feedback from teachers for continued monitoring and improvement of their PLC.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research in this study provided valuable data about effective leadership practices from two elementary principals. There are limitations to the research having used only two elementary schools as shown in the following issues.

Multiple and Large Scale Studies to Develop or Improve a Professional Learning Community

- Combining multiple studies on effective leadership practices in sustained elementary PLCs across the United States would provide needed insight with varying student and community populations.
- Studies that include each state and the District of Columbia in the United States with varying school populations would provide needed insight with

valuable findings and information to elementary schools in their initial stages of a PLC or to improve an existing PLC.

- Studies that include each state and the District of Columbia in the United States with varying district and state testing requirements would provide needed insight with valuable findings and information to elementary schools in their initial stages of a PLC or to improve an existing PLC.
- Studies that include a different research instrument to assess effective PLC practices with teachers to confirm similar results of the PLCA instrument used in this research.
- Conduct multiple semistructured interviews with teachers to provide additional insights into effective principal practices to support and sustain successful PLCs.
- Conduct multiple semistructured principal interviews at different intervals in the school year to provide additional insights into effective principal leadership practices to support and sustain a PLC.
- Use a different sampling procedure from this research study to locate established elementary professional learning communities across the United States.

Summary

The principals in this study showed evidence of effective leadership practices to support and sustain professional learning communities. The statements from their interviews were confirmed by the teacher PLCA survey results, school documents, and photographs that revealed an overwhelming transparent focus on student learning. The

majority of teachers from both schools surveyed supported the effective leadership practices exhibited by their respective principals to support and sustain increased teacher and student achievement.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to Superintendent

Date

Dear Dr. Thomas Richey,

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and currently completing my dissertation entitled, *Effective Leadership Practices in the Sustainability of Professional Learning Communities in Two Elementary Schools*.

My study examines effective principal practices in sustaining professional learning communities. My plan is to use a semistructured one-hour interview with the principals at two of your elementary schools. Your district is vital to my study because it is documented as professional learning community district in the research by Richard DuFour and Associates. My study includes an on-line survey of your kindergarten through fifth grade teachers using a well-documented research instrument, the *Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA)* by Dr. Dianne F. Olivier, Ph.D. The interviews and surveys are important elements for the triangulation of my study. I am requesting your permission to interview two of your elementary principals and survey your kindergarten through fifth grade teachers at the two designated schools. My study is intended to provide valuable information to other school systems interested in implementing PLCs or improving their own PLC.

My study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of ETSU; a copy is attached for your records. Any questions regarding the study can be addressed to Debra Wolford or my chair, Dr. Eric Glover.

I know you are very proud of the recognition and awards these schools have received. I look forward to receiving your approval to perform this vital study so that other schools and school districts can learn from their accomplishments.

Sincerely,

Debra W. Wolford
141 Canyon Drive
Wytheville, VA 24382
dwolford@wythe.k12.va.us
276-XXX-XXXX

Dr. Eric Glover, ELPA Department
501B Warf-Pickel Hall,
P.O. Box 70550
Johnson City, TN
glovere@etsu.edu
423-439-7566

APPENDIX B
Letter to Principals

Date

Dear (Principal),

I am a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) and currently completing my dissertation entitled, *Principal Leadership in the Sustainability of Professional Learning Communities in Two Elementary Schools*. I have received permission from your superintendent, Dr. Richey, to conduct the interviews with some of the principals in your district. I have also received authorization from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this study.

I am requesting your approval for an interview. I hope to plan the interviews at the two schools during a two-day period. I appreciate your willingness to work with me in scheduling these interviews. I hope to take only an hour of your valuable time. I am also requesting your permission to invite your kindergarten through fifth grade teachers to take part in an on-line survey through SurveyMonkey. The survey instrument, *Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA)*, is used by permission from the author, Dr. Dianne Olivier. I would appreciate your support in announcing the survey, and the intentions of the survey for this study with your faculty. I am sending a letter for each teacher as an introduction into the study and the vital part each teacher has in this study. I will need the email addresses for each kindergarten through fifth grade teacher on your staff to conduct the on-line survey. These emails will be kept confidential and destroyed at the conclusion of this study.

I certainly appreciate the vital role you are taking in this important study. Your effort will benefit many other schools and school districts who wish to create professional learning communities or improve their existing professional learning community.

Sincerely,

Debra W. Wolford
Doctoral Candidate, East Tennessee State University
141 Canyon Drive
Wytheville, VA 24382
dwolford@wythe.k12.va.us
(Cell) 276-XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX C

Letter to teachers

Date

Dear Teacher,

Your superintendent, Dr. Richey and your principal, _____ have consented to participate in a dissertation study with your school. Your participation is vital to this study. Your participation consists of completing a survey instrument entitled, *Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA)*. This instrument is used by permission from the author, Dr. Dianne Olivier. The estimated time for completion of the on-line survey through SurveyMonkey is approximately 10 minutes.

The study is to provide important information to future and existing professional learning communities who will greatly profit from your expertise and knowledge of PLCs. I hope you will support my efforts to provide valuable research information concerning PLCs.

Thanks for your participation,

Debra W. Wolford
Doctoral Candidate, East Tennessee State University
141 Canyon Drive
Wytheville, VA 24382
dwolford@wythe.k12.va.us
(Cell) 276-XXX-XXXX

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide

Educational Background:

1. Would you begin by telling me how long you have been a principal at _____ School?
 - a. How long have you been a principal?
 - b. Did you teach in the classroom before becoming a principal?
 - c. If so, how long?
2. What led you to become a teacher?
 - a. What led you to become a principal?
 - b. Why did you want to become the principal at _____ School?

Professional Learning Communities:

3. In your view what is a professional learning community?
 - a. Tell me about your experience with PLCs at _____ School.
 - b. Have you had any training on PLCs or leading a PLC?
4. Would you tell me about your current class and support schedule?
 - a. Has it changed since you became principal? If so, how?
 - b. Do your grade-level teachers have any scheduled collaboration time? If so, how often and how long do they meet?
 - c. Do you lead these meetings? Who is in charge? Does the person in charge change from time to time?
 - d. Do your teams have any particular goals for the term or year?

- e. Does the grade-level collaboration time impact your classroom instruction time?
5. How much of your time do you commit to each week/month to support and/or attend the team meetings?
6. How is student learning supported at _____ School?
- a. How do you know what students should know and be able to do in each grade level?
 - b. Do you follow the essential knowledge guidelines Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) for instruction? For assessment?
 - c. How do you know or assess what students are learning? Do grade levels give the same assessments for each subject area?
 - d. Are your results regarding the assessments on the agenda for grade-level meetings? If so, how often?
 - e. How does your school support lower performing students?
 - f. How does your school support students who achieve the essential knowledge quickly?
7. What are some obstacles to creating an effective collaborative community?
- a. Can you provide any specific obstacles your team has faced? How did you handle them?
 - b. Since you have been principal has there been a PLC problem your school/team has dealt with that you would share with me?
8. What are some obstacles to sustaining an effective collaborative community?
9. How is the professional development handled in your school? In your district?

Principal Leadership

10. How would you describe your leadership style? Do you think it has been effective supporting your PLC?
 - a. In what ways do you think leadership can have an effect on supporting student learning?
 - b. Can you provide examples of how your leadership supports student learning?
 - c. Staff learning?
11. How do you support shared leadership in your school?
12. Can you describe the ways you believe your leadership has an effect in supporting successful collaboration for your staff?
13. Would you share with me any other ways that your school supports student learning?
14. Staff learning?
15. Is there anything I did not ask you that you think is critical to understanding how the PLC works effectively in your school?

APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

1. Each principal interview began with an introduction of the researcher and a short description of the study. The researcher thanked the principal for the opportunity for the interview.
2. The researcher assured the principal that the comments in the interview would remain anonymous. Although quotes from the interview will be included in the manuscript used for publication, no names will be associated with these quotes or references will be made to the school.
3. The researcher informed the principal that the interview should take approximately one hour.
4. The researcher asked the principal to read and sign the informed consent form. Each principal received a copy of the informed consent.
5. The researcher asked permission to use a digital recorder during the interview for greater accuracy.
6. The researcher reminded each principal that they may decide to stop the interview at any point during the process.
7. The researcher asked if the principal would like the opportunity to review the interview transcript for accuracy once it is complete.

APPENDIX F

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT (ICD).

This Informed Consent will explain about being a participant in a research study. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you wish to be a volunteer.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the effective principal practices in sustainable professional learning communities (PLCs) in two elementary schools by principal interviews and teacher on-line surveys. This study will identify effective principal practices as expressed by each principal and teachers' opinions about professional learning communities and effective principal practices used in their schools.

DURATION: The principal interviews will take approximately one hour.

PROCEDURES: I will conduct a face-to-face interview with the principal at each of the two elementary schools. I will tape the interviews and take notes during and after each interview. The on-line survey will be taken by kindergarten through fifth grade teachers at a time and place chosen by each participant.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS: There are no alternative procedures or treatments with this study.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. The participants may choose to not answer any questions or choose not to participate in this study.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: The information from this study will be shared with researchers and new or existing professional learning communities and other parties interested in effective principal practices in PLCs. The researcher benefit from the study will be the process and newly acquired knowledge from the data provided by each principal and teacher participant.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling, Debra Wolford, at 276-XXX-XXXX, by email wolforddebbie@gmail.com, or by mail at 141 Canyon Drive, Wytheville, VA, 24382. You will be told immediately if any of the results of this study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in this study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have any questions, problems or research-related problems at any time, you may call Debra Wolford at 276-XXX-XXXX or Dr. Eric S. Glover at 423-439-7566. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439/6002.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be safely stored for at least five years after the conclusion of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the ETSU IRB, and personnel particular to this research ETSU Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis have access to the study records. My records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

DATE

APPENDIX G

Professional Learning Communities Assessment (PLCA) – Revised

Directions:

This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Shade the appropriate oval provided to the right of each statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement. Comments after each dimension section are optional.

Key Terms:

- Principal = Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal
- Staff/Staff Members = All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students
- Stakeholders = Parents and community members

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

2 = Disagree (D)

3 = Agree (A)

4 = Strongly Agree (SA).

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Shared and Supportive Leadership	SD	D	A	SA
1.	Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0	0	0	0
2.	The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	0	0	0	0
3.	Staff members have accessibility to key information.	0	0	0	0
4.	The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0	0	0	0
5.	Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.	0	0	0	0
6.	The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0	0	0	0
7.	The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	0	0	0	0
8.	Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	0	0	0	0
9.	Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	0	0	0	0
10.	Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	0	0	0	0
11.	Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Shared Values and Vision	SD	D	A	SA
12.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	0	0	0	0
13.	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
14.	Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	0	0	0	0
15.	Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	0	0	0	0
16.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	0	0	0	0
17.	School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0	0	0	0
18.	Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	0	0	0	0
19.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
19.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
20.	Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Collective Learning and Application	SD	D	A	SA
21.	Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0	0	0	0
22.	Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	0	0	0
23.	Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0	0	0	0
24.	A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	0	0	0	0
25.	Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0	0	0	0
26.	Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
27.	School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	0	0	0	0
28.	School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	0	0	0	0
29.	Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
30.	Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0

COMMENTS:

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Shared Personal Practice	SD	D	A	SA
31.	Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	0	0	0
32.	Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
33.	Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0	0	0	0
34.	Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
35.	Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0	0	0	0
36.	Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0	0	0	0
37.	Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	SD	D	A	SA
38.	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	0	0	0
39.	A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0	0	0	0
40.	Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	0	0	0	0
41.	School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0	0	0	0
42.	Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

STATEMENTS		SCALE			
	Supportive Conditions - Structures	SD	D	A	SA
43.	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	0	0	0
44.	The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	0	0	0	0

45.	Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	0	0	0	0
46.	Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	0	0	0
47.	Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0	0	0	0
48.	The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	0	0	0	0
49.	The proximity of grade-level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	0	0	0	0
50.	Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	0	0	0	0
51.	Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	0	0	0	0
52.	Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

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Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2009). Assessing and analyzing schools. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.). *Demystifying professional learning communities: Leadership at its Best*. (in press). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

APPENDIX H

Permission to Use Research Instrument

Debra,

I think that you will have an interesting study. I am pleased that you are interested in using the Professional Learning Community Assessment to study the progress of these schools in relation to learning community characteristics.

Our research team has revised the original PLCA, which I have attached. I believe this is the instrument you should use in your study. As first author of the *Professional Learning Community Assessment - Revised* form, I am providing permission for the use of the measure in your research study. Our research team is always interested in the use of the measure, as we conceptualize practices within learning communities. I am requesting that upon completion of your study, please share your final results with me. Additionally, I may also request the raw data on the PLCA-R from the schools in your study to include in our increasing PLCA-R raw score data base.

The revised measure will appear in our research teams new book scheduled to be released any day. You can check out a copy at either Amazon or Rowman & Littlefield (publishers). The info is Hipp, Kristine & Huffman, Jane (Eds), *Demystifying Professional Learning Communities: Leadership at its Best*. This new book extends the original measure by adding 7 items relating to data utilization and analysis. The new instrument is incorporated in the chapter on assessment and analyzing. Additionally, there are new tools that can readily be used to interpret the PLCA-R results.

Should you need any additional information, please feel to contact me.

This email response was to give you immediate confirmation as to the use of the measure. If you need a formal letter on letterhead, I can certainly send that document. Take care and best wishes,

Dianne Olivier

Dianne F. Olivier, Ph. D.
Assistant Professor
Educational Foundations and Leadership
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Office (337) 482-6408
Cell (337) 303-0451



APPENDIX I

Introduction to the Survey Letter

Dear Fellow Teacher,

Thanks for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study concerning professional learning communities (PLCs). I have been an elementary school teacher in Virginia for 25 years, and began working on my doctorate at East Tennessee State University about three years ago. My interest in improving student achievement and supporting teachers in their professional development lead me to study PLCs.

Your opinions and comments considering PLCs are essential to my work. I need to know how you feel and what you think about different aspects of PLCs. Your opinions as a group will appear in my dissertation and provide valuable feedback to schools considering a PLC school plan or existing schools looking to improve continually on their professional learning community.

You will be completing the Professional Learning Communities Assessment created and used by permission from Dianne F. Olivier, Ph.D. The survey will take less than 10 minutes to complete and be used to provide valuable information for existing or newly created PLCs.

Completing this survey will cause little or no risk to you. The survey will be marked from the elementary school from which it was received with no connection to any teacher. The results of the survey will remain confidential and will be stored in a safety deposit box for five years. Your participation is voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer. You may decide to stop the survey and not participate at any point during the survey.

If you have any questions, problems or research-related problems at any time, you may call Debra Wolford (276) 620-1377 or email wolforddebbie@gmail.com, or call Dr. Eric Glover, chair; East Tennessee State University at (423) 439-7566 or email glovere@mail.etsu.edu. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board, Mr. Chris Ayres at (423) 439-4211 concerning your rights as a research participant. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff you may call an IRB Coordinator Ms. Becky Fee or Ms. Teresa Doty at (423) 439-4211.

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Although your right and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, ETSU IRB, and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely

confidential according to current legal requirements. They may not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

Your participation is essential to the success of this study. I appreciate your willingness to participate and share your knowledge with other professional learning communities.

Debra W. Wolford

APPENDIX J

Document Review Log

Document #	Description of Document
<u>DRA</u> - 1	
<u>DRA</u> - 2	
<u>DRA</u> - 3	
<u>DRA</u> - 4	
<u>DRA</u> - 5	
<u>DRA</u> - 6	
<u>DRA</u> - 7	
<u>DRA</u> - 8	
<u>DRA</u> - 9	
<u>DRA</u> - 10	
<u>DRA</u> - 11	
<u>DRA</u> - 1 2	

APPENDIX K

Visual Data Log

Photos	Description of Photographs

APPENDIX L

Results of the PCLA

Question #1: By clicking the button below you agree to participate in the following Professional Learning Community Assessment (PCLA) Survey.

	School A		School B
	19		22

Question # 2: How many years have you taught?

		(%)	(#)		(%)	(#)
One to five years		26.3	5		50	11
Six to ten years		21.1	4		31.8	7
Eleven to fifteen years		10.5	2		18.2	4
More than fifteen years		42.1	8		0	0

Question #3: Select the school where you teach

	School A		School B
	19		22

Question #4: How many years have you taught at the school you selected in the previous question?

One to five years	52.6	10		50	11
Six to ten years	21.1	4		31.8	7
Eleven to fifteen years	10.5	2		18.2	4
More than fifteen years	15.8	3		0	0

Question #5: Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.2	1	13.6	3
Agree	47.4	9	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	47.4	9	18.2	4

Question #6: The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decision.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	4.5	1
Agree	68.4	13	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	31.6	6	27.3	6

Question #7: Staff members have accessibility to key information.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	4.6	1
Agree	57.9	11	54.5	12
Strongly Agree	42.1	8	40.9	9

Question #8: The principal is proactive and addresses where support is needed.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	4.6	1
Agree	52.6	10	54.5	12
Strongly Agree	47.4	9	40.9	9

Question #9: Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.3	1	9.1	2
Agree	68.4	13	59.1	13
Strongly Agree	26.3	5	31.8	7

Question #10: The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	5.0	1
Agree	31.6	6	55.0	11
Strongly Agree	68.4	13	40.0	8

Question#11: The principal participates democratically with staff to share power and authority.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	11.1	2	4.8	1
Agree	55.6	10	76.2	16
Strongly Agree	33.3	6	19.0	4

Question #12: Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	10.5	2	0	0
Agree	42.1	8	72.7	16
Strongly Agree	47.4	9	27.3	6

Question #13: Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	13.6	3
Agree	52.6	10	54.6	12
Strongly Agree	47.4	9	31.8	7

Question #14: Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	4.6	1
Disagree	17.6	3	18.2	4
Agree	53.0	9	63.6	14
Strongly Agree	29.5	5	13.6	3

Question #15: Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	52.6	10	22.7	5
Strongly Agree	47.4	9	77.3	17

Comments on the Shared and Supportive Leadership Section.

We do not have committees. It is designed for the entire staff to make decisions as a team. We do only have a K-CID community.

There are many opportunities for staff to participate in decision-making and leadership opportunities, however a large number of staff do not participate in these opportunities.

Question #16: School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	11.2	2	0	0
Agree	44.4	8	54.5	12
Strongly Agree	44.4	8	45.5	10

Question #17: Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	50.0	9	27.3	6
Strongly Agree	50.0	9	72.7	16

Question #18: Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	16.7	3	9.1	2
Agree	50.0	9	54.5	12
Strongly Agree	33.3	6	36.4	8

Comments

Question #19: Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.9	1	0	0
Agree	29.4	5	27.3	6
Strongly Agree	64.7	11	72.7	16

Comments to Shared Values and Vision Section.

Question #20: School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	11.1	2	22.7	5
Agree	72.2	13	50.0	11
Strongly Agree	16.7	3	27.3	6

Question #21: School staff member are committed to programs that enhance learning.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	38.9	7	40.9	9
Strongly Agree	61.1	11	59.1	13

Question #22: Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.6	1	0	0
Agree	44.4	8	36.4	8
Strongly Agree	50.0	9	63.6	14

Comments on the Collective Learning and Application section.

I am not sure when staff and stakeholders have learned together.

Question: #23: A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	4.5	1
Agree	61.1	11	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	38.9	7	27.3	6

Question #24: Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	50.0	9	50.0	11
Strongly Agree	50.0	9	50.0	11

Question #25: Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.6	1	0	0
Agree	38.9	7	50.0	11
Strongly Agree	55.5	10	50.0	11

Question #26: Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	47.1	8	45.5	10
Strongly Agree	52.9	9	59.1	13

Question #27: A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	4.5	1
Agree	66.7	12	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	33.3	6	27.3	6

Question #28: Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills, strategies and apply this new learning to their work.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.6	1	0	0
Agree	33.3	6	63.6	14
Strongly Agree	61.1	11	36.4	8

Question #29: Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	55.6	10	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	44.4	8	31.8	7

Question #30: Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	61.1	11	50	11
Strongly Agree	38.9	7	50	11

Question #31: A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.7	1	9.5	2
Agree	66.7	12	66.7	14
Strongly Agree	27.6	5	23.8	5

Question #32: Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	61.1	11	63.6	14
Strongly Agree	38.9	7	36.4	8

Question #33: Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.6	0	0	0
Agree	44.4	8	47.6	10
Strongly Agree	50.0	9	52.4	11

Question #34: The proximity of grade-level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.6	1	31.8	7
Agree	33.3	6	54.6	12
Strongly Agree	61.1	12	13.6	3

Question: #35: Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	13.6	3
Agree	55.6	10	63.7	14
Strongly Agree	44.4	8	22.7	5

Question #36: Communications systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	4.6	1
Disagree	0	0	13.6	3
Agree	72.2	13	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	27.8	5	13.6	3

Comments to Supportive Conditions – Structures

Most grade-levels are grouped together allowing easy collaboration with colleagues; however, Kindergarten has been split into separate pods making collaboration much more challenging. One third grade teacher is also located in a different location from the rest.

Question #37: Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	4.5	1
Agree	38.9	7	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	61.1	11	27.3	6

Comments on Supportive – Structures

Question #38: Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	22.2	4	27.3	6
Agree	55.6	10	59.1	13
Strongly Agree	22.2	4	13.6	3

Question #39: Staff members provide feedback related to instructional practices.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	27.8	5	36.3	8
Agree	55.5	10	45.5	10
Strongly Agree	16.7	3	18.2	4

Question #40: Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	5.6	1	0	0
Agree	50	9	40.9	9
Strongly Agree	44.4	8	59.1	13

Question # 41: Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	11.8	2	0	0
Agree	52.9	9	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	35.3	6	31.8	7

Question # 42: Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	22.2	4	9.1	2
Agree	44.4	8	59.1	13
Strongly Agree	33.3	6	31.8	7

Question # 43: Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	11.8	2	4.5	1
Agree	52.9	9	63.6	14
Strongly Agree	35.3	6	31.8	7

Question # 44: Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	16.7	3	13.6	3
Agree	66.7	12	54.6	12
Strongly Agree	16.7	3	31.8	7

Comments on the Share Personal Practice section.

Staff have been offered opportunities to observe peers, however, few have participated. Student work is shared in a general way (hanging for display), but there is not a “share time.” Each grade-level team has one hour of common team planning time each week where these activities are encouraged.

Question # 45: Caring relationships exist among staff and student that are built on trust and respect.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	4.5	1
Agree	44.4	8	50	11
Strongly Agree	55.6	11	45.5	10

Question # 46: A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	9.1	2
Agree	52.9	9	59.1	13
Strongly Agree	47.1	8	31.8	7

Question # 47: Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	0	0
Agree	27.8	5	31.8	7
Strongly Agree	72.2	13	68.2	15

Question # 48: School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	11.1	2	9.1	2
Agree	50	9	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	38.9	7	22.7	5

Question # 49: Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	0	0	9.1	2
Agree	44.4	8	54.5	12
Strongly Agree	55.6	10	36.4	8

Comments on the Supportive Conditions – Relationships section

Our staff is dedicated to building relationships with students. This is what makes our school stand above the rest. We are willing to extend our hand to parents and students. The relationship and trust piece is gaining strength and momentum.

Question # 50: Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	18.7	3	31.8	7
Agree	56.3	9	40.9	9
Strongly Agree	25.0	4	27.3	6

Question #51: The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	17.6	3	9.1	2
Agree	64.8	11	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	17.6	3	22.7	5

Question #52: Fiscal resources are available for professional development.

Strongly Disagree	5.9	1	0	0
Disagree	17.6	3	22.7	5
Agree	64.7	11	68.2	15
Strongly Agree	11.8	2	9.1	2

Question #53: Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	22.2	4	0	0
Agree	50	9	54.5	12
Strongly Agree	27.8	5	45.5	10

Question #54: Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.

Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0
Disagree	11.1	2	0	0
Agree	77.8	14	52.6	11
Strongly Agree	11.1	2	47.4	9

VITA

DEBRA WALLS WOLFORD

Education:

A.S. Pre-Teacher Education, Wytheville
Community College, Wytheville, VA, 1978.

B.S. Elementary Education, Radford University,
Radford, VA, 1980

M. S. Curriculum Instruction with a Reading Specialist
Certificate, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State
University, Blacksburg, VA, 1994.

Ed.D. Administrational Leadership and Policy Analysis,
East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN,
2011.

Professional Experience:

Kindergarten, First, Second, Fourth Grade Teacher, Rural
Retreat Elementary School, Rural Retreat, VA,
1985-2003

Reading Recovery Trained Teacher and Chapter 1 Reading
Specialist, Spiller Elementary School, Wytheville,
VA, 2003-2004.

Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) trained, Wytheville,
VA, 2007

World Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA)
trained, Galax, VA, 2008.

Reading First Reading Coach, Sheffey Elementary School,
Wytheville, VA, 2004-2009.

Reading Coach, Jackson Memorial Elementary School,
Austinville, VA, Max Meadows Elementary School,
Max Meadows, VA, Sheffey Elementary School,
Wytheville, VA, 2009-2010.

Second Grade Teacher, Jackson Memorial Elementary
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Honors and Awards:

Cum Laude, Wytheville Community College, Wytheville,
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Who's Who Among America's Teachers, 2000, 2001