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THE IMPACT OF WHOLE-FACULTY STUDY GROUPS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND TEACHER PRACTICIES IN GRADES K-3 OF A NEBRASKA SCHOOL DISTRICT: A MIXED METHOD CASE STUDY

Cynthia Wendell
University of Nebraska-Lincoln, cfwendell@gmail.com

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SCHOOL DISTRICT: A MIXED METHOD CASE STUDY

by

Cynthia F. Wendell

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Cynthia F. Wendell, Ed.D.

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Advisor: Donald F. Uerling

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Whole Faculty Study Groups on student achievement and teacher practices in grades K-3 of a Nebraska school district. Whole-Faculty Study Groups (WFSG) are a type of professional learning community (PLC).

Using a mixed method approach, both K-3 student scores on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and responses from surveys and interviews of K-3 teachers, principals, and district administrators were analyzed. Using the McNemar test of dependent proportions, DIBELS scores from kindergarten and first grade were compared with established benchmarks from the fall (or winter) to spring assessments to determine improvement in reading fluency skills. Using a two-way mixed factorial ANOVA, DIBELS scores from two groups of second and third grade students were compared with each other. The two groups of students were determined by the focus (fluency or not fluency) of their teachers in WFSG. All student scores showed significant improvement from the first testing to the second testing with the exception of one assessment for third graders. There was no significant difference in scores between WFSG focusing on fluency and those groups not focusing on fluency.

All grades K-3 teachers were surveyed and the results were analyzed. Two district administrators were interviewed. The perception of teachers and administrators was that the WFSG did change teacher practices, but educators were reluctant to attribute increased learning of students to WFSG alone. WFSG, through the use of collaboration and implementing new curriculum and teaching strategies, evolved into an important element of the district's school improvement process.

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

Statement of the Problem

There is a problem with our schools. We are being told the educational system in the United States is not what it needs to be. We are leaving children behind, and we are not keeping up educationally with other nations like China and India (Compton & Heeter, 2009). Compton believes the United States should place more emphasis on certain education courses, such as math and science, and look to China and India for examples on how to improve the United States educational system.

Countries that are considered world leaders are not leading in academic achievement. In the global economy, there are now international comparisons of academic achievements in schools. In 2002, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) was implemented. Results showed low performance of students from some countries who lead the world industrially and economically (Lingens, 2003).

In the United States, we first learned of the lack of competitiveness in 1983, with the U.S. Department of Education report *A Nation at Risk.* It was widely publicized that the U.S. schools that were previously thought to be a part of a world-class educational system were not keeping up with other nations.

Twenty-five years later, the U.S. Department of Education released another report, *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years After a Nation at Risk* (2008)*,* that continued to expound upon the problem of our failing schools in the United States of America.

The concerns with the US education system continued. Two years later, with a new president and administration, a new document was released by the Obama Administration titled *ESEA Blueprint for Reform: A Blueprint for Reform*, *the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.* The report produced by the United States Department of Education (2010) continued to express concern about an educational system in the United States that lagged behind many other countries in the world. This government report proposed severe consequences for school districts that did not meet the ever increasing federal expectations.

If American schools are not keeping up with expectations and other countries, what can be done to improve the United States educational system? What kinds of professional development opportunities are the most effective in changing teacher practices and can prepare teachers for the demands of state and federal accountability? What can schools do to increase student learning?

One approach to school improvement, professional development, teacher preparation, and enhancement of student learning is the Whole-Faculty Study Group (WFSG) system. Murphy and Lick (2005) defined the Whole-Faculty Study Group system as "a job-embedded, self-directed, student-driven approach to professional development" (p. 2)

The WFSG system is a professional development method that was designed to build communities of learners in which educational professionals continuously strive to increase student learning. Increased student learning is accomplished through the collaboration of three to five faculty members. These "practitioners (a) deepening their own knowledge and understanding of what is taught, (b) reflecting on their practices, (c)

sharpening their skills, and (d) taking joint responsibility for the students they teach"
(Murphy & Lick, 2005, p. 2).

Because there was little research on how teacher collaboration and collaborative
models of professional development have impacted student learning, this study was
designed to explore teacher perceptions of the impact of collaboration on student
learning.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Whole Faculty Study
Groups on student achievement and teacher practices in grades K-3 of a Nebraska school
district.

Research Questions

The central research question was whether WFSG had an impact on student
learning for kindergarten through third grade elementary students. This central question
was addressed through four sub-questions:

1. For kindergarten and first grade students whose teachers focused on reading
   fluency, was there a difference in the percentage of students who met the
   DIBELS benchmarks in the fall and in the spring?

2. For second grade and third grade students, was there a difference in the
   changes in individual reading fluency scores as measured by DIBELS in the
   fall and the spring between those students whose teachers were in WFSG that
   focused on reading fluency and those students whose teachers were in WFSG
   that focused on skills other than reading fluency?

3. Did teachers and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on teacher practices?

4. Did teacher and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on student achievement?

Methods

To accomplish the purpose of this study both student learning and educator perceptions of student learning in reading and changing teacher practices were examined:

1. To measure the impact of WFSG on student learning in reading, scores form Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literature Skills (DIBELS) assessments were collected and analyzed. For this study, two types of comparisons were done.

   a. Kindergarten and first grade DIBELS scores were compared with DIBELS benchmarks.

   b. Second and third grade student DIBELS scores were grouped by teachers' action plans or focus in WFSG. The two groups were

      i. students whose teachers focused on reading fluency, and

      ii. students whose teachers not focused on reading fluency. The scores from students of the teachers in the two groups were compared to each other.

2. To research educators' perceived impact of WFSG on student learning and changing teacher instructional practices, teachers and principals were surveyed and central office district administrators were interviewed. There were three components to the survey and interview process:

     a. Kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers who were members of WFSG were surveyed.

     b. Principals of the kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers who were members of WFSG were surveyed.

     c. Interviews were completed with two district administrators to investigate district-wide perceptions.

Results from the teacher surveys, principal surveys, and central office administrator interviews were compiled and analyzed.

Site

Kearney Public Schools (KPS) in Kearney, Nebraska, was chosen as the site for this study because this school district was large enough to provide adequate sample sizes of both teachers and students and was in the second year of district-wide implementation of WFSG.

At the time of the study, Kearney was a city with a population of approximately 30,100 people located along Interstate 80 in South Central Nebraska. The racial makeup of the city was 95.18% Caucasian, 0.63% African American, 0.38% Native American, 0.92% Asian, 0.04% Pacific Islander, 1.68% from other races, and 1.17% from two or more races. Hispanic and Latina of any race were 4.08% of the population. The median income for a household in the city was $34,829, and the median income for a family was $46,650. About 7.4% of families and 13.4% of the population were below the poverty line including 11.8% of those under the age of 18 and 8.9% of those at the age 65 or over (Wikipedia, 2009b).

Kearney Public Schools (KPS) was a district of approximately 5,000 students. At the time of this study there were 11 elementary schools, 10 elementary principals (nine full time principals) and 75 elementary teachers in kindergarten, first, second, third, and fourth grades. There were approximately 2,500 students in the elementary grades (K-5). The students/teacher ratio for elementary schools was 25 to 1. Kearney Middle School students/teacher ratio was 16 to 1 and high school students/teacher ratio was 17 to 1.

The district's English Language Learners (ELL) percentage was 4% compared to Nebraska's ELL percentage of 7%; special education student population was 14% compared to the Nebraska average of 15%, and free and reduced lunch student population was 32% compared to the Nebraska average of 37%. The district's mobility rate was 9% compared to the state average of 12%. Kearney Public School teachers on the average had 19.3 years of experience and 51% of them had master degrees. Ninety-eight percent of the teachers were teaching in their endorsed fields.

In 2007-08 five school districts in Nebraska, including Kearney Public Schools, implemented WFSG. The researcher was a superintendent of schools in one of the five districts that implemented Whole-Faculty Study Groups in Nebraska; and therefore, had knowledge about the use of WFSG in school districts.

In 2008-09, Kearney Public Schools (KPS) was in the second year of implementation of WFSG. The district administration was committed to implementing professional learning communities that would focus on student learning. After researching several options, KPS district administrators decided that the Whole-Faculty Study Group philosophy of Carlene Murphy matched the district philosophy of using student data to improve student learning. In addition, it was an option that the district

could afford since many other professional learning community options required more funding for implementation than WFSG required. The Nebraska Department of Education, through the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) department, supported the work of Carlene Murphy and Karl Clauset by informing Nebraska school districts about the WFSG process during the annual Excellence in Education conference, professional development workshops, and through resources offered to all Nebraska school districts. KPS had one year of successful implementation of WFSG in the elementary schools as they began the second year of WFSG in 2008-09.

Kearney Public Schools has used a variety of assessment tools including Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) for elementary students. DIBELS has been used in the district for several years. DIBELS was a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten to, most commonly, third grade. They were designed to be short, one minute fluency measures used to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills (Good & Kaminski, 2009).

Kindergarten through third grade was chosen for this study because the impact on student learning of preventative practices and interventions through WFSG could be studied and measured through the DIBELS process. Kearney Public Schools was an ideal site for this study because this school district used the DIBELS systematic process periodically for screening all students in kindergarten through third grade to determine which students were not meeting critical milestones in early literacy skills. In addition, KPS continued to monitor students to measure progress.

Kearney Public Schools was chosen as a site for this study because the district was in the second year of implementation of WFSG. Since WFSG was new to the state, two years of implementation was the longest implementation time in Nebraska. The district used WFSG to provide collaboration opportunities for teachers with the goal of improving instructional practices and differentiating interventions for their students.

Definition of Terms

A number of terms were defined for the purposes of this study:

Action Plan was a document completed by each Whole-Faculty Study Group at the beginning of the year and revised and updated as soon as every six weeks or as needed. The action plan includes these components (1) general category of student need, (2) the essential question that will guide the study group throughout its work, (3) actions teachers will take when the study group meets, (4) resources the study group will use, (5) the group's norms, (6) assessment of evidence that the study group work is having an impact on targeted student needs by specifying (a) specific student needs, (b) data sources with evidence of improvement, (c) baseline status of needs, and (d) targeted and actual results at the end of a 6- to 12-week period (Murphy & Lick 2005, p. 92).

Action Research was a process of asking important questions and looking for answers from data in a methodical way. The educator-researcher wants or needs to know the answers to the meaningful questions, and the questions are closely connected to real work. An action research cycle includes several steps:

> assess needs and establish a baseline and target performance, research content and best practices and develop expertise, plan interventions, implement interventions and monitor, and look at student work and data and assess changes, and evaluate student performance to decide whether to start a second action research cycle around the same student learning need or to start a new cycle focused on a different student learning need. (Clauset, Lick, & Murphy, 2008, p. 2)

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (*DIBELS)* was an assessment instrument that measured how successfully a child is progressing in the critical skills that underlie success in early reading. DIBELS assessed several early reading skills and uses the child's status in these areas to predict how likely it is that the student will read fluently. A student's score in each skill falls into one of three levels (1) benchmark, (2) at risk of reading difficulty, (3) or somewhere in between (Hall, 2006, p. 30).

Job-Embedded Professional Development is a form of professional development or learning that takes place during the course of one's work, where daily access to necessary materials, knowledge, and assistance are readily available. Job-embedded activities can include professional learning communities and action research (Arkansas Department of Education, 2006).

Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) involved statewide assessments in reading, math, and science implemented through state legislation in 2008. The statewide NeSA schedule for test implementation was reading in 2009-2010, math in 2010-11, and science in 2011-12. School-based, Teacher-lead, Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) has been phased out and replaced with NeSA.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are an extended learning opportunity to foster collaborative learning among colleagues within a particular work environment or field. They are often used in schools as a way to organize teachers into working groups.

Reading Fluency is the ability to read text accurately and quickly. Fluency bridges word decoding and comprehension. Comprehension is an understanding of what has been read. Fluency is a set of skills that allows readers to rapidly decode text while

maintaining high comprehension. A first benchmark for fluency is being able to "sight read" some words. The idea is that children will recognize at sight the most common words in the written form of their native language and that instant reading of these words will allow them to read and understand text more quickly. As children learn to read, the speed at which they read becomes an important measure (Wikipedia, 2009a).

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a system of service delivery designed to provide effective instruction for all students using a comprehensive and preventive problem solving approach. In Nebraska, RtI employs a tiered method of instructional delivery, in which the core curriculum addresses and meets the needs of most students (Tier 1), additional instruction is provided for those needing supplementary support (Tier 2), and intensive and individualized services are provided for the students who continue to demonstrate more intensive needs (Tier 3). At its foundation, RtI includes measuring the performance of all students, and basing educational decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and intervention intensity on student response to instruction (Nebraska Department of Education, n.d.).

School-based, Teacher-lead, Assessment and Reporting System (STARS) was Nebraska's former approach to standards, assessment, and accountability. STARS attempted to integrate No Child Left Behind state testing and accountability requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Educators in individual Nebraska school districts designed assessments to use in combination with national tests and a statewide writing test. Locally developed tests were required to meet the Six Quality Assessment Criteria developed through Buros Center for Testing at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska. In 2000, the Nebraska Legislature passed legislation to

implement STARS and in 2008 passed new legislation phasing out STARS. New legislation required statewide tests in reading, math, and science (Nebraska Department of Education, 2006)

Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI) was a dual-level professional development intervention designed for both at-risk K-1 students and their classroom teachers. This program was part of the National Research Center on Rural Education which was funded through the Institute for Educational Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education. This center was based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The TRI helped teachers acquire essential knowledge of early reading development and efficient instructional strategies, develop skills in matching instruction to informal assessment, and apply their learning particularly for the benefit of struggling readers. TRI teachers worked with their struggling readers intensively on a daily basis for about 15 minutes, initially one-on-one and transitioning to very small groups, using efficient, evidence-based reading strategies refined daily with a diagnostic mindset. The effectiveness and efficiency of the TRI was in both the reading strategies themselves that integrate multiple essential early reading abilities always in the context of real words and books and in the diagnostic thinking that teachers are guided to adopt with each day's plan. Kearney Public Schools was a part of the TRI research program (National Research Center on Rural Education Support, n.d.).

Whole-Faculty Study Groups (WFSG) are a form of Professional Learning Communities. WFSG are a job-embedded, self-directed, student-driven approach to professional development. It is a professional development system designed to build communities of learners in which professionals continuously strive to improve schools

and increase student learning. To improve schools and increase student learning, educators must deepen their own knowledge and understanding of what is taught, reflect on their practices, sharpen their skills, and take joint responsibility for the students they teach (Lick & Murphy, 2007). Every faculty member at the school is a member of a study group of three to five individuals focusing on data-driven student instructional needs and working collaboratively to increase their capacities to enable their students to reach higher levels of performance (Clauset et al., 2008, p. 8)

Assumptions

An assumption of this study was that collaboration with other teachers would improve teaching practices and increase student learning. Additionally, it was assumed that teachers working together in small groups would become responsible for designing their own professional development, through a collaborative process, to address student needs and change instructional practices.

Delimitations

A delimitation of this study was that all data came from only one district, and the district was only in the second year of implemented WFSG although two years of implementation was the greatest time of implementation in the state. The WFSG were not well-established and may not have been in place enough time to impact student learning. If that is the case, a follow up study would be helpful.

A second delimitation was that the researcher was not able to observe teachers in the classroom for the year that the student achievement data was gathered. The researcher relied on teacher and principal responses on surveys and interviews with Central Office administrators.

A third delimitation was the district did not schedule WFSG meeting times for every school on a consistent basis during 2008-2009, the year of the study. Each school in the district found its own way and time for teachers to meet in collaborative Whole-Faculty Study Groups. Some schools hired substitutes to provide time for teachers to meet. Others offered to "comp" or compensate teacher time spent in WFSG through early release time. Sometimes teachers met during work days or another time when school was not in session for students. There was not a consistent and designated time for WFSG throughout the elementary school buildings in the district.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the decision of the researcher to divide second grade and third grade students into two groups determined by the focus of teacher WFSG action plans. DIBELS scores were then compared from the two groups of second and third grade students. Groups were divided by teachers focusing on "fluency" and teachers "not focusing on fluency." The focus of study of the WFSG was difficult to determine by the action plans completed by the groups. Because some action plans were vague, determining whether the WFSG were working on fluency strategies or other strategies such as comprehension or decoding was very subjective. Some groups were working on reading comprehension but were not placed in the "fluency" group even though they may have been implementing some of the same strategies as the teachers working on reading fluency and placed in the "fluency" group.

Significance of Study

This research can and will benefit the Nebraska Department of Education, as well as other state's departments of education. Departments of education from all states

search for more effective ways to support the school districts in their state, as school districts and state education departments struggle to meet the requirements of current state and federal legislation. Research on effective professional development, which increases student learning, would be beneficial to state education departments.

In addition, this research will benefit K-12 educators and school districts by providing awareness and deeper understanding of the impact on student learning of teachers working in collaborative study groups to improve student achievement. The ultimate goal and outcome of professional development systems was to increase student learning by changing teacher practices.

Research about teacher collaboration and teachers' perception of how collaboration changes teachers' practices is crucial to bringing about change in schools. Changing teacher practices through collaboration and discouraging teachers teaching in isolation could change the culture of our schools. Changing teacher practices and changing the culture of our schools would bring about school reform that state and national legislators are demanding. Therefore, the perception of teachers in WFSG and how their work in their study groups impacted student learning was a relevant question.

Because few studies about the WFSG system have been completed, there was little information in the literature. WFSG were implemented in several school districts across Nebraska beginning in the 2007-08 school year with the financial and professional staff support of the Nebraska Department of Education. In addition, WFSG have been implemented in other states across the nation.

Since the best evaluation of the effectiveness of any professional development is whether or not student learning increased, research of relevant job-embedded

professional development that improves student learning through action research is important and needed for improving the quality of our schools. It was essential to gather research on the impact of WFSG on student learning and how WFSG changed teacher instructional practices. There was limited research to show if a collaborative culture does impact student learning and, if so, what kind of collaboration would lead to improved student learning.

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Introduction

In a political climate of under-performing schools, high-stakes tests, and leaving no child behind, there are many demands on public education. The United States has now in an era of accountability and researched-based teaching methods (Lasserre-Cortez, 2006) that demands educators reassess what and how to teach. School districts are searching for ways to increase student learning and meet all the state and federal demands while continually working to improve schools. The discussion does not start or stop with high school education. The preparation for high school begins in teaching the basics in the primary grades and continuing with rigorous curriculum and expectations through the middle grades, high school, and beyond.

School improvement and increasing student achievement are the two most critical issues in education today (Clauset et al., 2008). School districts have been searching for ways to change the culture of the school, increase student learning, and improve schools through professional development in an ever changing world with increasing expectations and demands.

Education in a Changing World

The world has changed. The students we educate now are different from students a generation ago. This has become a digital world where technology surrounds us. As Friedman (2005) says, "These are just technologies. Using them does not make you modern, smart, moral, wise, fair, or decent. It just makes you able to communicate, compete, and collaborate farther and faster" (p. 374).

According to Prensky (2001), many of our educators did not grow up with technology and are labeled as digital immigrants. However, these digital immigrants are expected to educate a generation of digital natives, who grew up with technology. Friedman (2005) stated in his book, *The World is Flat,* which is about globalization in the 21st century, "If you want to grow and flourish in a flat world, you better learn how to change and align yourself with it" (p. 339).

Pedagogy models have changed from teacher focused to student focused, from learning in isolation to learning through collaboration. Communication and collaboration have evolved to create many opportunities for the exchange of ideas. In today's world, communication happens in a variety of ways from face-to-face discussions to electronic networking. Tapscott (2009) stated:

> Educators should take note. The current model of pedagogy is teacher focused, one-way, one size fits all. It isolates the student in the learning process. Many Net Geners learn more by collaborating -- both with their teacher and with each other. They'll respond to the new model of education that's beginning to surface – student-focused and multiway, which is customized and collaborative. (p. 90)

Pence (2007) argued that our current generation is not really the Web Generation –yet. As the pace of technological change quickens, the effects of globalization and social networking have not reached their full impact. Pence stated,

> At best, the present students represent a transitional group. . . . The media revolution is changing so fast that in a decade we will be dealing with college-age students as different from today's college students as current college students are different from their teachers. (p. 347)

Pence's (2007) conclusion was that teaching practices that have worked in the past may not be as effective with today's students:

> Perhaps the most important conclusion is the recognition that student attitudes are changing. Teaching techniques that have worked for decades may no longer work as well; in some cases they may not work at all. . . . Individual faculty members

must be willing to experiment with new teaching methods, and there must be more opportunities for faculty to exchange ideas and methods. Only by sharing experiences can faculty prepare themselves for the real net generation that is yet to come. (p. 355)

There is no denying that the world is changing and educational systems must change as students are changing. Technology and global competition, both economically and educationally, have demanded that change happen now, if not "yesterday," creating a real sense of urgency and a need for teachers to work together collaboratively.

A Nation Searching for Educational Reform

The US government and the United States Department of Education released several important documents since 1983 that addressed the challenges facing our education system in this country. Even though these were not research reports they were important documents (Bryant, 2004, p. 80).

A Nation at Risk, which was released in 1983, was the first government report and was the beginning of the modern search for educational reform. As Bryant (2004) stated about *A Nation at Risk*, "This is a very important document, but it is not a research report. Rather, this report is a compilation of selected research studies and of political and education beliefs. Or, put slightly differently, the conclusions arrived at in the report are derived less from actual data and more from beliefs" (p. 80).

The political and education beliefs were that our education system was desperately in need of change. Even in 1983 in the *A Nation at Risk* report (U.S. Department of Education, 1983), concerns were expressed that graduates were not as prepared for the world as graduates a generation before:

Nevertheless, the average graduate of our schools and colleges today is not as well-educated as the average graduate of 25 or 35 years ago, when a much smaller

proportion of our population completed high school and college. The negative impact of this fact likewise cannot be overstated. (p. 4)

A quarter of a century later, in 2008, the U.S. Department of Education released another report, *A Nation Accountable: Twenty-five Years After A Nation at Risk,* that continued to give further details about the seriousness of our school's failure to meet the federal government's expectations. The Executive Summary of this report stated that the nation remained a nation at risk and was also a nation with much work to be done:

> Twenty-five years later, it's time to review the progress we have made since the report's release. We remain a nation at risk but are also now a nation informed, a nation accountable, and a nation that recognizes there is much work to be done.
> - If we were "at risk" in 1983, we are at even greater risk now. The rising demands of our global economy, together with demographic shifts, require that we educate more students to higher levels than ever before. Yet, our education system is not keeping pace with these growing demands. . . .
> - We must leverage this information to achieve better results. We simply cannot return to the "ostrich approach" and stick our heads in the sand while grave problems threaten our education system, our civic society, and our economic prosperity. We must consider structural reforms that go well beyond current efforts, as today's students require a better education than ever before to be successful. (p. 6)

Again in 2010, the federal government expressed concern about the education system in the nation with another document, A *Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.* This report was produced by the United States Department of Education. President Barack Obama recognized the need for educational reform in his introductory letter in A *Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*:

> Today, more than ever, a world-class education is a prerequisite for success. America was once the best educated nation in the world. A generation ago, we lead all nations in college completion, but today, 10 countries have passed us. It is not that their students are smarter than ours. It is that these countries are being smarter about how to educate their students. And the countries that out-educate us today will out-compete us tomorrow. (p. 1)

President Obama went on to say that the nation must do better. Together the country must achieve a new goal by 2020 and lead the world in college completion, raise expectations, and "ensure that every student graduates from high school well prepared for college and a career" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 1).

In *A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act,* President Barack Obama expressed the importance of well trained, highly qualified teachers and principals in our classrooms and schools "to provide a world-class education to every child" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

> This effort will require the skills and talents of many, but especially our nation's teachers, principals and other leaders. Our goal must be to have a great teacher in every classroom and a great principal in every school. We know that from the moment students enter a school, the most important factor in their success is not the color of their skin or the income of their parents – it is the teacher standing at the front of the classroom. To ensure that success of our children, we must do better to recruit, develop, support, retain, and reward outstanding teachers in America's classrooms. (p. 1)

School districts have been under tremendous pressure to make sure that their students are learning at every grade level. School districts must employ highly qualified educators and continue to provide professional development opportunities for educators to maintain and further develop their skills. School districts and states must be accountable for each one of their students, regardless of race, social economic status, or ability levels. Each state has its own method of measuring student learning through various kinds of state tests and types of assessments. States and districts have been asked to develop processes to evaluate and support teachers and principals on the basis of student growth. Teachers and principals may lose their teaching or administrative jobs if their students do not perform to the expected levels determined by the state and federal governments.

In the 2010-2011 school year, the process continued as a result the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Stabilization Fund Program signed into law on February 17, 2009. There were four educational needs identified in the assurances of ARRA, which were presented to Nebraska school leaders (Peterson, 2010).

1. great teachers and leaders - Making improvements in teacher effectiveness and in the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need;

2. robust data systems - Making progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including limited English proficient students and students with disabilities;

3. rigorous standards and assessments; and

4. intervention in struggling schools - Providing targeted, intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools.

School Turnaround grants were to be available for the lowest-performing schools to assist schools to implement rigorous interventions.

To ensure significant changes in the "operation, governance, staffing, or instructional program" (p. 12) of schools, four intervention models were presented in *A Blueprint for Reform* (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2010).

- *Transformation model:* Replace the principal, strengthen staffing, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance and flexibility.
- *Turnaround model:* Replace the principal and rehire not more than 50 percent of the school staff, implement a research-based instructional program, provide extended learning time, and implement new governance structure.

- *Restart model:* Convert or close and reopen the school under the management of an effective charter operator, charter management organization, or education management organization.
- *School closure model:* Close the school and enroll students who attended it in other, higher-performing schools in the district. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 12)

The pressure for school districts to prove students are learning by scoring well on tests increased. Consequences for lowest-performing schools may include the release of principals from their position, teachers losing their jobs, or even closure of the school. Schools must find ways to improve student learning and change teacher practices beginning in preschool and kindergarten with sustained student learning through secondary school. Schools must increase high school graduation rates and make sure students are prepared for college and work.

States have been responding to federal accountability requirements. In 2008, Nebraska legislators responded by enacting, Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA), which required a statewide test in reading, math, and science, beginning with reading in the 2009-10 school year. Nebraska had previously implemented a statewide writing test. With NeSA testing, the previous accountability system called School-based, Teacher-lead, Assessment, and Reporting System (STARS) was phased out.

During the seven years of the STARS era, Nebraska educators engaged in professional development practices that impacted student learning positively. While Nebraska educators were developing local assessments, they also developed and enhanced assessment literacy skills (Isernhagen & Mills, 2009). In addition, Nebraska teachers were accustomed to working together in collaborative groups to develop assessments. Whether the assessments were developed locally, as through the STARS system, or were mandated through NeSA as a high stakes state test, testing for

accountability has become a way of life for school districts across the nation as schools

respond to federal pressures to improve student learning.

     With all the high stakes testing in our schools and the ultimate ranking of schools

by test scores, there will be so called "failing schools" identified in every state. Everyone

agrees schools need to continually work to improve and always focus on increasing

student learning; however, there are differing opinions about our educational system.

Yong Zhao, Professor at the College of Education at Michigan State University, grew up

in China and received his undergraduate education in China. His children have attended

public schools in America. Zhao (2009) stated that instead of being fearful we should

consider the many possibilities.

> Instead of instilling fear in the public about the rise of other countries,
> bureaucratizing education with bean-counting policies, demoralizing educators
> through the dubious accountability measures, homogenizing school curriculum,
> and turning children into test takers, we should inform the public about the
> possibilities brought about by globalization, encourage education innovations,
> inspire educators with genuine support, diversity and decentralize curriculum, and
> educate children as confident, unique, and well-rounded human beings. (p. 198)

     There has been a sense of urgency to improve students' test scores on high stakes

tests. However, there has been a lot that is right with the United States educational

system. As Yong Zhao pointed out in an interview with Richardson (2010), there are

developing countries that may have surpassed the United States in test scores. However,

Zhao commented about developing countries educational systems by stating

> They happen to do very well in testing because that's all they can do given what
> they have, although they'd rather do something different. They focus on what
> they can do, which is reading and memorizing. The tests happen to reflect most
> of those things. When you look at that uncritically, it looks pretty good. . . . There
> is a general tendency to try to reduce something complex, like education, to
> something simple like a test score, and the use it to rank people and institutions.
> (Richardson, 2010, p.19)

Zhao went on to say that American schools are more than scores on a high stakes test. In almost any American school, rooms can be found filled with musical instruments and facilities that are conducive for a well-rounded education. America has cultural establishments such as museums and public libraries that our children have access to. "Why would you want to abandon great art programs, music programs, science programs, technology programs, sports programs so we can focus on learning that can occur basically by memorizing from a book" (Richardson, 2010, p. 20).

There have been increasing educational demands, changing accountability requirements, changing students, and a changing world. However, America's greatness had been based on the opportunity for all to have an education. Our schools have had many strengths, so before we become too critical about our educational system, we should celebrate what we have and where we have been. Zhao stated that American education is at a crucial place:

> American education is at a crossroads. We have two choices. We can destroy our strengths in order to catch up with others on test scores, or we can build on our strengths and remain a leader in innovation and creativity. The current push for more standardization, centralization, high-stakes testing, and test-based accountability is rushing us down the first path. What will truly keep America strong and Americans prosperous is the other path because it cherishes individual talents, cultivates creativity, celebrates, diversity, and inspires curiosity. (Richardson, 2010, p.20)

America can build upon strengths to improve learning for all students. Effective and quality professional development for teachers is more important now than ever before.

Overview of Job-Embedded Professional Development

NCLB and state accountability legislation had a profound impact on professional development. "Two aspects of the NCLB legislation have special significance for staff

development leaders. First is the requirement for 'scientific, research-based programs.'

Second is the strong emphasis on accountability, defined in terms of improvements in

student performance" (Guskey, 2003, p. 27).

As the demands for schools to change and accountability pressures multiply for

school districts, the need for effective and meaningful professional development for

teachers and principals has increased, too. Teachers must have meaningful training and

professional development to increase student learning and change teacher practices.

According to Guskey (2000), the methods and styles of delivery of professional

development have been experiencing a transformation over the past years.

The goal of professional development should be to improve student learning, but

has professional development really changed what teachers have done in the classroom

and impacted student learning? As stated by Guskey (2000), "conceptions of

professional development in education have changed drastically in recent years. These

changes, in turn have lead to important adaptations in the processes and methods

involved in evaluating professional development" (p. 14).

According to Guskey (2000), the traditional method of professional development

practices in schools are only staff development events where days are set aside in each

school year for the traditional pattern of "sit and git" information. Teachers are the

audience while the experts enlighten them. The traditional model of professional

development is a series of unrelated, short workshops or presentations with little or no

follow up that lack guidance for implementation. This model of professional

development is sometimes viewed as something teachers and administrators must

similarly endure and get through.

Guskey (2000) stated that professional development should be a systematic, systemic, and ongoing process that brings about positive change. It is most effective when it is part of the school improvement process, and there is increased pressure for more accountability. The most crucial evidence of professional development efforts is the noticeable improvements on student learning or other benefits to students such as improved attendance, better student behavior, or decreased dropout rate.

Guskey (2000) stated that traditionally educational leaders have had a very narrow view of professional development. Professional development was often viewed as an event or happening. Educators are realizing that occasional workshops do not bring about significant change in our schools. To bring about change in practice, professional development needs to be intentional, ongoing, and systemic.

According to Killion (2003), sometimes leaders of professional development like to link an episode of staff development such as workshops or a professional development day to student learning. However, it is not possible to produce sufficient results for students or teachers with workshops or professional development days alone. It is unrealistic to expect results for students from a staff development program that is unlikely to produce them or is "poorly conceived and constructed" (p. 16).

Killion stated, "staff development program's goals express its intended results in terms of student achievement. Instead, of 'provide training to all teachers' as its goal, a results-driven program has as a goal improving student achievement" (2003, p. 16).

However, as stated by Guskey (2000), regardless of the form it takes, professional development in education has to be a systematic effort to bring about change. The old view of professional development is moving from professional development events to an

ongoing and continuous process. This broader concept of professional development is a series of extended, job-embedded learning experiences that bring about positive changes and improvement. Professional development should be a part of the school culture of continuous learning for not only students but for those who are in charge of their learning, the teachers and administrators. Changing professional development means changing the school culture.

It has become obvious that schools cannot educate today's children as they have educated children 30, 20, or even 10 years ago. The traditional teacher mindset of closing the classroom door and teaching in isolation has been replaced with collaboration, analyzing student data, and using research based practices to improve student learning. Isernhagen and Mills (2009) found through surveying Nebraska educators that "embedding professional development into the school improvement process is critical for the improvement of student performance" (p. 41).

According to DuFour (2004), most schools and districts have created an artificial distinction between working and learning with approximately five days set aside each year for professional development. The traditional idea that professional development must occur someplace other than the school is slowly and gradually changing to quality staff development that happens in the workplace rather than in a workshop. School leadership must end the separation between working and learning. Administrators must create an environment that allows staff to grow and learn within their workplace and as part of their daily or weekly work routines. DuFour cautioned school leaders that shifting to site-based staff development does not guarantee improved learning for either adults or

students. Site-based staff development will be more effective and enhance student

learning if four questions are addressed.

1. Does the professional development increase the staff's collective capacity to achieve the school's vision and goals?
2. Does the school's approach to staff development challenge staff members to act in new ways?
3. Does the school's approach to staff development focus on results rather than activities?
4. Does the school's approach to staff development demonstrate a sustained commitment to achieving important goals? (pp. 64-65)

DuFour (2004) stated that job-embedded, site based professional development

offers the best opportunities for ongoing staff development and continued learning.

School leaders can and must play an important part in making sure the staff development

program leads to higher levels of learning for both staff and students.

According to Bloom and Stein (2004), collaborative groups should extend to

school leadership. When school administrators collaborate with each other, they are in a

better position to support classroom instruction and teacher collaboration. The authors

have designed a simple model for professional leadership development with the

following characteristics: (a) It is focused and ongoing; (b) Participants are exposed to

new research, perspectives and methods; (c) The input portion includes guided practice;

(d) Central office staff participates; (e) The input portion is followed by site-based

practicum sessions; and (f) Practicum sessions follow a protocol and are facilitated.

According to Bloom and Stein (2004), school leaders can set the example of

> breaking down the isolation that has limited teacher professional efficacy and
> growth for so long. In our experience, it is well worth the effort to do the same
> for school leaders. The creation of small learning communities that focus upon
> supporting teacher development through the supervision process is one effective
> way of initiating this important change in professional culture. (p. 22)

A collaborative model of job-embedded professional development for all educators is an effective model of adult learning and ultimately impacts students if professional development goals are related to improved student learning.

Professional Learning Communities

In searching for more effective professional development models, schools across the nation have implemented professional learning communities. DuFour and Eaker (1998) stated that "professional learning communities, meaningful collaboration must be systematically embedded into the daily life of the school . . . the best structure for fostering collaboration is the team" (p. 118).

There is worldwide competition among educational systems as technology and mobility have produced a more global economy. Rolfs (2003), a German author, proposes PLCs as an answer to the disappointing results from German students on the international achievement test called Program for International Student Assessment or PISA. Rolfs (2003) stated, "Teachers as learners see themselves as people who learn from one another ('teachers learn from teachers') and with one another, that is, in a community of professionals" (p. 30).

DuFour (2004) defined professional learning communities as a powerful collaboration that is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process then leads to higher levels of student achievement.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) stated that teachers are very comfortable working in isolation in their classrooms. Working in isolation has been engrained into our

educational systems. However, creating a collaborative environment for teachers to work together is very important for successful school improvement initiatives and improving student learning. "Virtually all contemporary school reformers call for increased opportunities for teacher collaboration" (p. 117).

The need for changing the culture from teacher isolation to teacher collaboration has brought the movement of fostering an environment of learning everyday together while working on job-embedded professional development. Schools are striving to create professional learning communities. According to Dufour (2004), Professional Learning Communities must ensure that all students learn, create structures to promote a collaborative culture, and focus on results.

Thomas Gwin, a suburban Massachusetts high school principal, completed a research study in his school while implementing professional learning communities. His high school was a high achieving affluent school with a veteran staff that did not see the need for professional development. Gwin (2008) stated,

> As a leader in a high school, I more clearly understand that making institutional change requires the faculty and leadership team to share the vision and work in harmony to implement change. The empowerment of the teaching staff is critical in bringing about school improvement. As the leader in the building, I need to trust that the faculty has the capability and will take responsibility and ownership in doing the work. (p. 150)

Fullen (2006) stated that professional learning communities are about establishing collaborative cultures that last. Professional learning communities are intended to be a new way of working and learning that creates a culture for school improvement and not just another program innovation.

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), professional learning communities view staff development as deeply embedded into the daily work of the teachers. Teachers are

in charge of their own staff development each time they collaborate and work together in

designing curriculum, developing assessment strategies, practicing new skills, and

striving to improve results. This type of job-embedded learning for educators is the most

promising strategy for effective staff development.

Creating a culture of collaboration and sharing the responsibility of improving

student learning was addressed briefly by President Obama in *A Blueprint for Reform*

(U.S. Department of Education, 2010) when he commented on the teamwork and

collaboration that must be developed to restructure schools.

> Reforming our schools to deliver a world-class education is a shared
> responsibility-the task cannot be shouldered by our nation's teachers and
> principals alone. We must foster school environments where teachers have the
> time to collaborate, the opportunities to lead, and the respect that all professionals
> deserve. (p. 1)

There are some studies about job-embedded professional development for

teachers and the outcomes of teacher collaboration while using student work. Cahill's

(2007) study identified the following conditions to promote collaboration:

- quality professional development;
- communication systems, data rich resources;
- and scheduled time for collaboration;
- teachers' willingness to reflect on student achievement, conversation using common language; and
- inclusive environment.

Key leadership styles found to promote teacher collaboration included shared

leadership, active instructional leadership, and change agent leadership.

Marsden (2007) found through six individual case studies that all teacher

participants thought a sustained, job-embedded approach to professional development

was more effective for their daily practice due to reflection with each other. However,

there was a wide variety of success with the actual application of knowledge in the classroom. Marsden's study also raised the question of whether professional development should be differentiated for adults in the same way the instruction is differentiated for children.

Another study by Reed-Wright (2007) investigated change in teacher understandings and student achievement as a result of job-embedded coaching as a professional development model. To change from a traditional model of professional development was a cultural shift for schools, administrators, and teachers. Through interviews, observations, and documents, there was evidence of new teacher understandings and a rise in student achievement, along with enhanced relationships, communications, and teaching strategies.

Shepard's (2008) research revealed that utilizing research-based strategies and sharing evidence of student learning positively impacted teacher effectiveness. In addition, using these practices increased student engagement and student learning. Implementation of this collaborative team model carries potential for changing the culture of an individual team, school, and district through teachers expanding their knowledge base and sharing expertise and successful practices. The collaborative model may increase the depth and authenticity of teacher social interaction and teacher efficacy. As a result, student learning increases.

O'Donovan (2007), a middle school principal, wrote about professional learning communities:

> Working as a Professional Learning Community makes it more likely that teachers will ask the right questions about student learning: What do students need to know? How do we assess learning? What do we do when students do not

learn? What do we do when students have already mastered expectations? Such work is grounded in a few key beliefs:

- Collaboration is more than a process or structure. It is a commitment to core ideas about student learning.
- Teachers who collaborate effectively do so systematically across the organization.
- All students must learn. The variable is no longer student learning-that is the outcome. The variables are resources and time allocated to ensure student learning
- Teachers set specific and timely goals to help all students learn.
- Teachers share and change instructional practices in a strategic way based on assessment results.
- Collaboration is more than collegiality. It is hard work, as tough questions must be confronted.
- Change happens at the school level with specific guidance, support and focus from district level administration. (p. 95)

Meyer's (2006) doctoral research on high quality professional development discovered a secondary theme. The district with the longest history of professional learning teams reported the most impact on knowledge and skills at all levels (district, school, and classroom). In addition, two districts that she studied had implemented professional learning teams and reported the highest level of capacity for sustainability of reform efforts at the school-level.

Pearo's (2005) research revealed that teachers' reflections demonstrated a movement toward individual growth in teaching and learning. Collaboration and looking at student work were deemed as effective tools for change in teaching instruction. However, in this two year study, the interventions practiced set the foundation for the development of a professional learning environment, but the school did not reach the organizational level for sustainability.

According to Pearo (2005), evidence has accumulated that job-embedded teacher collaboration, while evaluating student work and sharing teacher practices, is an effective

model of professional development. However, it is difficult to sustain this model over time and make an impact at the organizational level.

Cahill (2007) examined teacher collaboration focused on student achievement in an entire urban school district and found that school districts can support teacher collaborative practices systemically through job-embedded professional development. She discovered that specific conditions promote collaboration such as quality professional development, communication systems, data resources, scheduled time for teacher collaboration, teacher willingness to reflect on student achievement, a common language used in the district, and an inclusive environment.

Whole-Faculty Study Groups

The Whole-Faculty Study Group system is a type of job-embedded, self-directed, student achievement driven approach to professional development. Whole-Faculty Study Groups, a form of a professional learning community, is a process designed to continuously strive to increase student learning. This is accomplished in several ways. Teachers deepen their own knowledge and understanding of what is taught, reflect on their practices, sharpen their skills, and take joint responsibility for the students they teach.

In WFSG every faculty member is involved in a collaborative group of three to five professionals focused on student data to help students perform at higher levels. The WFSG approach allows faculties, though a consensus process, to collaboratively address student needs at the school. Through this process each teacher, as a member of the WFSG, will support the school improvement process. The structure of the WFSG gives

teachers the framework and opportunity to design their own professional development that is based on improving student learning (Clauset et al., 2008).

Whole faculty means all classroom teachers, special education staff, media specialists, counselors, and anyone who has professional certification. Making the school better for all students is the continual focus of every study group. Some schools involve noncertified staff members, such as para-educators and school secretaries, in collaborative job-embedded professional development.

> The goal of WFSG is to focus the entire school faculty on creating, implementing, and integrating effective teaching and learning practices into school programs that will result in an increase in student learning and a decrease in negative behaviors of students, as reflected in related, relevant data sources. (Murphy & Lick 2005, p. 12)

According to Murphy and Lick (2005), WFSG bring needs of individuals and institutions together in an organized manner. The power of study groups rests in the premise that teacher collaboration will produce more skillful, knowledgeable, and competent teachers who in turn produce more skillful, knowledgeable, and competent students.

Kockenour (2010) found that the WFSG model is a viable and effective alternative to traditional profession because the "content of teachers' learning grows from the learning needs of their students. The process of teacher' learning offers the opportunity for teacher to support each other in their understanding of the essential curriculum and instructional strategies. Content and process are rooted in the context of teachers' learning, that is, their daily work with students" (p. 61).

The essence of the Whole-Faculty Study Group (as a form of professional learning community) is found in one question: "What are our students learning and

achieving as a result of what we are learning and doing in our study group?" (Lick & Murphy, 2007, p.3).

The constant focus of all WFSG is to make the school a better place for all students. As Lick and Murphy (2007) described the process of WFSG for school improvement, the faculty goes through a process of analyzing student and school data to identify student needs that their study groups will address. When the needs are identified the study groups are formed around the student needs. Each group then determines what its members will do when the group meets to address a specific student need. Teachers will probably need to change and refine instructional strategies and the members of the group collaborate and support each other in that process.

Lick and Murphy (2007) went on to say that the goal of WFSG is to "focus the entire school faculty on creating, implementing, and integrating effective teaching and learning practices into school programs that will result in an increase in student learning and decrease in negative behaviors of students, as reflected in related, relevant data sources" (p. 5). To do this, teachers use action research in the WFSG.

According to Clauset et al. (2008), when a school staff decides every teacher will be engaged in action research involving specific concerns, and this effort is coordinated throughout the entire school, the approach is referred to as schoolwide action research.

Clauset et al. (2008) also noted the definitive goal is for schoolwide action research to improve student performance each year, much as medical specialists help patients improve health. Study groups diagnose and solve student learning problems.

Clauset et al. (2008) stated the following:

The steps in the action research cycle include the following: (a) Assess needs and establish baseline and target performance, (b) research content and best practices

and develop expertise, (c) plan interventions, (d) implement interventions and monitor, and (e) look at student work and data and assess changes. Then study groups evaluate student performance to decide whether to start a second collaborative action research cycle around the same student need or to start a new cycle focuses on a different student learning need. (pp. 55, 56)

Ultimately, each study group using action research supports the school improvement process. According to Mills (2007), when teachers have the goal to be professional problem-solvers committed to improving both their own practice and student outcomes, this provides a powerful and relevant reason to practice action research.

The use of student data is a key element of Whole-Faculty Study Groups. One form of data that is often used with WFSG that focus on reading in elementary schools is data from the *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* or DIBELS. The *Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills* (DIBELS) is a Curriculum Based Measurement assessment of reading fluency and other reading skills that is often used with elementary students. Since DIBELS is a quick measure that classroom teachers administer on a regular basis, DIBELS student assessment results provide teachers and administrators with information on students' initial skills and progress monitoring.

DIBELS can be used to monitor progress and assess reading concerns when students are learning to read so that research based interventions can be implemented and reading failure can be prevented. Hall (2006) stated that the Preventive Model from the American Federation of Teachers is based on the three premises: (1) all but very few children can be taught to read proficiently; (2) prevention of reading difficulties in kindergarten through third grade is more cost effective and efficient than remediation in upper grades; and (3) relying on assessment tools and instruction practices that are

research based can prevent reading failure. These premises suggest high expectations for all students in reading as well as a sense of urgency to have a strong start in early reading.

According to Good and Kaminski (2009), DIBELS were designed for use in identifying children experiencing difficulty in acquisition of basic early literacy skills in order to provide support and to prevent later reading difficulties.

Good and Kaminski (2009) stated that DIBELS were based on Curriculum Based Measurement (CBM) procedures developed in the 1970s and 80s by researchers Deno, Mirkin, Fuchs, and Shinn. Research conducted at the University of Oregon and other institutions has documented the reliability and validity of the measures. DIBELS, like CBM, were designed to be a quick, economical, efficient, and systematic process for periodically screening students in kindergarten through third grade to determine which students were not acquiring the determined early literacy skills.

According to Clauset et al. (2008), there are many factors that contribute to the success or failure of study groups using action research to increase student learning, but possibly none more important than school leadership. The principal and other school leaders are essential to ensuring the success of schoolwide action research and the creation of professional learning communities that lead to improved teacher practices and increased student learning.

Whether it is using student data, action research, or supporting schoolwide action research in schools, Clauset et al. (2008) stated that every component of the WFSG System is built on research based systems. Hundreds of schools have implemented this system since 1993, but there has been no funded research of the WFSG system. "WFSG

is a national school improvement design that is not adequately visible on the educational research radar screen" (Clauset et al., 2008, p. 226).

Principals' Role in Professional Development and PLCs

Principals, as instructional leaders for their school buildings, play an integral role in creating a school climate based on increasing student learning, establishing the vision for school improvement, generating a sense of urgency, and communicating expectations for their staff. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) clearly defined standards for quality staff development (2001). Its context standards stated staff development that improves learning for all students (1) will organize adults into learning communities with goals that are aligned with goals of school and district, (2) require skillful district leaders who guide the continuous instructional improvement, and (3) will provide the necessary resources to support adult learning and collaboration.

As the NSCD rationale stated, principals and other district leaders should create a clear vision and combine both pressure and support to achieve school and district goals. Clauset et al. (2008) stated that creating a vision is important, but more is needed from principals and leaders. Communicating the vision means to communicate

> repeatedly through every vehicle possible, develop strategies for achieving the vision, and teach new behaviors through actions . . . 'walking the talk.' For the principal, walking the talk means protecting study group time, actively and regularly giving feedback and support to study groups, participating in an administrative study group, and being an advocate for study groups to the district and community. (p. 152)

As a result of his research on principals creating collaborative communities of professional learning, Dumas (2010) stated that "teachers yearn for opportunities to collaborate. But they need more than simple encouragement – they need structures and expectations to facilitate this collaboration" (p. 53).

The Innovation Configuration from NSDC had a tool that is essentially a checklist

for principals to use to support the work of collaborative, job-embedded initiatives.

According to Champion (2003), the Innovation Configuration can assist principals

through

- describing a new initiative to stakeholders;
- set long-range and interim goals;
- establish realistic expectations and a timeline to implement each part of the initiative;
- monitor and gauge implementation through observations;
- guide teachers, teams, and principals in self-assessment; or
- gather data to diagnose emerging staff needs for professional development. (p. 69)

Principals must evaluate the effectiveness of the staff development that has been

in place to support the vision of the school. Staff development must improve student

learning. The NSDC (2001) recommended using multiple sources of information for

evaluating and measuring the impact of professional development on student learning.

Evaluation of Professional Development and PLCs

Evaluation of professional development has become very important as the

pressures of accountability through high stakes tests and accountability of time and

resources increase. Guskey (2000) identified five levels of evaluating professional

development: (1) participants' reactions, (2) participants' learning, (3) organization

support and change, (4) participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and (5) student

learning outcomes.

Level 1, participants' reaction, is the simplest and easiest method of evaluating

professional development. The questions focus on whether the participants liked the

professional development. Was their time well spent? Did the materials make sense?

Were the activities meaningful? The information is generally gathered through questionnaires at the end of the professional development session (Guskey, 2000, p. 82).

Level 2 focuses on professional development through participants' learning. Did the participants learn something from the professional development experience? This level is often measured by a pre and post assessment (Guskey, 2000, p. 83).

Level 3 focuses on the organizational characteristics necessary for success and is more difficult to measure than levels 1 and 2. This information is used to improve organizational support and provide information for future change initiatives (Guskey, 2000, p. 83).

Level 4 addressed the question, "Did what participants learn make a difference in their professional practice?" This information is gathered from questionnaires, interviews with participants, interviews with their supervisors, and participants' documentation such as journals, logs, and action plans. The evidence is in the daily work of the participants (Guskey, 2000, p. 85).

Level 5 addressed Student Learning Outcomes: "What was the impact on students?" Measures of student learning usually include student performance, assessments, and achievement. Other possible measures could be affective and psychomotor outcomes. Schoolwide measures could be attendance rates, office referrals, and dropout rates (Guskey, 2000, p. 85).

Level 4, making a difference in professional practices should lead to improving student learning or Guskey's level 5. The effectiveness of WFSG or any type of professional development, whether it is job-embedded or not, is ultimately evaluated by the impact it has on student learning.

Summary

Hirsh and Killion (2009) stated the importance of applied and shared knowledge:

collective expertise exists when individuals in the system share their knowledge. When teachers apply that shared knowledge and experience, every student benefits from the expertise of every teacher and no student relies on just the knowledge and expertise of a single teacher. (p. 3)

Hirsh and Killion (2009) also commented, "educators share expertise and systematically address problems of practice by developing shared knowledge, engaging in reflective practice, and assessing the impact of their work" (p. 3). Answers to complex problems are not always found in external, more expensive sources, but often lie within the community where the problem exists.

In education as well as in business, "The best companies are the best collaborators. . . . The next layers of value creation – whether in technology, marketing, biomedicine, or manufacturing – are becoming so complex that no single firm or department is going to be able to master them alone" (Friedman 2005, p. 353). It is a changing world and we must change our teaching methods; we must change the cultures of our schools; we must encourage collaboration and not isolation. Also, we must have a sense of urgency to make improving student learning the priority.

"The world is being flattened. I didn't start it and you can't stop it, except at great cost to human development and your own future. But we can manage it, for better or worse" (Friedman, 2005, p. 469).

Chapter Three

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Whole Faculty Study Groups on student achievement and teacher practices in grades K-3 of a Nebraska school district.

The study examined both student achievement and educator perceptions of teacher practices and student learning. To measure the impact on student achievement, scores from Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literature Skills (DIBELS) assessments were collected and analyzed. To measure educator perceptions, teachers and principals were surveyed, central office administrators were interviewed, and the survey and interview results were compiled.

The central research question was whether WFSG had an impact on kindergarten through third grade student learning. This central question was addressed through four sub-questions:

1. For kindergarten and first grade students whose teachers focused on reading fluency, was there a difference in the percentage of students who met the DIBELS benchmarks in the fall and in the spring?

2. For second grade and third grade students, was there a difference in the changes in individual reading fluency scores as measured by DIBELS in the fall and the spring between those students whose teachers were in WFSG that focused on reading fluency and those students whose teachers were in WFSG that focused on skills other than reading fluency?

3. Did teachers and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on teacher practices?

4. Did teacher and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on student achievement?

These questions were answered by analyzing student achievement data, surveying teachers in WFSG and their principals, examining WFSG logs and actions plans, and interviewing district administrators.

What was the perceived impact of WFSG on teacher practices and student achievement in reading fluency as determined by surveying kindergarten through third grade teachers and their principals and interviewing district administrators? Were there changes in student achievement as measured by student DIBELS reading fluency scores for each of the two groups of students--(1) Kindergarten and first grade students, and (2) Second grade and third grade students.

Was there a significant difference in the percentage of kindergarten and first grade students who met the DIBELS established benchmarks category on DIBELS reading fluency scores from the beginning of the year to the end of the year? It must be noted that all kindergarten and first grade teachers who were in WFSG focused on reading fluency as indicated on WFSG action plans.

Did DIBELS reading fluency scores for second grade and third grade students whose teachers were members of WFSG that focused on reading fluency differ significantly from reading fluency scores of second grade and third grade students whose teachers were members of WFSG that did not focus on reading fluency? A different method for student data analysis was developed for second grade and third grade students

since some second grade and third grade teachers who were in WFSG focused on reading

fluency and others did not focus on reading fluency. As with the kindergarten and first

grade student DIBELS results, reading fluency scores were compared from the beginning

of the year to the end of the year.

Research Design

This study used a mixed methods research design. According to Creswell and

Plano Clark (2007), the most common and well-known mixed methods approach is the

Triangulation Design in which different but complementary data are gathered on the

same topic. The purpose of this design was to bring together the strengths and

weaknesses of quantitative methods with strengths and weaknesses of qualitative

methods. The two methods complemented each other in this topic by validating and

expanding quantitative results with qualitative data.

The Triangulation Design method was used to obtain quantitative and qualitative

data that were gathered to answer the research question during the second semester of the

2008-09 school year. Data from several sources were used to secure an in-depth

understanding of perception of the impact of WFSG on student learning. The

quantitative portion of this study required the collection of kindergarten through third

grade student achievement data through DIBELS for the fall and spring of the 2008-09

school year. DIBELS, a curriculum based assessment designed for elementary grades

that measured reading fluency, had been administered in this district for several years.

Therefore, reliable student achievement data were available. Some quantitative data was

obtained from teacher and principal survey results.

Qualitative data were gathered in two ways: surveys and interviews. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers who were surveyed to gather their perceptions on the topic of changes in teacher practices as a result of what kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers were learning and doing in their Whole-Faculty Study Groups. Principals who supervise the kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers were surveyed about changes in teacher practices and the impact of principal support on the success of professional development, specifically WFSG.

Additional qualitative data was gathered through interviews. Two district administrators were interviewed to gain further understanding of district perceptions and implications. Interviews provided more information about the level of professional development in the district.

Case Setting and Population

The site for this study was Kearney Public Schools, a Nebraska school district with about 5,000 students. There were nearly 1,700 students in kindergarten to third grade in this district. There were approximately 75 kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers and 9 full-time principals who were surveyed. Two district administrators were interviewed. In 2008-09, Kearney Public Schools was in the second year of implementation of Whole-Faculty Study Groups. The district has given DIBELS tests to kindergarten through third grade students in the fall, winter, and spring for several years.

The student population included all kindergarten through third-grade elementary students. Kindergarten through third grade elementary student achievement data was

accessed from the 2008-09 school year. Student data used were DIBELS scores for each kindergarten through third grade elementary student.

The survey population consisted of kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers involved in WFSG and their building principals.

Data Collection and Analysis for Principal and Teacher Perceptions

Changes in teachers' instructional practices were investigated through surveys completed by kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers and their building principals. Interviews with district administrators provided additional information about district practices. Kindergarten through third grade elementary student achievement data for DIBELS were accessed and analyzed.

Survey invitations were sent by email to 75 kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers and 9 principals. Surveys were conducted through Survey Monkey (an online survey instrument). Data were gathered from the 2008-09 school year. Surveys of the kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers and their building principals were completed by May 25, 2009.

Teachers and principals were asked about their perceptions of the impact of WFSG on student learning and to analyze changes in instructional practices. In order to reduce coverage error, all kindergarten through third grade elementary grade classroom teachers listed on the district records and employed by Kearney Public Schools for the 2008-09 school years were surveyed. This list was obtained from a district administrator at the district central administrative office. The list of kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers included school email addresses of all teachers. The communications were sent out electronically through school email, and surveys were

completed online through Survey Monkey. Special education teachers, Title I teachers, counselors, media specialists, and other certificated staff who were not kindergarten, first grade, second grade, or third grade classroom teachers were not asked to complete the survey.

The rights and interests of those involved were protected. The informed consent form and survey were sent by email. Names of participants were kept confidential and anonymous when reporting results. The district administrators gave permission to be named in the study.

Data Collection and Analysis for Student Learning

The analysis of student learning using the DIBELS fluency scores was completed by two methods. The first method was used for the analysis of DIBELS scores for kindergarten and first grade, where all teachers focused on reading fluency. The second method was used for the analysis of DIBELS scores for second and third grade, where some teachers focused on reading fluency and other teachers focused on other student needs such as math, spelling, writing, and reading comprehension.

In the first method, DIBELS scores were gathered for kindergarten and first grade students. DIBELS was an assessment instrument that measured how successfully a child is progressing in the critical skills that underlie success in early reading. A student's score in each skill falls into one of three levels (1) benchmark, (2) at risk of reading difficulty, (3) or somewhere in between (Hall, 2006, p. 30). Individual student scores from the beginning of the year were compared with the scores from the end of the year. DIBELS scores fell into benchmark categories of deficit, emerging, and established, with the goal of all students reading at the established benchmark level. Change in student

scores was measured in the percentage of student scores that were at the established benchmark level in the fall (with the exception of one assessment administered in the winter) assessment compared to the number of student scores that were at the established benchmark level in the spring assessment.

In the second method, used with second and third grade teachers and their students, DIBELS scores were gathered in the same way as DIBELS scores were gathered for kindergarten and first grade students. However, since not all second and third grade teachers were focused on fluency in their WFSG action plans, the teachers where divided into two groups depending on the focus of their WFSG action plans. The two groups into which second and third grade classroom teachers were divided were (a) the WFSG that focused on reading fluency in their action plans, and (b) the WFSG that did not focus on reading fluency in their action plans. DIBELS student scores were collected from the beginning of the year (fall assessments) and the end of the year (spring assessments). The scores from students of teachers in the first group, in which teachers focused on reading fluency, were compared to the scores from students of teachers in the second group, in which teachers did not focus on reading fluency.

Additionally, second and third grade student scores were analyzed as the kindergarten and first grade scores were analyzed, individual student scores from the beginning of the year were compared with the scores from the end of the year. DIBELS scores fell into benchmark categories of deficit, emerging, and established. Change was measured in the percentage of student scores that were at the established benchmark level in the fall assessment compared to the number of student scores that were at the established benchmark level in the spring assessment.

The independent variables represented in this study's research question were groups of all kindergarten and first grade students who were assessed using DIBELS. For second and third grade, the independent variables were (a) groups of students of second and third grade elementary teachers who focused on reading fluency in small collaborative groups meeting on a regular basis in WFSG who were assessed using DIBELS, and (b) groups of students of second and third grade elementary teachers who did not focus on reading fluency in small collaborative groups meeting on a regular basis in WFSG who were assessed using DIBELS. The dependent variable was student achievement measured by DIBELS assessment scores.

The quantitative (data from DIBELS and survey results) and qualitative data (survey results and interview information) were analyzed separately and independently.

Permissions

Throughout this research ethical guidelines were followed. The administration of Kearney Public Schools granted permission for this case study to be completed in their district (see Appendix A) and to be identified by name (see Appendix B).

Permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was requested and received. All the documentation required by the IRB was completed and research did not begin until permission was granted by the IRB (see Appendix F).

Chapter Four

Results and Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Whole Faculty Study Groups on student achievement and teacher practices in grades K-3 of a Nebraska school district. The study examined both student achievement and educator perceptions of teacher practices and student learning. To measure the impact on student achievement, scores from DIBELS assessments were collected and analyzed. To measure educator perceptions, teachers and principals were surveyed and central office administrators were interviewed. Results from surveys and interviews were compiled.

The central research question was whether WFSG had an impact on student learning in the kindergarten through third elementary grades. This central question was addressed through four sub-questions:

1. For kindergarten and first grade students whose teachers focused on reading fluency, was there a difference in the percentage of students who met the DIBELS benchmarks in the fall and in the spring?

2. For second grade and third grade students, was there a difference in the changes in individual reading fluency scores as measured by DIBELS in the fall and the spring between those students whose teachers were in WFSG that focused on reading fluency and those students whose teachers were in WFSG that focused on skills other than reading fluency?

3. Did teachers and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on teacher practices?

4. Did teacher and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on student achievement?

Student Achievement Analysis

To form the basis for student achievement analysis, DIBELS scores from 361 kindergarten students, 402 first grade students, 383 second grade students, and 329 third grade students were analyzed. Seven indicators (similar to subtests) are included in DIBELS; however, for this study, only six indicators were analyzed. Initial Sound Fluency (ISF) was not used because data were not available for the end of the year. According to Hall (2006), the indicators measure these seven skills:

- Initial Sound Fluency (ISF) – ability to recognize and produce the initial sound in an orally presented word (Kindergarten). This indicator was not used in this study because this test is not given at the end of the year.

- Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) – ability to recognize and name a random mixture of uppercase and lowercase letters on a page, including several fonts. (Kindergarten and First Grade)

- Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) – ability to segment a spoken word of two to five phonemes into the individual sounds. (First Grade)

- Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) – ability to read two-letter and three-letter nonsense words, primarily consonant-vowel-consonant patterns. (First Grade)

- Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) – fluency and accuracy in reading grade-level passages aloud, as measured by words read correctly per minute. (First Grade, Second, and Third Grades)

- Word Use Fluency (WUF) – Measures vocabulary by a tally of the number of words spoken in accurate utterances or definitions in response to target words. (Second and Third Grades)

- Retell Fluency (RTF) – ability to retell information from a passage just read, as a measure of comprehension. (Second and Third Grades)

DIBELS benchmarks. According to Hall (2006), DIBELS is not a standardized, norm-referenced test that would produce a standard score or percentile ranking. Instead, the designers of DIBELS have gathered a very large set of data for the purpose of establishing a process for progress monitoring:

> predictive benchmarks or indicators of later reading success. Benchmarks are scores typically achieved at critical milestones by children who are at grade level, and below-benchmark scores are those typically achieved by children reading below grade level. 'Grade level' is estimated to be equivalent to about the fortieth percentile. (Hall, 2006, p. 45)

Tables 1 through 4 provide information about benchmarks for DIBELS measures for kindergarten through third grade students. The benchmarks are shown for the beginning of the year, the middle of the year, and end of the year.

The benchmarks for DIBELS measures for kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade students provided in Table 1 through 4 were the measure used to determine which student scores met the benchmarks at the beginning, middle, and end of the year.

Kindergarten and first grade DIBELS analysis. University of Oregon researchers published established benchmark levels for all indicators in order to help educators determine which students are at risk. The percentage of students reaching these established benchmarks at the beginning of the year compared to the end of the year were

Table 1

DIBELS Benchmarks for Kindergarten

DIBELS Measure	Beginning of Year Goal	Middle of Year Goal	End of Year Benchmark
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	8	27	40

Table 2

DIBELS Benchmarks for First Grade

DIBELS Measure	Beginning of Year Goal	Middle of Year Goal	End of Year Benchmark
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	35	35	35
Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)	24	50	50
Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)	Not Administered	20	40

Table 3

DIBELS Benchmarks for Second Grade

DIBELS Measure	Beginning of Year Goal	Middle of Year Goal	End of Year Benchmark
Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)	44	68	90
Retell Fluency (RTF)	Benchmarks Not Established	Benchmarks Not Established	Benchmarks Not Established
Word Use Fluency (WUF)	Benchmarks Not Established	Benchmarks Not Established	Benchmarks Not Established

Table 4

DIBELS Benchmarks for Third Grade

DIBELS Measure	Beginning of Year Goal	Middle of Year Goal	End of Year Benchmark
Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)	77	92	110
Retell Fluency (RTF)	Benchmarks Not Established	Benchmarks Not Established	Benchmarks Not Established
Word Use Fluency (WUF)	Benchmarks Not Established	Benchmarks Not Established	Benchmarks Not Established

used to determine changes in student learning for kindergarten and first grade students.

For this study, kindergarten and first grade student DIBELS scores were compared to the

established benchmarks in Table 1 and Table 2. Second grade and third grade student

DIBELS scores comparison was between two groups. The first group was students of

teachers who were focusing on reading fluency in their WFSG, and the second group was

students of teachers who were focusing on skills other than reading fluency in their

WFSG.

Kindergarten results of DIBELS assessments.

Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) for kindergarten. Kindergarteners were tested on

one indicator, Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), at the beginning, middle, and end of the

year. Letter Naming Fluency measures the ability to recognize and name a random

mixture of uppercase and lowercase letters on a page, including several fonts.

In one of the areas of DIBELS assessment, Letter Naming Fluency (LNF),

approximately 8% of the kindergarten students scored at the established benchmark level

or higher at the beginning of the year, while 72% scored at the established benchmark

level or higher at the end of the year. These percentages were significantly different based on the results of the McNemar test of dependent proportions, p < .001.

First grade results of DIBELS assessments. In this study, DIBELS indicators used for first grade student learning analysis were: (a) Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) scores from the beginning and end of the, (b) Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) scores from the beginning and end of the year, and (c) Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) scores from the middle and ending of the year.

Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) (Beginning to End) for first grade. PSF measures the ability to segment a spoken word of two to five phonemes into the individual sounds. For first grade students, this skill was tested at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.

In the DIBELS first grade PSF, 68.9% of the first grade students scored at the established benchmark level or higher at the beginning of the year, while 91.7% scored at the established benchmark level or higher at the end of the year. These percentages were found to be significantly different based on the results of the McNemar test of dependent proportions, p < .001.

Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) (beginning to end) for first grade. NWF is the ability to read two-letter and three-letter nonsense words, primarily consonant-vowel-consonant patterns. For first grade students, this skill was tested at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year.

In the NWF assessment, used for first grade students, 20% of the first grade students scored at the established benchmark level or higher at the beginning of the year while 70% scored at the established benchmark level or higher at the end of the year. As

PSF, these percentages were found to be significantly different from each other based on the results of the McNemar test of dependent proportions, $p < .001$.

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) (middle to end) for first grader. DIBELS ORF measures fluency and accuracy in reading grade-level passages aloud, as measured by words read correctly per minute. For first grade students, this test was given at the middle and end of the year.

In ORF 39% of the first grade students scored at the benchmark level or higher at the middle of the year, while 68.7% scored at the benchmark level or higher at the end of the year. These percentages were significantly different based on the results of the McNemar test of dependent proportions, $p < .001$.

Second grade and third grade results. For second grade and third grade, the comparison of student DIBELS scores was between two groups: (a) students of teachers who were focusing on reading fluency in WFSG, and (b) students of teachers who were focusing on skills other than reading fluency in their WFSG.

An additional analysis of second and third grade student scores was completed. A comparison from the beginning of the year to the end of the year was done for second and third grade student scores. The percentage of students reaching these established benchmarks at the beginning of the year compared to the end of the year were used to determine changes in student learning.

Second grade results of DIBELS assessments. A two-way mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted in three areas on second grade student scores. The three areas were ORF, RTF, and WUF with groups (fluency vs. not fluency) as the between-subject factor and the assessment data (beginning vs. end) as the within-subjects factor.

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) for second grade. ORF is a fluency and accuracy measure that involves reading grade-level passages aloud, as measured by words read correctly per minute. For second grade students, this test was given at the beginning and end of the year.

For ORF, the results showed that the interaction of groups and assessment data was not significant, $F(1,381) = 0$, $p = .982$. The group effect was also not significant, $F(1,381) = .046$, $p = .831$. However, the difference in assessment data from the beginning of the year compared to the end of the school year was significant, $F(1,381) = 2229.156$, $p < .001$. The ORF DIBELS scores were significantly higher at the end of the year than at the beginning.

As shown in Figure 1, there was not a significant difference between the scores of the two groups (one group focusing on fluency and the second group not focusing on fluency). However, test scores compared from the beginning of the year to the end of the year did show significant increases.
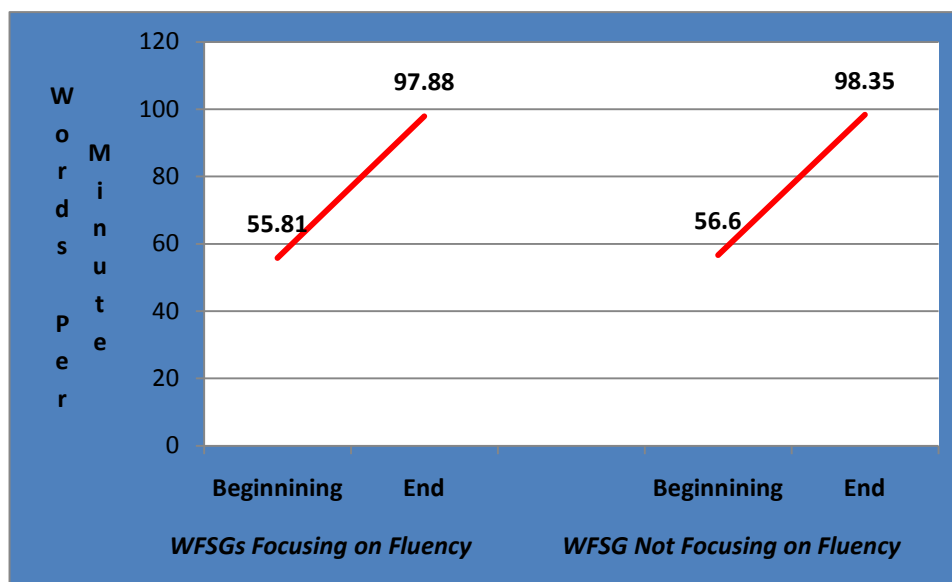
Figure 1. Second grade oral reading fluency.

Figure 1 shows a significant increase in student scores in Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, but there is not a significance difference in scores between the two groups—(a) students of teachers who were focusing on reading fluency in their teacher collaboration small groups called WFSG, and (b) students of teachers who were focusing on skills other than reading fluency in their teacher collaboration small groups called WFSG.

Retell Fluency (RTF) for second grade. RTF is the ability to retell information from a passage just read, as a measure of comprehension. Retell fluency was used for second and third grade students. Student scores were used from tests administered at the beginning and end of the school year.

The results of the RTF for Second Grade scores showed that the interaction of groups and assessment data was not significant, $F(1,379) = .576$ p $= .448$. The group effect was also not significant, $F(1,379) = .521$ p $= .471$. However, the RTF DIBELS scores were significantly higher at the end than at the beginning, $F(1,379) = 677.793$, p $< .001$.

As shown in Figure 2, there was not a significant difference between the scores of the two groups (one group focusing on fluency and the second group not focusing on fluency). However, test scores compared from the beginning of the year to the end of the year did show significant increases. Therefore, there was a significant increase in student achievement from the beginning of the year to the end of the year regardless of the focus of action plans of their teachers in WFSG.
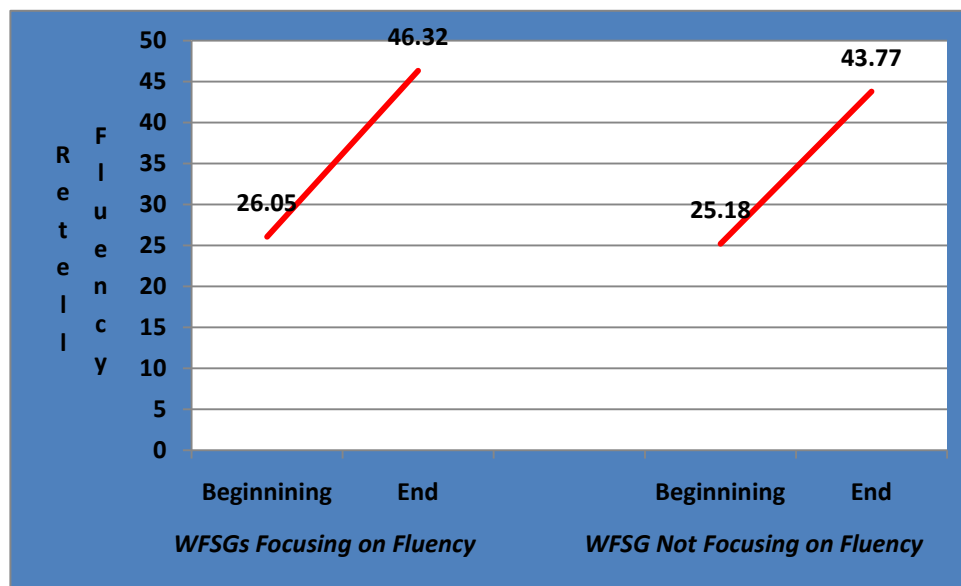
Figure 2. Second grade retell fluency.

Figure 2 shows a significant increase in second grade student scores in RTF from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, but there is not a significance difference in scores between the two groups—(a) students of teachers who were focusing on reading fluency in their teacher collaboration small groups called WFSG, and (b) students of teachers who were focusing on skills other than reading fluency in their teacher collaboration small groups called WFSG.

Word Use Fluency (WUF) for second grade. Word Use Fluency measures vocabulary by a tally of the number of words spoken in accurate utterances or definitions in response to target words.

For WUF using Second Grade scores, the results showed that the interaction of groups and assessment data was not significant, $F(1,381) = .144$, $p = .704$. The group effect was also not significant, $F(1,381) = .293$, $p = .588$. However, the WUF DIBELS scores were significantly higher at the end than at the beginning, $F(1,381) = 239.014$, $p < .001$.

As shown in Figure 3, there was not a significant difference between the scores of the two groups (one group focusing on fluency and the second group not focusing on fluency). However, test scores compared from the beginning of the year to the end of the year did show significant increases. Therefore, there was a significant increase in WUF from the beginning of the year to the end of the year regardless of the focus of action plans of their teachers in WFSG.

Figure 3. Second grade word use fluency.

Figure 3 shows a significant increase in second grade student scores in WUF from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, but there was not a significance difference in scores between the two groups—(a) students of teachers who were focusing on reading fluency in their teacher collaboration small groups called WFSG, and (b) students of teachers who were focusing on skills other than reading fluency in their teacher collaboration small groups called WFSG.

Third grade results of DIBELS assessments.

Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) for third grade. A two-way mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted in three DIBELS areas for third grade scores. The three areas were ORF, RTF, and WUF with groups (fluency vs. not fluency) as the between-subject factor and the assessment data (beginning vs. end) as the within-subjects factor for third grade.

For ORF the results showed that the interaction of groups and assessment data was not significant, $F(1,327) = 3.438$, $p = .065$. The group effect was not significant, $F(1,327) = .508$, $p = .477$. However, the ORF DIBELS scores were significantly higher at the end than at the beginning, $F(1,327) = 786.862$, $p < .001$.

As shown in Figure 4, there was not a significant difference between the scores of the two groups (one group focusing on fluency and the second group not focusing on fluency). However, test scores compared from the beginning of the year to the end of the year did show significant increases.
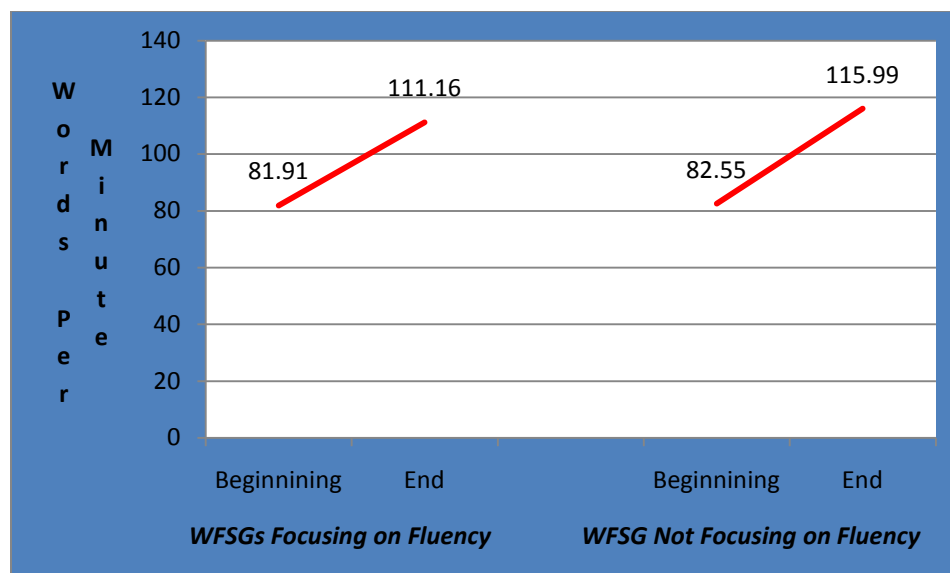
Figure 4. Third grade oral reading fluency.

As shown in Figure 4, there was not a significant difference between the scores of the two groups (one group focusing on fluency and the second group not focusing on fluency). However, test scores compared from the beginning of the year to the end of the year did show significant increases. Therefore, there was a significant increase in third grade student learning in ORF from the beginning of the year to the end regardless of the focus of action plans of their teachers in WFSG.

Retell Fluency (RTF) for third grade. The results of RTF for Third Grade showed that the interaction of groups and assessment data was not significant, $F(1,327) = .157$ $p = .692$. The group effect was also not significant, $F(1,327) = .138$ $p = .710$. However, the RTF DIBELS scores were significantly higher at the end than at the beginning, $F(1,327) = 62.062$, $p < .001$.

As shown in Figure 5, there was not a significant difference between the scores of the two groups (one group focusing on fluency and the second group not focusing on fluency). However, RTF test scores compared from the beginning of the year to the end of the year did show significant increases. Therefore, there was a significant increase in student learning in RTF from the beginning of the year to the end of the year regardless of the focus of action plans of their teachers in WFSG.

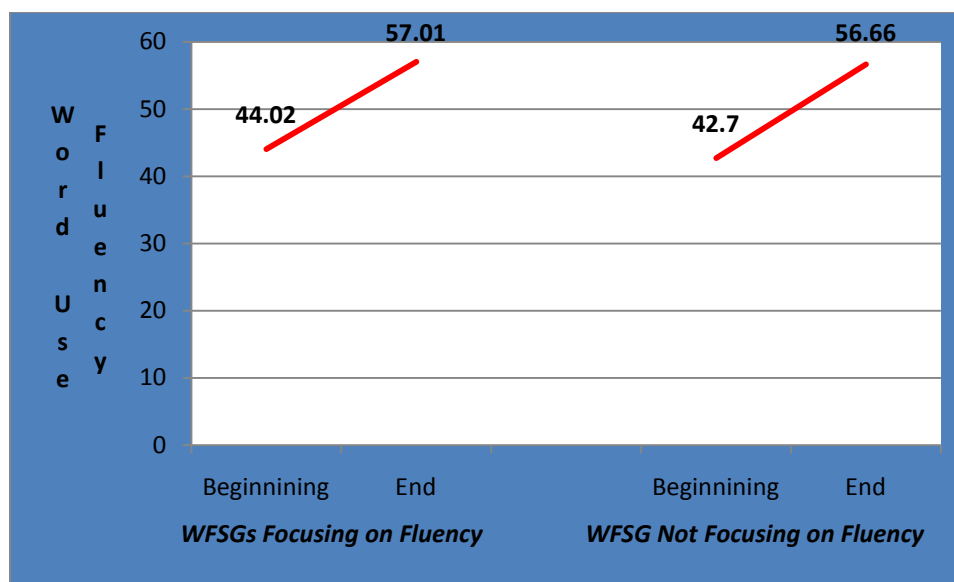There was not a significant difference between the scores of the two groups (one group focusing on fluency and the second group not focusing on fluency) as shown in Figure 5. There was a significant increase in third grade student learning in RTF from the beginning of the year to the end regardless of the focus of action plans of their teachers in WFSG.
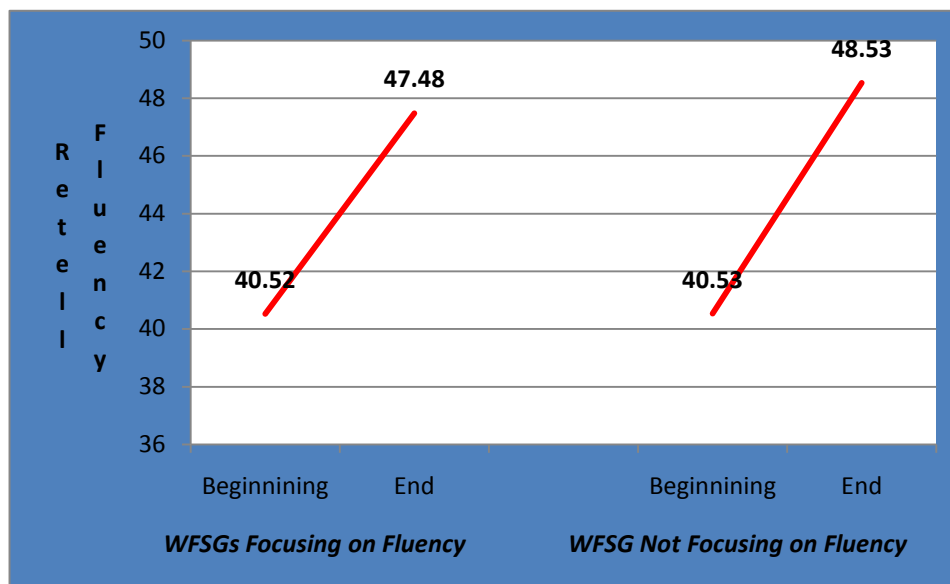
Figure 5. Third grade retell fluency.

Word Use Fluency (WUF) for third grade. Third Grade WUF results showed that the interaction of groups and assessment data was significant, $F(1,326) = 4.02$, $p = .046$. The group effect was not significant, $F(1,326) = .828$, $p = .363$. The difference in assessment data from the beginning of the year to the end of the year was also not significant, $F(1,326) = 3.611$, $p = .058$.

Third grade WUF indicator showed a decrease in scores of students whose teachers were focused on reading fluency and a slight increase in scores of students whose teachers were not focused on reading fluency from the beginning of the year to the end of the year (see Figure 6). The results of the third grade WUF indicator were not consistent with other indicators in other third grade indicator results. It was also inconsistent with scores from DIEBEL indicators in other grades.
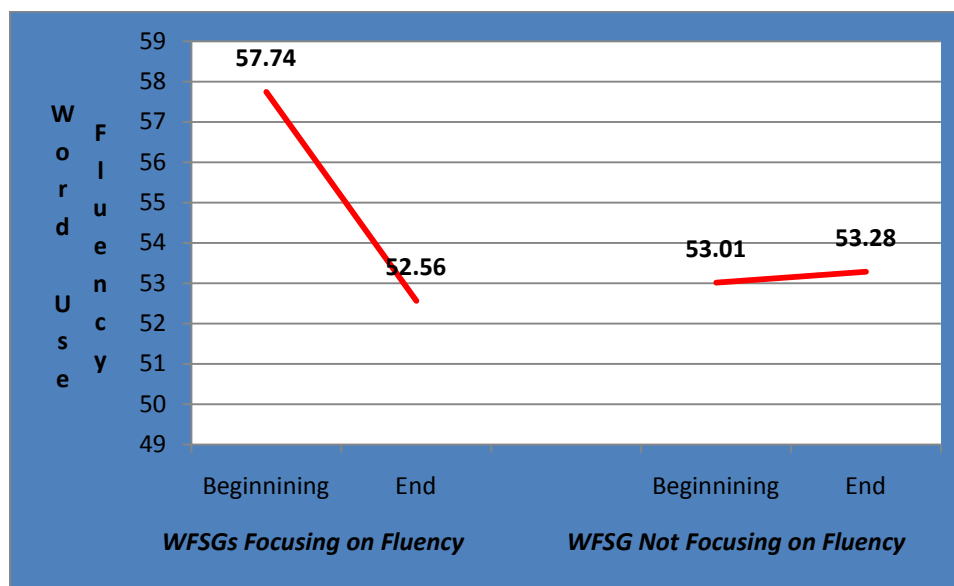
Figure 6. Third grade word use fluency.

Due to the significant interaction, another test was used to further explore the results. The Least Significant Difference (LSD) test was used by comparing the mean of one group with the mean of the other group. The results showed that there was a significant drop of WUF DIBELS scores for the group focusing on reading fluency, t(53) = 2.14, p = .03. However, for the group not focusing on reading fluency, there was no significant difference between WUF DIBELS scores at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year.

As shown in Figure 6, the results of the Third Grade WUF test were inconsistent with other results in this study. Third Grade WUF DIBELS indicator showed a decrease in scores of students whose teachers were focused on reading fluency and a slight increase in scores of students whose teachers were not focused on reading fluency from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.

The researcher searched for possible reasons for the third grade student scores to decline or only slightly increase in the DIBELS indicator WUF. Since these results were inconsistent with other DIBELS results in all grades, an additional analysis was conducted. This analysis, a simple effect test, was completed with the same results. The researcher contacted district administrators in order to discover a reason for the inconsistent results of the WUF scores for third grade. District administrators did not have any additional information or ideas as to the inconsistent results of this test of third grade scores.

Teacher and Principal Survey Results

Survey data involved kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers who were surveyed to gather their perceptions on the topic of changes in teacher practices as a result of what kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers were learning and doing in their WFSG. Principals who supervised the kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers were surveyed about changes in teacher practices and the impact of principal support on the success of professional development, specifically WFSG.

The survey invitations were sent by email to 75 kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers and 9 principals. The surveys were conducted through Survey Monkey (an online survey instrument). Data were gathered from the 2008-09 school year at Kearney Public Schools. Surveys of the kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers assigned to elementary schools and their building principals were completed by May 25, 2009.

Certified teachers and principals were asked about their perceptions of the impact of WFSG on student learning and to analyze changes in instructional practices. Teacher

and principal comments are recorded in this results chapter as the teachers and principals

reported them on Survey Monkey surveys. Figures in this chapter were generated by

Survey Monkey with questions embedded within the figure.

Teacher survey results. Email invitations, including the informed consent

statement, were sent to 75 kindergarten through third grade elementary classroom

teachers asking them to complete a survey on WFSG through Survey Monkey. The

survey was sent out in May 2009 as principals and teachers were completing the 2008-

2009 school year. Teachers and principals were accustomed to receiving and sending

information through school email and were familiar with the Survey Monkey format.

The researcher believes this had a positive effect on the response rate.

Of the 75 kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers invited to

complete the survey, 42 teachers responded, for a response rate of 56%. Teacher surveys

were completed by May 30, 2009.

The purpose of the surveys was to evaluate the perceived impact of WFSG by

addressing the basic questions: (a) What did you learn that makes a difference in your

professional practice? and (b) What was the impact on students' learning?

Teacher responses to each question are direct quotes taken as written on their

surveys.

Question # 1 – school where currently teaching. There were 11 elementary

schools in the Kearney Public Schools. The first question was for teachers to identify the

school building in which they taught. As shown in Figure 7, the number of kindergarten

through third grade elementary teachers who responded from each school were Kenwood
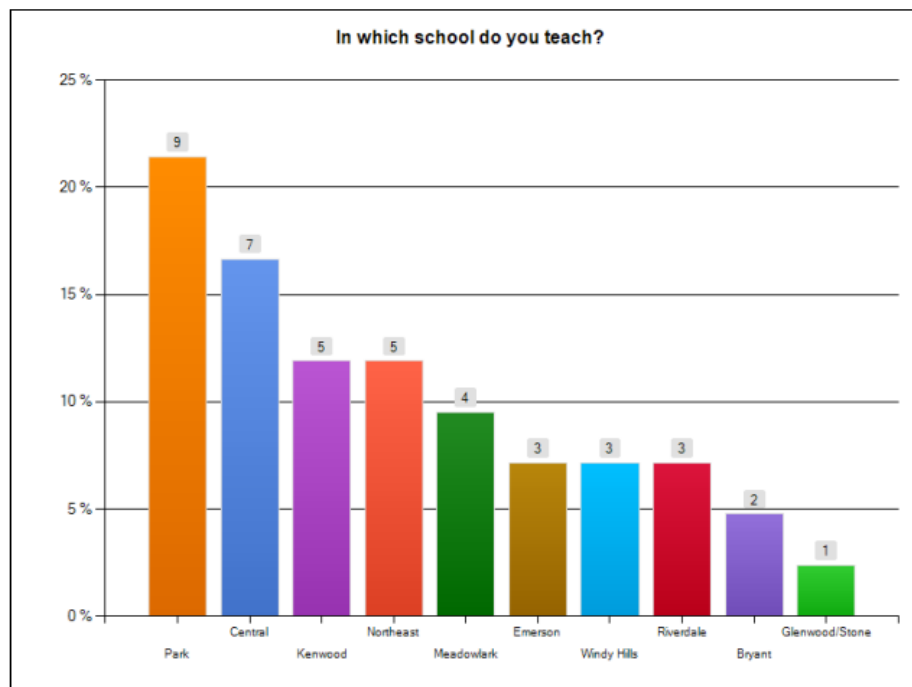
Figure 7. Teacher survey - School at which teachers taught.

(5), Bryant (2), Central (7), Emerson (3), Glenwood and Stone (1), Northeast (5), Park

(9), Windy Hills (3), Riverdale (3), and Meadowlark (4) for a total of 42.

There were a total of 42 respondents to the first question with the largest number

of teachers reporting from Park Elementary School (9) and the next largest number from

Central Elementary (7). Glenwood and Stone had the lowest response rate (1 teacher);

however, Glenwood and Stone were small rural schools with the fewest number of total

teachers.

Question # 2 - grade level taught. As shown in Figure 8, teachers were asked to

identify the grade level at which they taught. For the 42 respondents, the results were

kindergarten (11), kindergarten and first grade combined (1), first grade (15), second

grade (7), and third grade (8).
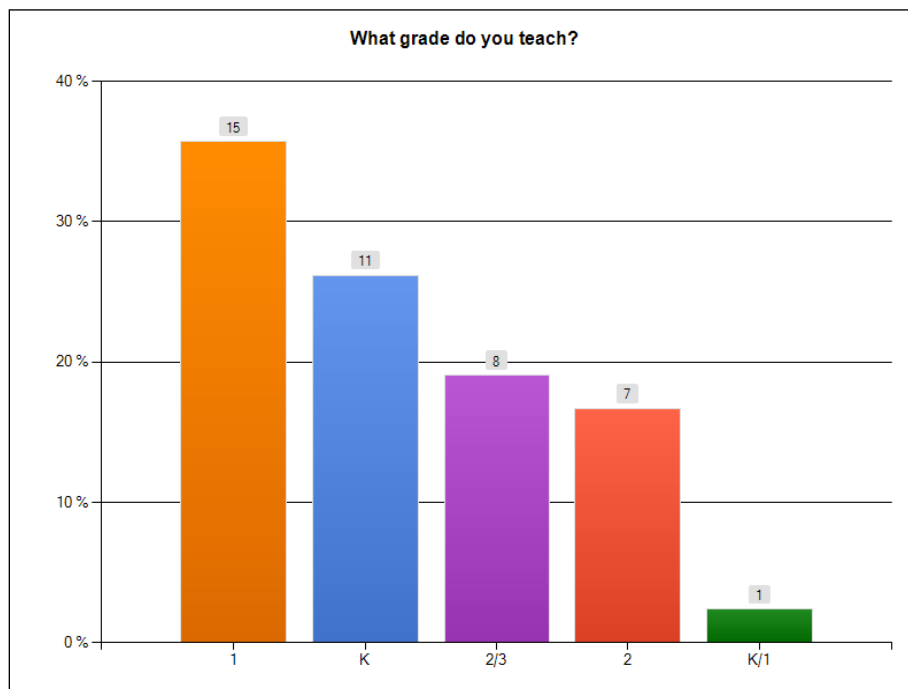
Figure 8. Teacher survey - What grade taught by teachers.

As shown in Figure 8, there were a total of 42 respondents to the second question about grade level taught, with the largest number of teachers reporting as first grade teachers (15) and the next largest number reporting as kindergarten teachers (11). A combination of kindergarten/first grade teacher had the lowest response rate (1 teacher).

Question # 3 - student learning needs listed on action plans. The study researched student learning needs that each group listed on their action plans. Of the replies for the question, "Which student learning needs did your WFSG list on your action plan and address this year?" there were 36 written responses with 33 of the learning needs addressing reading:

- reading comprehension,
- reading fluency, and
- other reading skills of some type.

Three teachers listed a need that was not a reading learning need. There was one action

plan in three other areas:

- math computation,

- higher order thinking skills, and

- spelling.

Reading skills of one type or another were listed as student learning needs by

91.6% of the teachers who responded to this question.

Question # 4 – Membership by grade in WFSG. WFSG were made up of three

to six teachers. The groups were kept small so there was more collaboration within the

group. Figure 9 shows the average membership by grade.

As shown in Figure 9, the WFSG groups consisted of combinations of

kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade teachers.
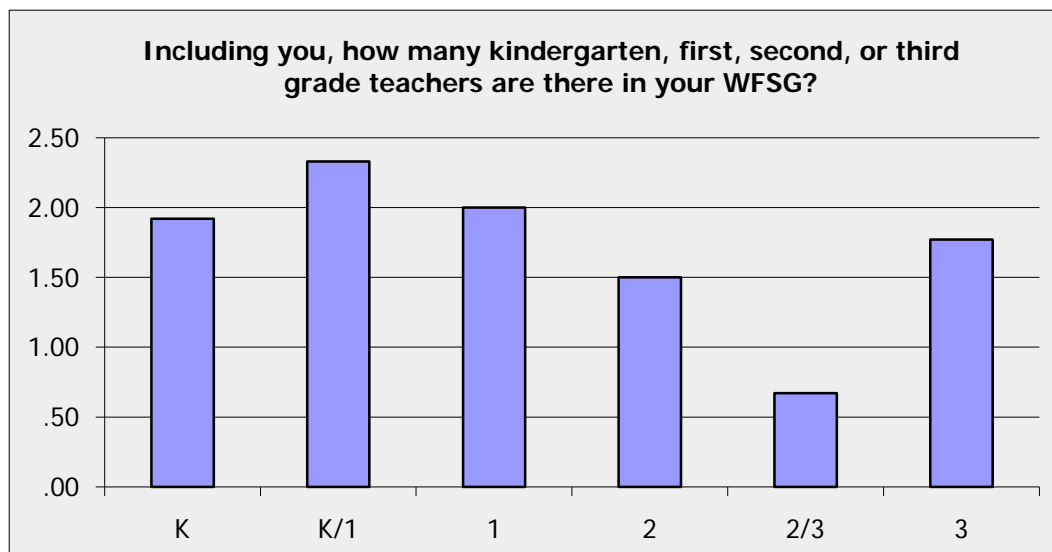
Figure 9. Teacher survey – Membership by grade in WFSG.

Question # 5 - list action research steps done in WFSG. Teachers were also asked to check any action research steps done in their WFSG and add anything else that their group had done. Teacher responses were varied: 92.9% diagnosed students' current levels of performance (relative to need); 92.9% identified strategies/materials to use in their classes to address needs; 85.7% analyzed data that showed the results of using strategies in their classrooms; 78.6% examined samples of student work for evidence of student understanding; 76.2% articulated strategies they used; 66.7% planned lessons for how each member used the strategy/materials; 61.9% demonstrated/practiced lessons or strategies members used or would use in class, and 57.1% developed and designed materials to address need. Other action research steps were added by teachers:

- correlated grades with expectations, teaching, and assessing;

- implemented consistent reading system and integrated it with basal series;

- implemented spelling instructional strategies;

- supported new teachers; and

- implemented reading intervention according to TRI training (TRI is Targeted Reading Intervention).

Figure 10 shows the action research steps done in WFSG with specific steps and percentages of teacher who completed each action research step.

Figure 10 shows the list of action steps done throughout the year by teachers in WFSG.

It should be noted that Kearney Public Schools had implemented two programs recently that had an impact on action research steps. The two programs were (a) the TRI grant program, in which the district had been chosen to participate; and (b) a new reading series called Treasures Reading Program from Macmillan/McGraw-Hill.
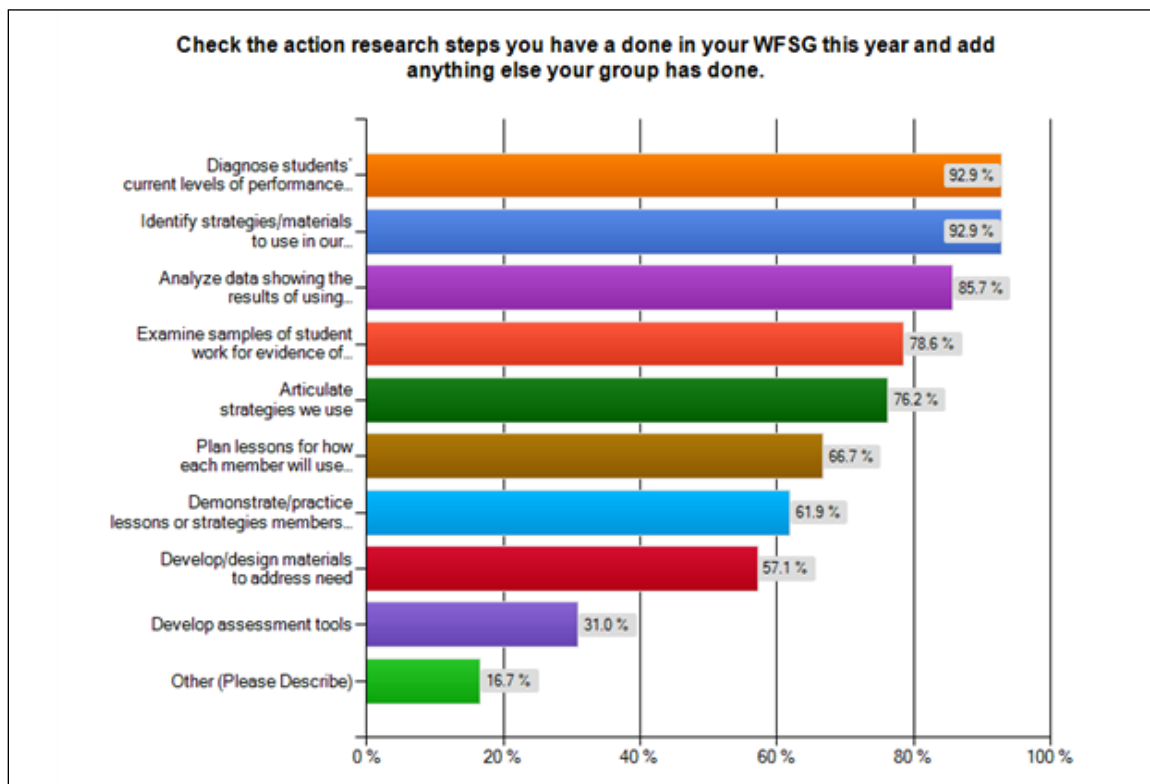
Figure 10. Teacher survey - Action research steps done in WFSG.

Kearney Public Schools was involved with a grant research program through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The TRI is a dual-level professional development intervention designed for both at-risk K-1 students and their classroom teachers. Teachers were trained in reading strategies and data were collected by the National Research Center on rural Education Support at the University of North Carolina. Kearney Public School elementary teachers trained in TRI worked with their struggling readers intensively on a daily basis for about 15 minutes, initially one-on-one and then transitioning to very small groups, using efficient, evidence-based reading strategies refined daily with a diagnostic mindset (http://www.nrcres.org/TRI.htm).

The Treasures Reading Program that was adopted by the district is a comprehensive, research-based reading program that offers high quality literature to engage learners. Instruction and practice ensure students' growth in reading proficiency. Each week's lesson integrates grammar, writing, and spelling for a total language arts approach.

The Treasures Reading Program and TRI were mentioned many times by teachers and principals and are reflected in some of the additional comments. Reported on the survey:

- Implementing interventions according to TRI training teachers received.

- Make sure all grades are correlating what we are expecting, teaching, and assessing.

- Implementing a consistent reading system and integrating it with the basal series.

- Trying a new program called www.spellingcity.com and incorporating more "fun" ways to study such as writing words in shaving cream.

- There was general support given to teachers with understanding of research. Reading specialists and English Language Learner (ELL) teachers were also in Whole-Faculty Study Groups.

- Teachers developed a high frequency word book to be used in grades K-2 and available district wide.

Question # 6 – change in teaching practices to address student learning needs in WFSG. Of 42 respondents, 29 or 69% replied that their teaching practices (what they taught and how they taught) changed for the student learning needs addressed as a result of their WFSG work. However, 13 or 31% of the teachers responded no. One teacher response was, "I have better insight on what to focus on when helping students learn to

read and the process of increasing the difficulty of the task to meet the need of the student."

There were many comments about the TRI strategies since Kearney Public Schools was a part of a grant with the University of North Carolina. Three of the elementary schools were chosen as experimental schools using TRI strategies, and three other schools were chosen as control schools for the study. The three experimental schools were Bryant, Kenwood, and Meadowlark. The teachers in these three schools were trained in TRI practices and have been using TRI methods and strategies. The three elementary schools where teachers were using TRI methods had very positive responses about the results. As one teacher who is using TRI strategies commented, "We use the TRI program from North Carolina. My five lowest students all made benchmark for oral reading on the DIBELS test. Each of them was significantly low at the start of the year."

The new reading series, Treasures, recently purchased by the district, was also mentioned often by teachers. The Daily Five is an instructional strategy used in the new Treasures reading series. Learning the new reading series and discussing the instructional strategies in their WFSG was reported favorably by several teachers as the following comment indicates, "I use the Daily Five and have coordinated it with our new reading series."

Question # 7 - changes in teaching practices as result of WFSG work. Teachers who reported that their teaching practices had changed as a result of the WFSG work described those changes. Many teachers listed specific strategies such as the Treasurer's reading series Daily Five, TRI strategies used in three elementary schools, timed reading

fluency passages, small group instruction strategies, hands on strategies, and test taking

strategies. Other teachers' comments related to the process of WFSG collaboration.

- new ideas, lessons, and materials were shared;

- shared ideas, implemented new ideas for consistency purposed; and

- used newly discovered strategies.

Some comments on other teaching practices that had changed through WFSG are:

- more parent involvement for fluency practice to read at home;

- students met their end of the year goals;

- words were practiced weekly rather than hit or miss;

- other adults in addition to the teacher were involved;

- one on one instruction with students for an intense consistent strategy intervention; and

- better insight on what to focus on when helping students learn to read and the process of increasing the difficulty of the task to meet the need of the student.

Question # 8 - WFSG impact on the student learning. As shown in Figure 11,

teachers were asked if the work of their WFSG had an impact on the learning of their

students with regard to learning needs. Teachers rated student learning on a scale to 1 to

5, with 5 having the most significant impact. The average rating was 3.57. There were

no teachers who rated the impact as 1 or no impact. Five teachers rated the impact as 2 or

minimal. Eighteen teachers chose 3 or the midpoint rating as the rating for the impact on

learning of their students. Nine teachers selected 4 as the impact on student learning, and

ten teachers chose 5, the highest rating possible.

Teachers were asked to rate the impact of their WFSG on student learning. As

shown in Figure 11, no teacher chose 1 (no impact) as the impact on learning of students,
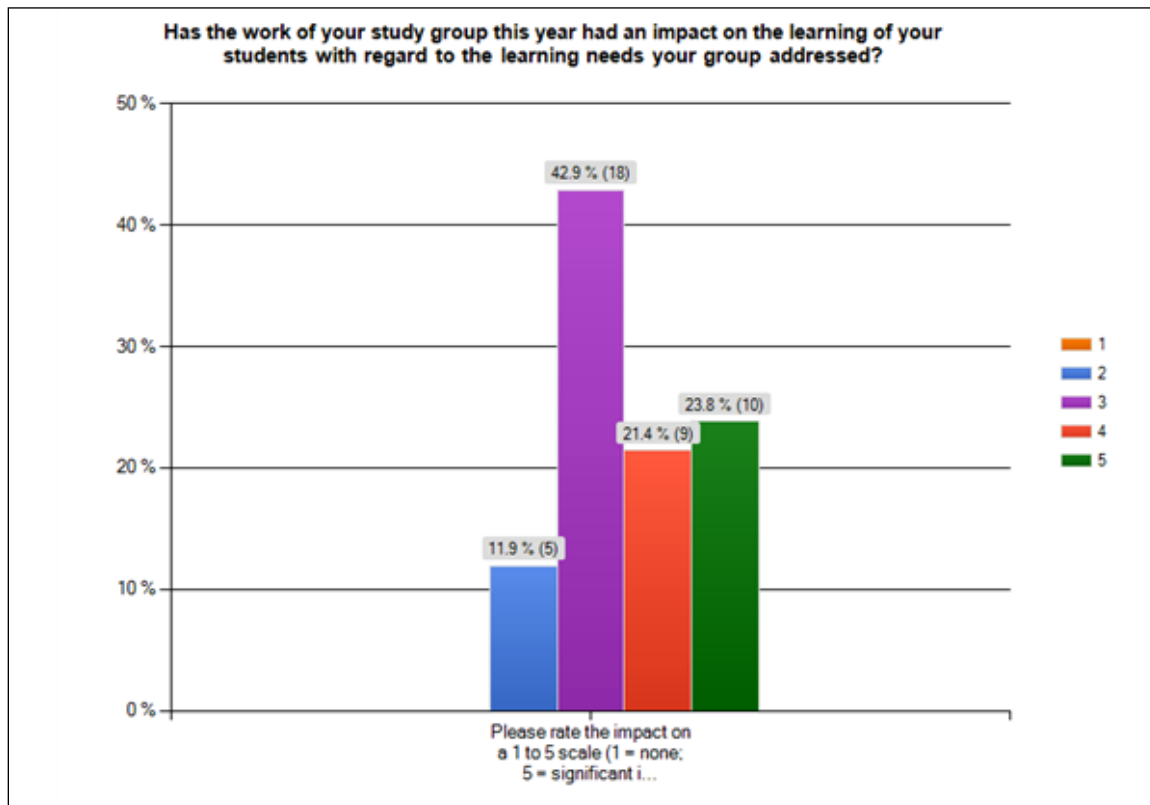
Figure 11. Teacher survey - Impact on student learning in regard to student needs.

five teachers chose 2, eighteen teachers chose 3, nine chose 4, and ten chose 5 (most

significant impact). This question provided needed information as one of the purposes of

this study was to measure the perceived impact of WFSG on student learning from the

teachers' perspective.

Comments from teachers emphasized student achievement and how well students

learned.

- I had no students who did not meet proficient or advanced. Only two were proficient and the rest were all advanced.

- Both first grade rooms had all five of their lowest readers make benchmark in oral reading on DIBELS tests.

- I teach kindergarten this year. I have at least nine students reading at the first grade level. I have never had that many and most of them are reading at the end of first grade books!

There was a comment that WFSG were used for TRI during the 2008-09 school year. There were other comments about the impact of the WFSG structure on student learning.

- We created a tool during WFSG time and really won't see results until next year when we use the tool created.

- My goal for first grade reading is to teach students how to read fluently by the end of first grade. This goal for WFSG has not changed what I already do every year.

- I think, being new to the district, I was given the opportunity to converse with my colleagues about what practices we were implementing in the kindergarten and first grades. I think it is essential to communicate in order to ensure that we are being consistent in our expectations and applications in Phonemic Awareness for these primary grades.

Question # 9 - data from assessments available to teachers. Since teachers need data to document student learning, another question on the survey was "Do you have data from classroom assessments or other assessments such as DIBELS to document changes in student learning as a result of your WFSG work?"

As shown in Figure 12, of the 42 teachers, 21 teachers or 50% reported that they have lots of data from classroom assessments or other assessments such as DIBELS to document changes in student learning as a result of your WFSG work. Seventeen or 40.5% indicated they had partial data, and four teachers or 9.5% reported that they had no data from classroom assessments or other assessments to document changes in student learning as a result of their WFSG work.
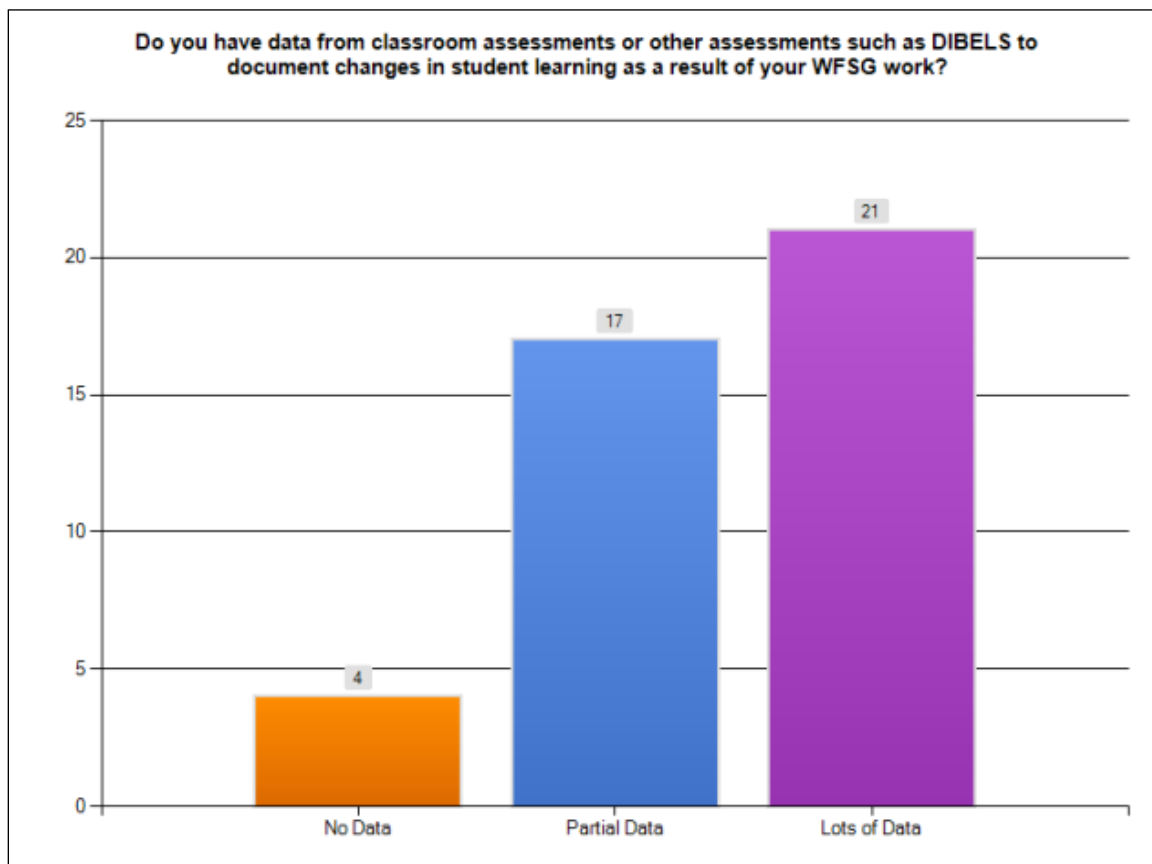
Figure 12. Teacher Survey - Amount of data from assessments available to teachers.

Teachers' responses indentified data from video tapes of performance over time,

weekly tests, data from prior years, DIBELS scores, and student checklists of words.

Other comments related to WFSG were:

- I would use the same data without WFSG.

- We have lots of data. I do not think WFSG had a great impact on our results.
  I do think our new reading series did.

Question # 10 - change in teacher practices because of WFSG. When asked,

"Did your practices as a teacher change because of WFSG?" Twenty-eight (66.7%) of the

42 teachers responded "yes," and 14 (33.3%) responded "no" (see Figure 13).

As shown in Figure 13, a majority of teachers (28 teachers) reported that teacher practices did change due to WFSG; however, there were 14 teachers who responded that WFSG did not impact or change their teaching practices in any way.
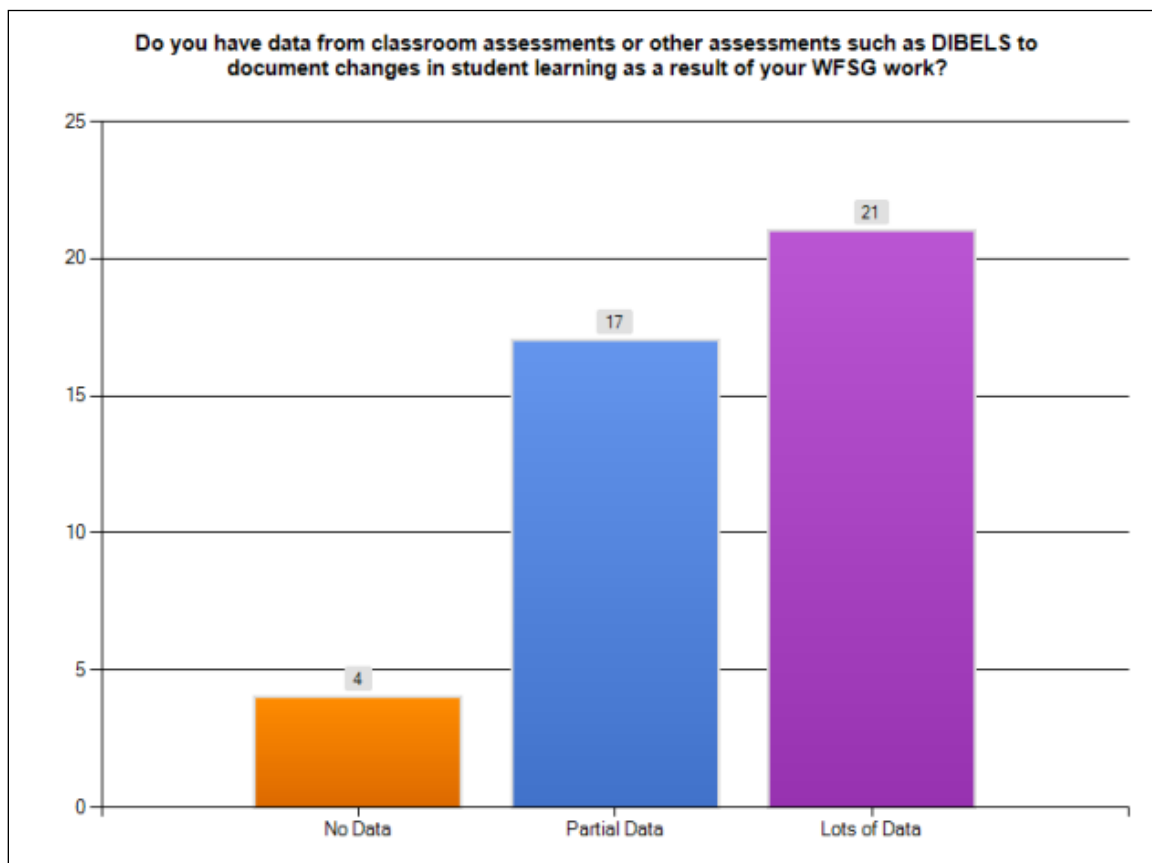
Figure 13. Teacher Survey - Changes in teacher practices due to WFSG.

Comments on this question were written by 31 teachers. All comments were about how teacher practices had changed. There were no comments about why teacher practices had not changed. There was a comment that indicated teacher practices had changed but it was not due to WFSG.

- I work extremely hard each year to make sure that all of my students are reading at or above grade level. (l love to teach reading!) Even though reading fluency was our goal for WFSG it would not have changed my way of teaching.

The remaining comments were about how teacher practices changed, but it is difficult to discern if the change in teacher practices was because of WFSG, other initiatives in the district, or other reasons. Again, TRI strategies and interventions are credited by teachers as to changing teacher practices. Comments were:

- Somewhat – Due to TRI.

- I have always taught the words, but followed a more organized schedule this year.

- I discovered the need for vocabulary development in students. I talk a lot more about the meaning of words and ask students to describe what words mean. I specifically address the reading need of the student and target in on what they need to do become a better reader.

- We were required to do individual lessons.

- I used different strategies.

- I have a more successful reading program and students are making more progress. Our WFSG made it easier to transition to our new reading series and to continue to implement the Daily Five more fully.

- I question the students more and did more modeling.

- Using TRI gave me new ideas/methods for teaching phonetic concepts.

- I teach main idea/details through a wider variety of methods.

- I will add timed fluency passages to my practices every year.

- The way I assess will be much easier due to this book.

- Yes, because of the use of the fluency passages.

- It helped me focus on one basic area of study with the children who needed it most.

- I always worked with students to improve their reading skills, but with TRI I am able to work 15 minutes at a time one-on-one.

- I used the same strategies and resources I would have used before, there was more assessing and practice time planned.

- I implemented strategies that were shared by my colleagues that I otherwise may not have focused upon.

- WFSG gave me more time to collaborate with fellow teachers and to get ideas to take back and implement in the classroom.

- I am more focused on teaching specific skills to help struggling readers.

- I was more focused on what I was teaching and the procedures were the same for all students. The students were directed and knew their expectations, not only as an individual, but also as a partner.

- I basically have taught the same, but I did add new strategies that I discovered from WFSG.

- I modeled and explained the importance of self correcting more often. They are much better at monitoring their own reading which has caused them to be very good understanding the story, too, because they are making sure it makes sense.

- I tried new ways to teach spelling not as many worksheets, more hands on!

- I have integrated research based practices which have improved student performance.

- As education practices tend to recycle, the small group instruction has resurfaced with the name of guided reading. I tend to keep my groups flexible and as students advance at different rates, I found my groups constantly changing. I did not have any para assistance but that is an asset that would really improve small group instruction.

- Since we were using DIBELS already, we shared how we were training kids in Phonemic Awareness and how we were preparing them to attack words like we assess in Nonsense Word Fluency. We were using many similar practices. Plus, we have a Phonemic Awareness section in our reading series and we were following that curriculum to be able to see if we thought that was effective this first year.

- New and different ways to reach student needs.

- I will use graphic organizers more consistently and I will use the terms main ideas and details when teach writing, too.

- I learned how to effectively incorporate the Daily 5 into my classroom.

Teachers were willing to attribute new curriculum and other training to changes in teacher practices. Often teachers were collaborating in their WFSG on new curriculum and other strategies introduced to teachers in other trainings.

Question # 11 – strategies and practices used this year but not last year because of WFSG. As shown in Figure 14, 42 teachers responded to the question about using instructional practices or strategies in their classrooms that they had not used last year because of WFSG; 30 or 71.4% of the teachers said that they are using new instructional practices due to WFSG, but, 12 or 28.6% of the teachers said that they do not use instructional practices or strategies in their classrooms this year that they did not use last year because of WFSG.

Many practices were listed, and 31 teachers wrote comments to this survey questions. Two teachers recognized other initiatives such as the new reading series and the TRI program for the change in practices and not WFSG. Some teachers saw WFSG as a way to share collaboratively on use of strategies from the reading series or other sources.

Question # 12 - how strategies were learned. Thirty-two teachers answered the question, "How did you learn of these instructional practices or strategies?" Teacher responses contained from one to four sources of learning instructional practices.

As shown in Table 5, teachers reported (13 times) that more strategies were learned through other teachers in their WFSG than any other way. Reading Series and TRI grant training was reported (7 times) as the next most frequent methods of learning

Did you use instructional practices or strategies in your classroom this year that you did not use last year because of WFSGs?
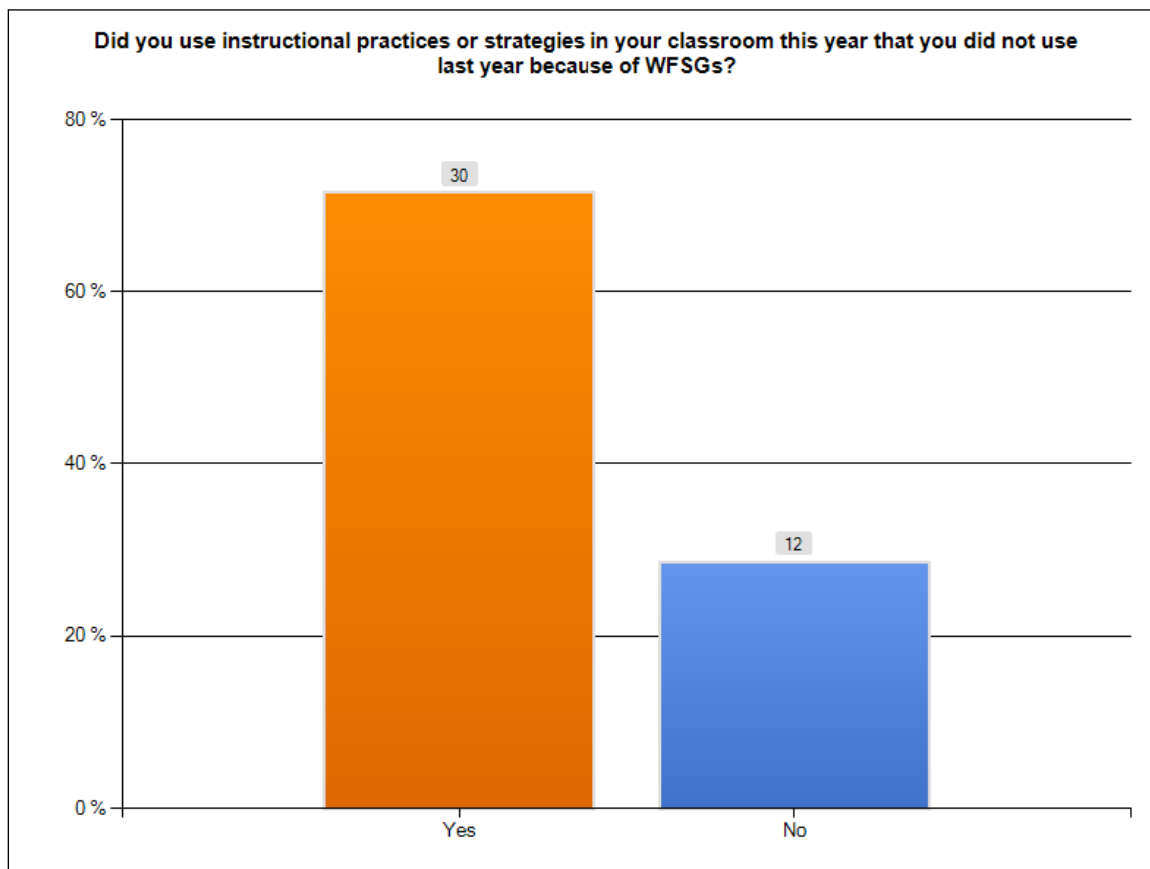
Figure 14. Teacher survey – Used instructional practices this year that were not used last year.

new strategies. Self-teaching was reported 3 times. Three methods--other curriculum, district specialists, and grants--were reported only once.

As shown in Table 5, 13 teachers stated that other teachers in WFSG were the sources of learning instructional practices with 7 teachers responding that they had learned new instructional practices and strategies from TRI and the district reading series.

Other ways teachers learned of instructional practices or strategies were workshops, internet/resources, teacher knowledge (my own knowledge), district specialists (i.e., reading specialist), grants, and other district curriculum.

Table 5

Teacher Survey - How Strategies were Learned

Types of Sources	# of Sources
Other Teachers/WFSG	13
Reading Series	7
TRI	7
Internet Resources	6
Workshops	6
Myself	3
Other Curriculum	1
District Specialists	1
Grants	1

Teachers used many sources to learn instructional practices; however, they did depend most on each other and teacher collaboration to learn new instructional practices and strategies.

Question # 13 - how many teachers used instructional practices. As shown in Figure 15, the survey revealed that 30 or 73.2% of the 41 responding teachers thought that all teachers in their WFSG used the instructional practices in their classrooms. Eleven or 26.8% of the teachers said that some of the teacher in their WFSG used the instructional practices and strategies in their classrooms.

Of 41 responding teachers, 30 or 73.2% said that all of the teachers in their WFSG used the instructional practices and strategies in their classrooms. Approximately one-fourth or 11 teachers reported that some of the teachers in their WFSG used instructional practices and strategies in their classrooms (see Figure 15).
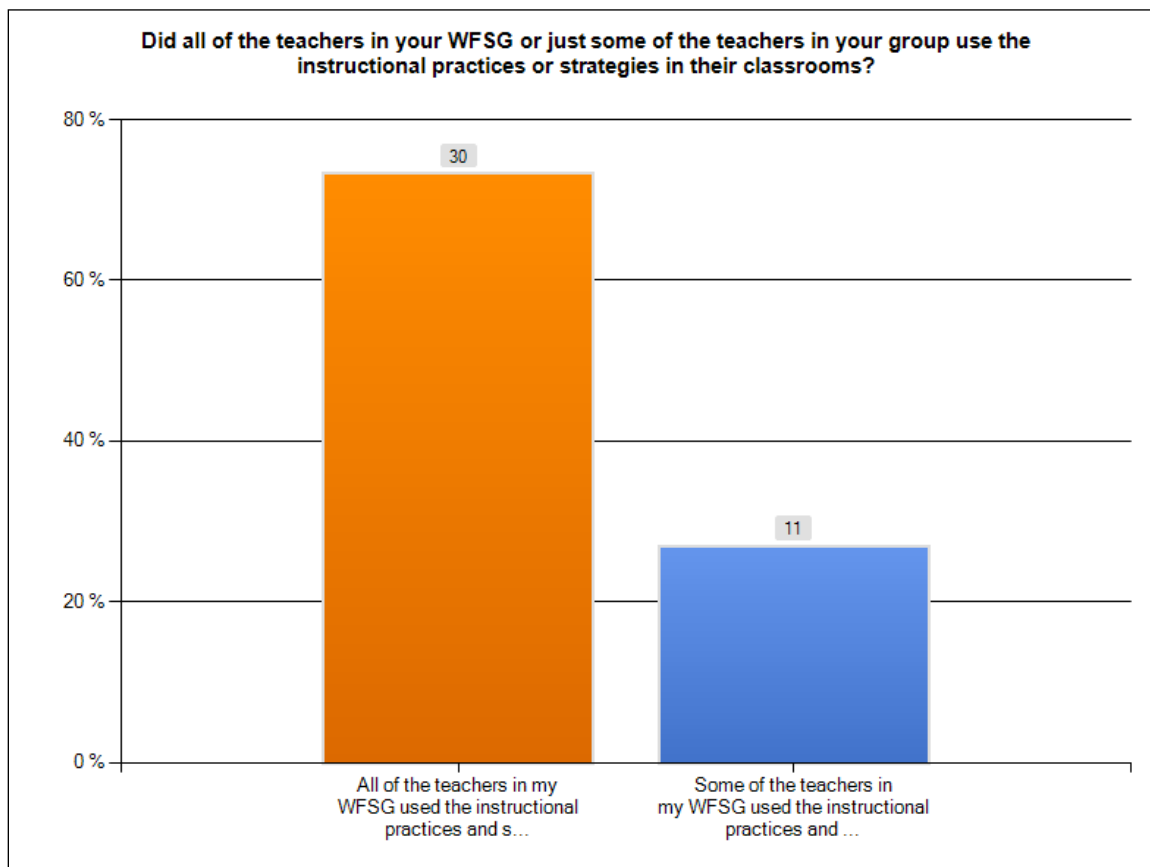
Figure15. Teacher survey - All or part of teachers in WFSG used instructional practices.

Question # 14 - factors attributed to improving student learning through WFSG. Teacher were asked "Would you attribute a change in attitude, change in awareness, or a change in teacher practices as a factor in improving student learning through WFSG?" As shown in Figure 16, a change in awareness was chosen 32 times as the factor attributed to improving learning through WFSG. A change in practices was chosen 26 times, and change in attitude was chosen 16 times. The 41 teachers who answered the question could check all the responses that applied.
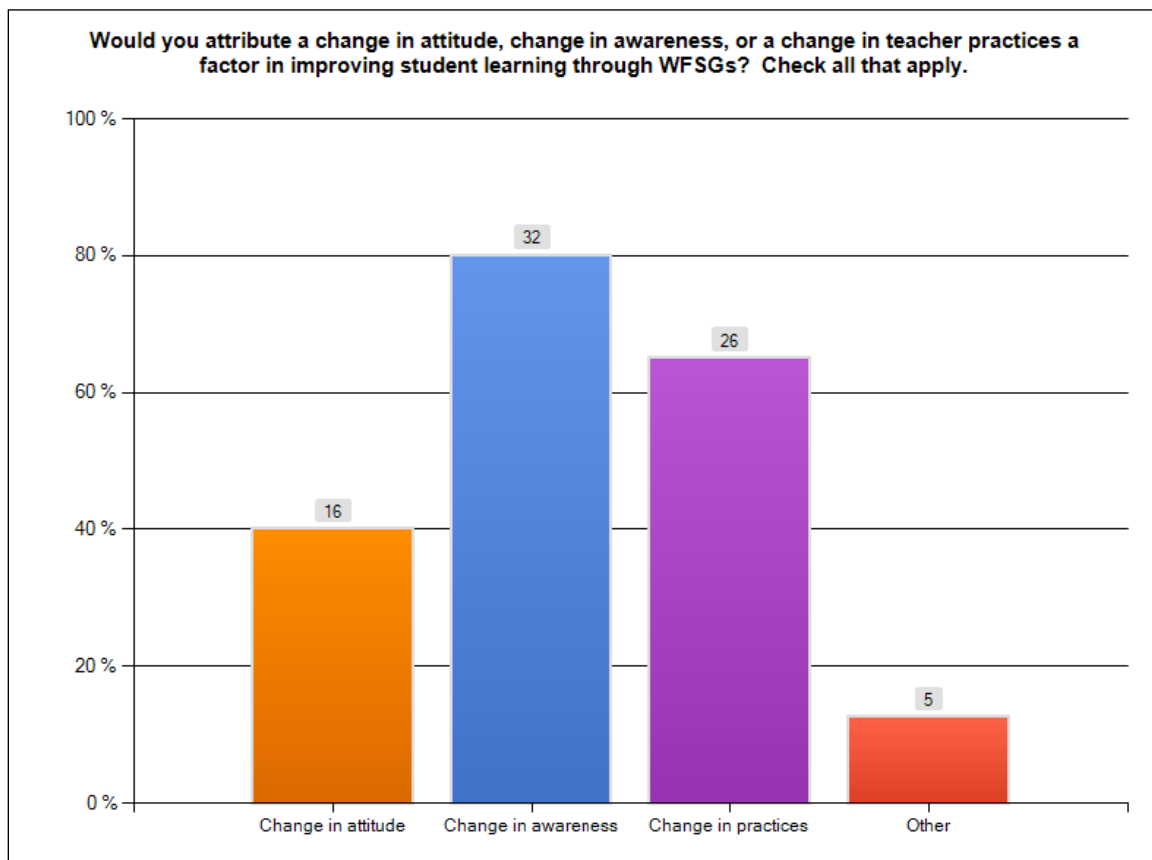
Figure 16. Teacher survey - What change attributed to student learning?

As shown in Figure 16, different factors were identified as improving student learning through WFSG. Change in awareness was identified most often (32 times), change in practices was identified the second most times (26 times) in improving student learning through WFSG, and change in attitude was identified 16 times.

There were 21 comments written for this question, with 18 positive comments and three negative comments. Of the 21 positive comments, 9 related to changing instructional practices, 5 referred to value of collaboration with other teachers, and 4 teachers had other positive comments. The 2 negative comments indicated that the teachers responding negatively did not think WFSG had any impact. The third negative

teacher comment was, "not really the biggest fan of WFSG." Almost 86% of the comments were positive. One teacher responded, "I believe that having the opportunity to collaboratively work with my colleagues is of great value. The discussions that we have and the materials and ideas that we share are invaluable." These comments demonstrate the contrasting teacher perspectives and attitudes.

Question # 15 - sharing the work with others. Twenty teachers reported that they shared their WFSG work with other WFSG through staff meetings, board meetings, and other opportunities. Of the 36 replies,16 reported that they did not have any opportunity to share with other WFSG. Several responses said that a celebration or sharing with other WFSG was scheduled but was cancelled due to principal interviews or other reasons.

Question #16 - administrator support the work of WFSG. Of 40 replies, only three teachers reported that their administrators did not support the work of their WFSG. Teachers reported that principals supported them in a number of ways, which are shown in Table 6 listed in order of the number of times reported:

1. time and encouragement;

2. organization of WFSG, providing time, and setting up meetings;

3. reading logs;

4. comments and suggestions;

5. attending WFSG meetings;

6. getting supplies and sending teachers to workshops;

7. entering and keeping student data; and

8. attending other meetings (see Table 6).

Table 6

Teacher Survey - Methods of Administrative Support

Methods of Administrative Support	Times Reported
Time & Encouragement	19
Organization of WFSG	10
Reading Logs	7
Attend WFSG	6
Comments/Suggestions	6
Supplies/Workshops	5
Keeping Student Data	5
Attending Other Meetings	1
Other	1

Question # 17 - how implementation of WFSG was supported by district. The

question of how the implementation of WFSG was advocated, facilitated, and supported

by the district received 36 teachers' responses, with teacher asked to choose all answers

that applied. As shown in Table 7, answers were in 11 categories:

1. providing time to meet,

2. providing training and meetings,

3. the district's priority,

4. the district's commitment to TRI grant,

5. the district made us or asked to do it,

6. administrative support,

7. resources were purchased or provided,

8. the district's School Improvement Plan,

Table 7

Teacher Survey - District Methods of Support

District method of Support	Times Reported
Provided Time	13
Training, Meeting	10
District Priority	7
TRI	4
District Made/Asked Us	4
Administrative Support	3
District SIP (School Improvement Process)	2
Provided Resources	2
Other	2
Reading Series	1
Provided Subs	1
By Building Initiative	1

9. providing subs,

10. each building had their own initiative with the high school not as committed, and

11. supporting the new Treasurers reading series (see Table 7).

Question # 18 - who initiated WFSG in the district. When asked how WFSG were initiated in the district, 41 teachers responded to the question with 63.4% responded that the district initiated WFSG; 39% responded that administrators initiated them; 14.6% thought teachers initiated, and 31.7% responded that the district, administrators, and teachers initiated WFSG. There were 9.8% of the teachers who marked the "other"

category as shown in Figure 17. The "other" category was not defined, and there were no comments to explain the "other" category.
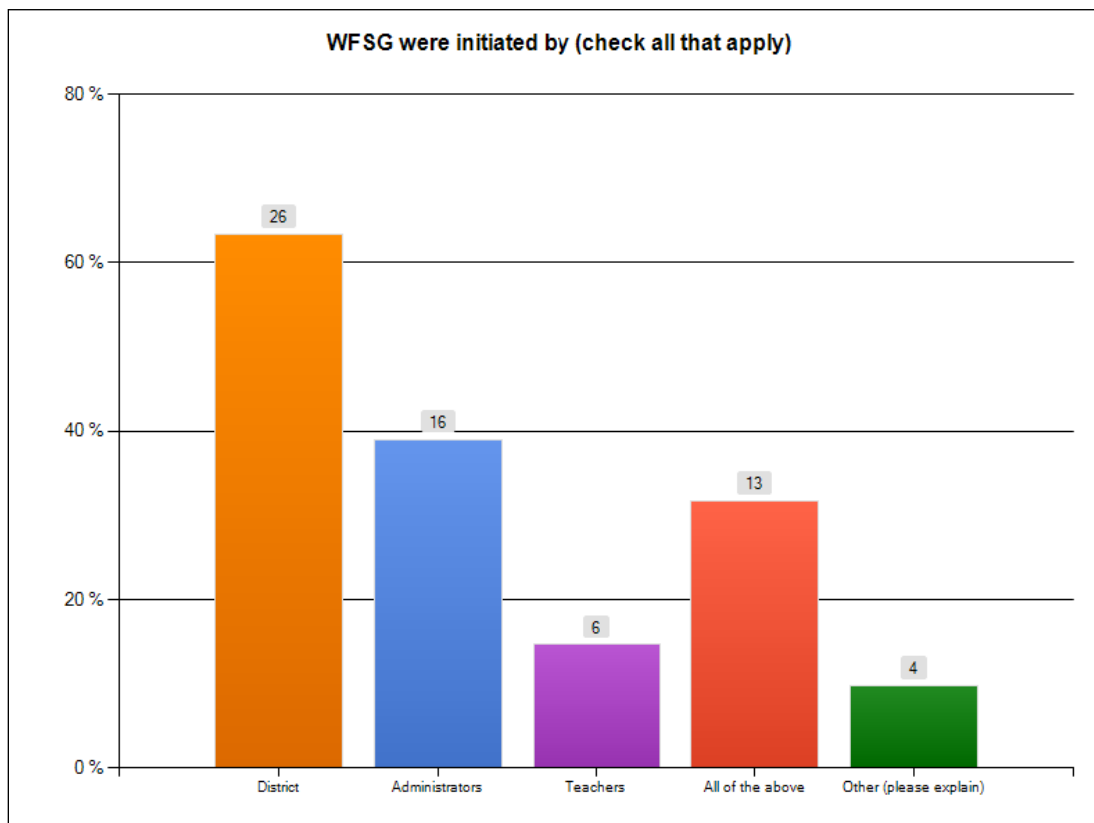
Figure 17. Teacher survey - Who initiated WFSG?

Question # 19 - other comments made by teachers. There were some final comments offered by teachers on the survey when asked about the impact of WFSG on student learning:

- WFSG has directly impacted student learning. Students are enthused about learning, take responsibility for learning, and show considerable growth on their evaluations.

- I have some new strategies as a result of WFSG. I'm not really sure that WFSG is the reason for my students' rising scores, as I work extremely hard

to raise scores. My kids did great before WFSG! Overall, it has not made a huge difference. I'm always open to new ideas, however.

- Working collaboratively with other professionals is a tremendous resource.

- It is good to focus on an area of need. I could do without all the paperwork!

- I work very hard to make sure that all of my students are successful in all academic areas. I do not think that WFSG will change that. It seems as if we are always being asked to do so many things each day. So many things, can take away from actual teaching because teachers are worried about getting paper work to the district.

- Positive and productive discussions, sharing of ideas, and brainstorming and planning with fellow educators is very beneficial for teachers and students.

- In the last two years there have been 2 different directions the WFSG have taken. Last year our building looked at several areas that dealt with reading and writing and were placed in groups according to our interest. My group looked at vocabulary instruction. As the year ended we were told by the district that this school year we would not continue and the following year (this year) every group would be a grade level group and would focus on getting familiar with our new reading series.

- I think it is a nice way to collaborate with others to improve student learning.

- I am glad we did it for our students' sake, but we have had zero information from the district or administrator.

- The first year we were part of a WFSG, we read "The Daily Five." Some people in the group were more involved than others. Some teachers utilized this within their classrooms, while others did not. It just depended on their commitment. I believe the classrooms that worked with students did benefit from learning about "The Daily Five." It was beneficial to my students a year ago. The direction our group took this year was different. We were overwhelmed with a new language arts curriculum and felt like we needed to work our way through this new curriculum during the time we met for WFSG.

- WFSG good idea time an issue Topics most often too broad *[sic]*

- I will use this program next year in my classroom with the help of my principal.

- Student growth is amazing and that is the goal!!

Given a final opportunity for additional comments, teachers gave a wide range of responses:

- It's been good to have a time to meet with fellow teachers and brainstorm. It's beneficial to hear and see what has worked for others and what has not worked.

- WFSG in our district are not very beneficial. Every year the WFSG take a totally different direction. Next year (2009-10) the WFSG are to look at differentiated instruction. It is an activity that you do because the district says you have to.

- Since it was not implemented consistently across the district WFSG came to be a bone of contention with many. Some schools were required to meet twice a month, and others twice during the year.

- I feel the purpose of the WFSG is important to our schools, however, we are so involved with meetings in our building/district. There were many times when it was time for the WFSG, we preferred to have time to work in our classrooms on things like report cards. Our "work days" always included WFSG. With our new language arts curriculum this year, I was overwhelmed with new information. Perhaps next year will be better for me!

- Much to much paper work! and paper! wow!, need online stuff, copyright 2006 ? old! *[sic]*

- I wish we could focus on math.

- I have not investigated what was done by other schools at my grade level to see what other ideas I could use.

- Our WFSG was made up of K-5 teachers. This really did not work well. I think teachers need to be with like teachers.

Principal survey results.

There were nine full-time elementary principals in Kearney Public Schools. Nine out of nine started the survey, and eight out of nine principals completed the survey. Principal surveys were completed by May 30, 2009, through Survey Monkey.

Principals and teachers were surveyed in ten elementary school buildings in the Kearney Public School district with Glenwood & Stone having the same principal.

Schools from which principals responded were Kenwood, Bryant, Central,

Emerson,Glenwood and Stone, Northeast, Park, Windy Hills, and Riverdale.

Meadowlark did not have a response; however there were two responses from Park. The

assumption is that one principal inadvertently marked the wrong school since the survey

was emailed to one principal at each elementary school.

Questions #1 and #2 asked what buildings in which they worked. Principal

responses to each question are direct quotes taken as written on their surveys.

Question # 3 - grouping of K-3 teachers in each school building. As shown in

Figure 18, principals reported that 66.7% of the grades K-3 teachers were grouped by

grade span, i.e., K-1 and 2-3. About 33% reported that they were grouped by grade. The

principals reported that 11.1% of the teachers were grouped by the category of student

needs that they selected or other undefined methods.

As shown in Figure 18, most principals (6) responded that their teachers were

grouped in WFSG by grade span such as K-1 and 2-3 rather than by grade or category of

student need.

Administrator commented on how teachers were grouped:

- Grade level to provide time for teachers to become familiar with the newly adopted reading series.

- K-1 were [sic] grouped together because they received training from UNC at Chapel Hill on Targeted Reading Interventions (TRI). The remaining teachers were grouped by grade level, reading specialists, and resource teachers.

- Specialists for Reading and SPED were assigned to a group due to common relationship with students and programs.

- Small schools with fewer faculty members had a K-5 study group

- K-1 were grouped for Letter/Sound Identification, grades 2-5 were grouped for reading and math
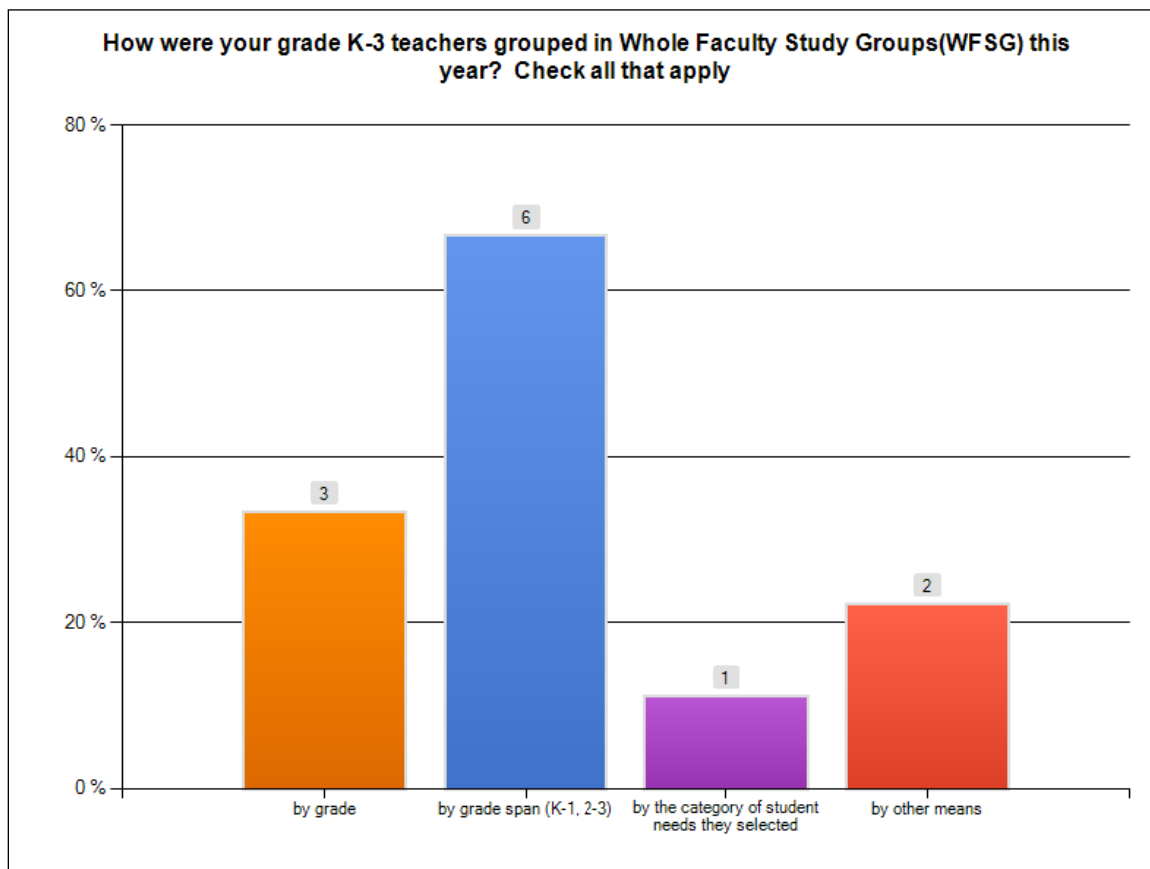
Figure 18. Principal survey –grouping of K-3 teachers in WFSG.

- Teachers were grouped by K-1, 2-3, 4-5 with specialists in the groups. This school also had two paraprofessional WFSG who were grouped by special education and regular education.

Question # 4 - student learning needs listed on action plans. Elementary building principals were asked which student learning needs their K-3 teachers listed on their action plans and addressed this year.

- All the grade level teachers studied student learning needs in the area of reading as it applied to the new reading series. They also continued their study and implementation of The Daily Five. Our other teacher groups studied the application of Quantum Learning in their areas. Our Paraprofessional groups studied Positive Behavior Expectations.

- Reading fluency

- The K-1 and 2-3 WFSG researched and studied Reading with a special emphasis on independent reading/writing skills (as embedded in the Daily Five).

- K-1 Letter/Sound Identification, grades 2-5 focused on either reading or math

- Reading fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

- letter sounds, comprehension, main ideas, and fluency

- Reading Comprehension, reading fluency, phonemic awareness skills

- K-1 focused on Improving phonemic awareness and fluency, 2nd grade focused on improve sight word fluency, and 3rd grade focused on improving identifying main idea.

Question # 5 – success of action plans focusing on student learning needs.

Elementary principals reported that their WFSG were generally successful in focusing on action plans and working on specific student learning needs. Elementary building principals were asked to rate the success their WFSG with grade K-3 teacher members in focusing their action plans and their work on specific student learning needs.

As shown in Table 8, administrators rated success on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being no success and 5 a significant impact. There were no principals who rated the success of their WFSG with a rating of 1 or 2. One principal rated the impact as a 3, five principals rated the success of their WFSG with a rating of 4, and two principals rating the success of their WFSG as a 5, the highest rating. The average rating for principals reporting was 4.13.

Question # 7 - change in teaching practices for student needs as result of WFSG. In addition, all eight (100%) of the elementary building principals who responded to the survey reported that teaching practices of grade K-3 teachers (what

Table 8

Principal Survey - Rating of Success in Focusing on Action Plans

Rating Categories	1 Least Successful	2	3	4	5 Most Successful	Average Rating
Principals Ratings – for each category	0	0	1	5	2	4.13

teachers teach and how they teach) for the student learning needs addressed changed this

year as a result of their WFSG work.

When asked to describe how teaching practices of grade K-3 teachers changed

during the year as a result of their WFSG work, the principals responses were:

- The most significant changes were the scheduling of uninterrupted time for instruction, flexible grouping of students, and the use of independent learning time within that structure.

- Reading fluency assessments showed good results. Teachers in some of the upper grades started working with reading with expression at the 2-5 grade levels.

- We are evolving with our reading study. Each year we have made significant changes in our approaches to scheduling, structure of reading instruction, flexible grouping, differentiation, and instruction.

- The collaborative discussions focusing on specific student needs were helpful in our schoolwide efforts to increase a collaborative approach between classroom teachers and specialists to increase individualized instruction strategies.

- Teachers actually introduced and implemented strategies specific to student needs. Groups developed charts to track student performance on daily, weekly charts that indicated the success with the learning objectives involved in the interventions they presented to the students. Those charts and measures served as the focal points for continuing or discontinuing interventions. In addition, interventions were modified or "tweaked" to increase their effectiveness.

- The teachers implemented the newly learned strategies within a one on one or small group situation. Teachers had para-professionals pull students to work on specific skills.

Question # 8 – WFSG impact on student learning. Principals were asked to rate

impact on the learning of their students with regard to the learning needs the groups

addressed in their K-3 WFSG as shown in Table 9. They rated the impact on a 1 to 5

scale, with 1 being no significance and 5 a significant impact. Six principals rated the

impact on student learning as 4 and two principals rated the impact on student learning as

5, the highest rating.

Table 9

Principal Survey - Impact on Student Learning

Rating Categories	1 Least Successful	2	3	4	5 Most Successful	Average Rating Principal Perception of Impact on Student Learning
Principals Ratings – for each category	0	0	0	6	2	4.25

As shown in Table 9, elementary principals reported that their WFSG were

generally successful in impacting student learning. Elementary building principals were

asked to rate the success their WFSG impacting student learning. With a rating of 1 to 5

with five the most successful rating on focusing on action plans, the average rating for

principals reporting was 4.25.

Comments on the impact on student learning validated the ratings.

- Overall our students showed very good assessment results in reading fluency.

- We progress monitor our students weekly and are seeing significant improvements.

Question # 9 - data to document changes in student learning. Six or 75% of the eight principals who responded said that they have lots of data when asked, "Do you or your grade K-3 teachers have data from classroom assessments or other assessments such as DIBELS to document changes in student learning as a result of their WFSG work?" Two or 25% of the eight principals reported that they had partial data.

- We use our reading series assessments and DIBELS results to determine growth.

- We use DIBELS, ITBS, writing scores, SRI and daily classroom assessments (including observations and running records) to monitor the effectiveness of our interventions.

- We use DIBELS and sight word vocabulary knowledge (number known) Classroom assessments were used for main idea, supporting details, and summarizing. Also, new reading curriculum materials such as running records were used.

Question # 10 - teacher practices changed by WFSG. All eight (100%) of principals responding reported that teacher practices changed because of WFSG:

- We are working with a new reading series. The treasures area *[sic]* does a great job of assessment and tracking student growth. DIBELS tends to reinforce the results from the reading series.

- Each year we have made some changes in our school-wide and classroom approaches to reading/writing instruction. The most concrete examples include scheduling, structure of reading instruction, flexible grouping, differentiation, and instruction.

- Teachers used the group experience to modify what they did in the room. Their efforts with kids exceeded the interventions and strategies that they would have used if it were only up to them to reflect on information concerning student performance.

- Action research - plan, act, reflect

- Teaching more one on one, individualized instruction.

Question # 11 - teachers using practices not used last year. Principals were asked, "Did your teachers use practices or strategies that they did not use last year?" As shown in Figure 19, there were eight principals who responded to this question with seven principals that said their teachers did use new practices or strategies that were not used last year because of WFSG. One principal responded that his teachers did not use new practices or strategies.
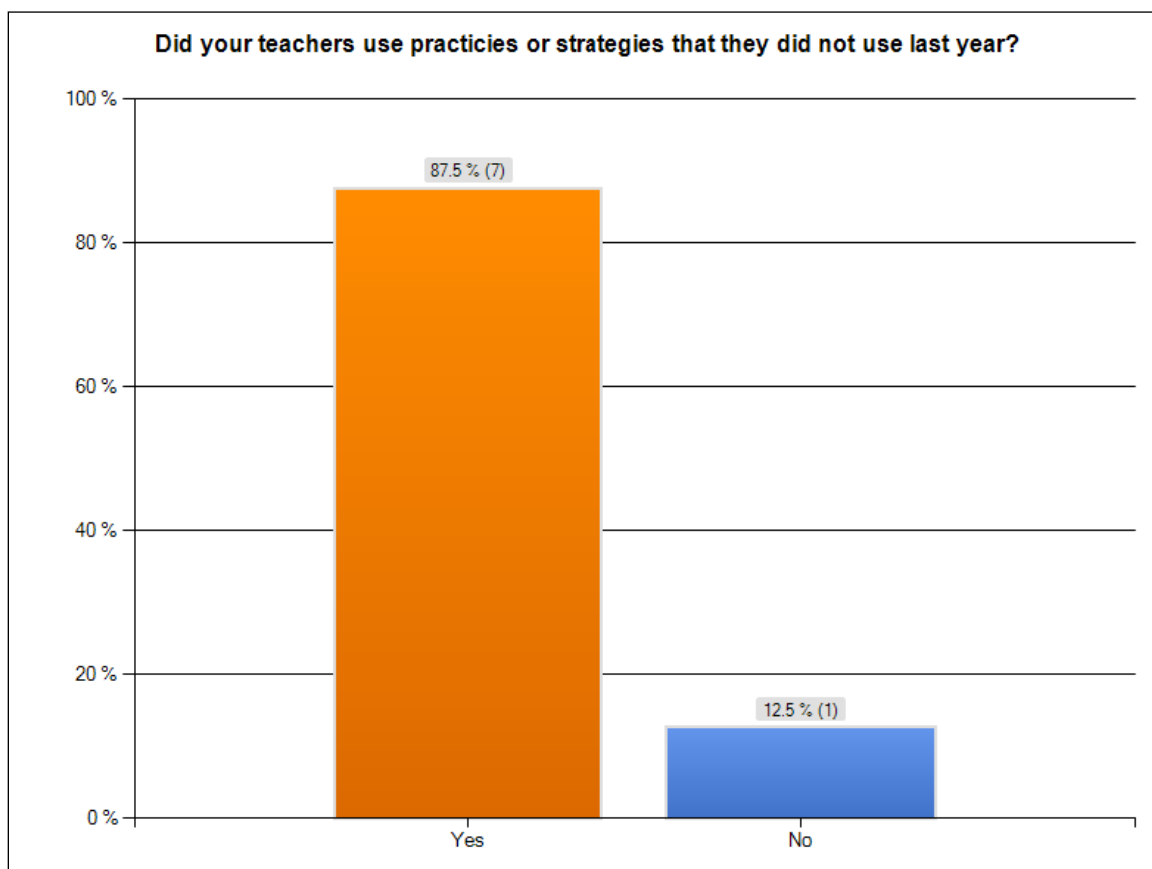

Figure 19. Principal Perception – Teachers using practices that were not used last year.

Principals responded with written comments about strategies or practices that were implemented in 2008-2009:

- Somewhat, they used a slightly different approach to flexible grouping. It was also greatly impacted by how we incorporated our HAL [High Ability Learners] program into the schedule and grouping practices.

- Followed reading series materials and assessments.

- Not so much, just fine tuning and adjustments within a new reading series.

- Increased collaborative strategies between classroom teachers and specialists and across grade levels.

- The logs that teachers submitted ranged from the adoption of an entire reading series to specific interventions like "Spell City." Without referring to all of the logs it is difficult to list or specify in this survey.

- Different types of student grouping for specific skill building. Utilization of paras and volunteers in different ways to help specific students.

- K-1 TRI Strategies-rereading for fluency, change one sound, read write and say, guided oral reading 2nd-more individualized practice 5th-more poetry, using different expressions with quotations, running records.

Question # 12 - evidence of change in practices in observation and

walkthroughs. Of the eight principals responding, five (62.5%) reported that in

classroom walkthroughs or observations they clearly saw evidence of changes in practice.

Both Table 10 and Figure 20 show the evidence of change in classroom practice as

observed by principals. All (100%) principals responding did see some level of change

in classroom practices. Three (37.5%) reported that these changes in practice in

classroom walkthroughs or observations was somewhat evident.

As shown in Table 10 and Figure 20, five principals reported that changes in

teacher practices were clearly evident through observations and walkthroughs with three

principals reporting that changes in practice were somewhat evident.

Principals commented about the evidence of change in practice observed:

- Teachers tended to use more individual and group types of instruction. This allowed them to work more on the individual needs of the students.

Table 10

Principal Survey - Evidence of Changes in Classroom Practice as Observed

Walkthroughs and Observations

	Response Percent	Number of Principals
Yes, clearly evident	62.5%	5
Somewhat evident	37.5%	3
Not evident	0.0%	0
Did not respond		1
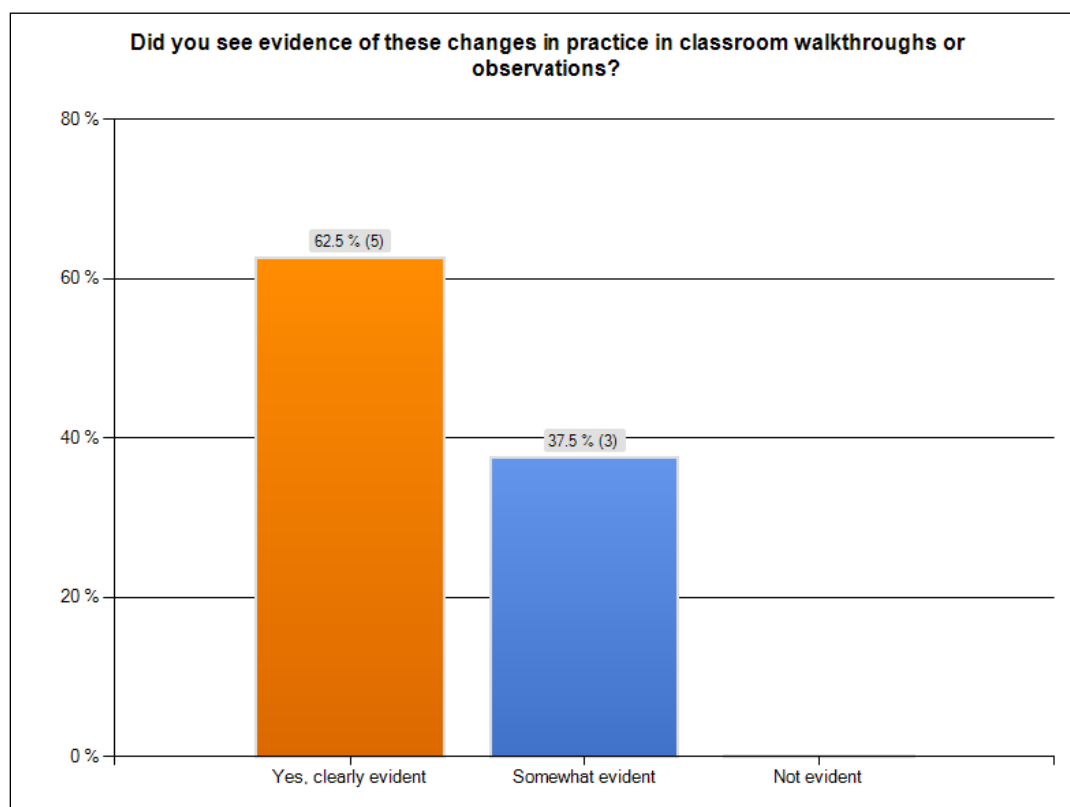
Figure 20. Principal survey – evidence of observed changes in classroom practices.

- Yes, it was easy to see a commonality of practice within the team as I passed through classrooms and also visited with teachers before and after school.

Principals offered these comments that teachers learned of these practices or strategies in a number of ways:

- Through action research, dialogue, problem solving, sharing of ideas, implementing ideas, discussing the successes-not successes of tried practices.

- Reading series, workshops, grade level meetings and State reading convention.

- Through research, dialogue, and peer coaching.

- By sharing from one teacher to the next.

- Teachers were given fiscal support from the School Improvement budget for material type items as well as some additional time to explore concepts through workshops that they or members of the group chose to attend. We did not have any major presentations from outside for any of these. In addition, there were sharing opportunities provided at staff meetings.

- new reading series

- Use of new reading curriculum materials. Collaboration and brainstorming of alternatives

- K-1 went to UNC to receive training 2nd-5th--shared info from experiences and asked for suggestions from reading teachers

Question # 14 - number of teachers using strategies. Table 11 and Figure 21 display principal perceptions of teachers trying strategies in their classrooms. Principals were asked "Did all teachers or did just some of the members of a group use strategies in their classrooms?" Of the eight principals responding, seven (87.5%) clearly saw evidence that all teachers used strategies in their classrooms. One principal (12.5%) said that only some of the teachers used strategies in their classrooms, and one principal skipped the question.

Table 11

Principal Survey - Teachers Using Strategies in Their Classrooms

	Number of Principals Responding	Response Percent
All teachers used strategies in their classrooms	7	87.5%
Only some teachers used strategies in their classrooms	1	12.5%
Did not respond	1	
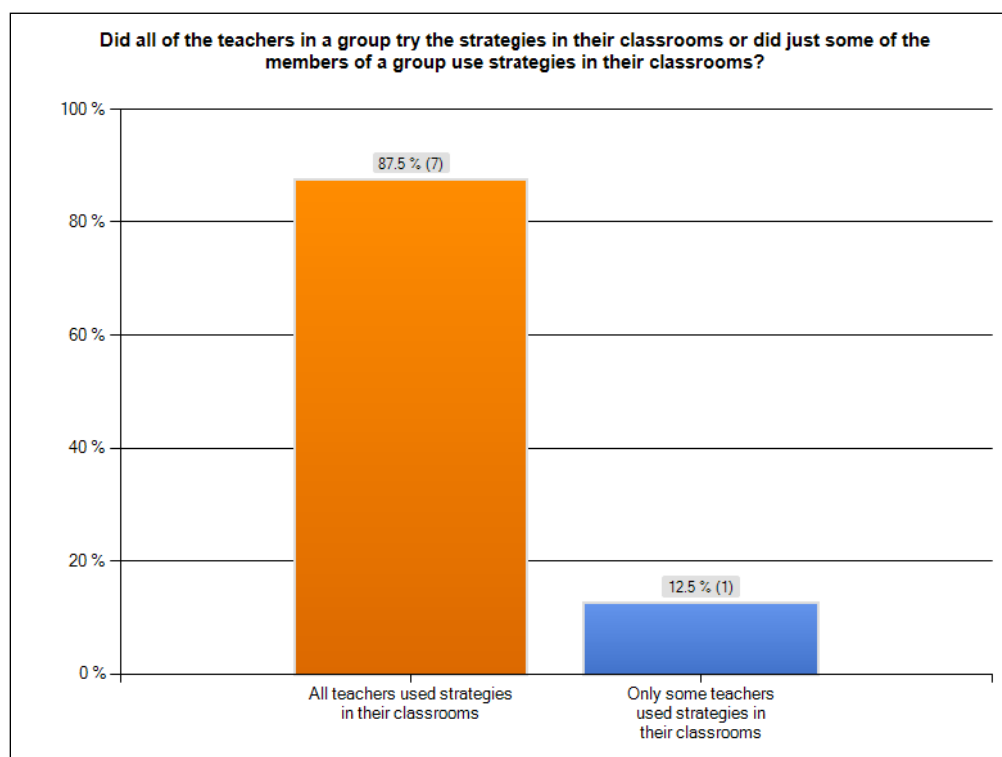
Figure 21. Principal survey – all or some teachers used strategies in their classrooms.

Question # 15 - what factors are attributed to change. Principals attributed change in awareness and change in teacher practices as the most prevalent factor in improving student learning through WFSG. Change in attitude was also a factor, but not rated as dominant as shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Principal Survey -Factors Principals Attribute to Improving Student Learning Through WFSG

Factors	Response Percent	Number of factors selected by Principals
Change in attitude	62.5%	5
Change in awareness	100%	8
Change in teacher practices	100%	8
Changes in structure of the school	12.5%	1
WFSG has become part of what teachers do.	12.5%	1

As shown in Table 12 and Figure 22, of the eight principals reporting, 100% or all eight reported that a change in awareness and change in teacher practices were factors that attributed to improving student learning through WFSG. Five principals or 62.5% reported a change in attitude, one principal or 12.5% reported that changes in structure of the school attributed to improving student learning through WFSG. One principal or 12.5% attributed WFSG becoming a part of what teachers do to improving student learning through WFSG.
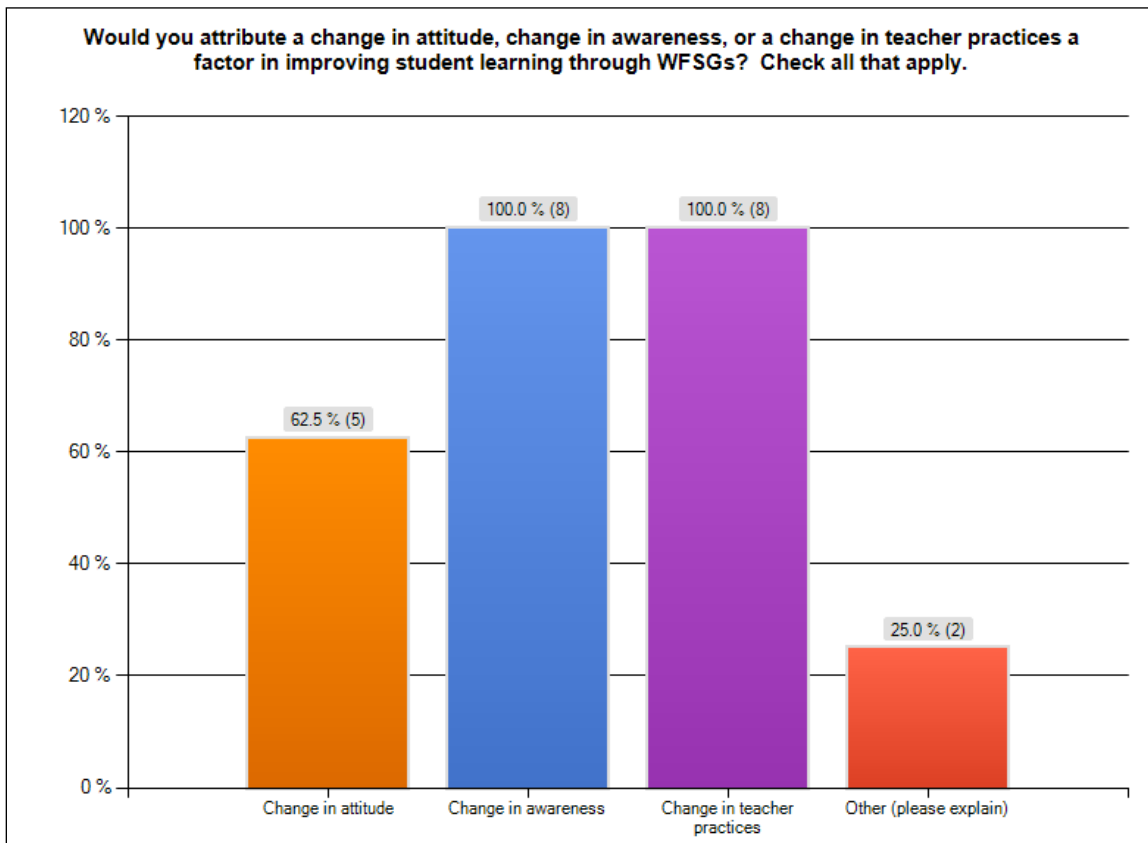
Figure 22. Principal Survey - Factors principals attribute to improving student learning through WFSG.

One principal commented:

WFSG has become part of what teachers do. They truly have begun using themselves as major resource support for each other. I am a little concerned that we will be backing down on district supported time for WFSG's as it has been very helpful in establishing routine this year with meetings twice a month. I am not sure if this frequency will be maintained next year. I am pleased that we have moved past the stage that WFSG's made us feel like we were serving a process. We have moved to a process that serves students and staff.

Question # 16 - opportunities to share work with others. Principals responded to the questions, "What opportunities have your grades K-3 WFSG had to share their work with each other and with other WFSG and to learn from them?" were

- Staff meeting sharing.

- We have been limited the past two years because we are an old class one school eight miles from Kearney. Next year we will be working with Glenwood and Stone schools, which will allow more interaction between study groups. Glenwood is a single section school with 140 students. Stone is an old class one school with 40 students. Riverdale is an old class one with 60 students.

- They meet monthly at least once for an extended period of time to work toward their goals together.

- Our K-1 team kept their discussion within their team. 2-5 groups shared their discussions between groups.

- Every staff meeting has time for each group to share. This has been an opportunity this year. Next year, I intend for it to be an expectation for each group at the monthly staff meeting.

- Posted meeting logs and action plans.

- Somewhat limited. We share at building level.

- We post logs on ANGEL [online collaboration system] so everyone has access to it if they'd like. We started putting our logs in the staff lounge also and sharing at staff meetings.

Question # 17 – principal support of WFSG as reported by principals.

Principals reported they had supported the work of their K-3 WFSG in several ways:

- Giving them all the support they need or ask for. That included creating time for their meetings, collaboration and work time. That also included providing materials and encouragement. I read over their logs each time they met and gave feedback.

- Materials and moral support. Feed back on logs etc.

- Scheduling, creating time when there is none in the calendar, supervising students while they meet, encouraging the teachers with comments in their logs...asking frequently what they need from me.

- I have joined them for conversations and facilitated the implementation of ideas that were generated from them.

- I have received the logs from each group and provided feedback as appropriate. While this area has strengthened for me and the staff, it has room

for improvement. Sustaining it throughout the entire year is my goal. We also began periodic leadership meetings for one member from each of the teams to meet with me. This has been a very good thing, but again can be strengthened with more frequent meetings. I think the Leadership meeting is probably one of the best vehicles for me and the groups to keep momentum and focus. A definite plus.

- Time and feedback.

- Provided feedback to groups about their work. Asked critical questions "what if..what will you do next?" Provided time for groups to meet *[sic]*.

- I write comments on their logs that include questions and ideas. We celebrate the successes at staff meetings.

Question # 18 - ways district supported WFSG. Principals reported specific

ways that implementation of WFSG was supported by the district:

- Time created in the calendar, inservice in the summer, dialogue at leadership council meetings and our own WFSG on the topics.

- Full district inservice, Principals meeting and grade level meetings. Lots of support from the central office.

- Some calendar changes have supported the opportunity to meet a few times during the year.

- Time allotted to meet. Guidelines and best practices provided from district level. On-site reviewer to look at our practices and provide feedback for improvement.

- This year the district supported the WFSG's with 14 meetings throughout the year with time on eight release days and comp time for 6 additional meetings. Next year comp time will discontinue for the 6 additional meetings. I will schedule time on the yearly calendar for meetings up to the same standard that we had this year, however, comp time will not be offered. My expectation is that the teams meet with this frequency even though it will probably be for an abbreviated time. Ideally I would like to schedule up to a total of 12 times beyond the district support. I will wait to see the compliance rate with the 6.

- Training and ongoing support

- Expectations for WFSG were set by district. Training in the process provided. Flexibility for scheduling time was provided

- Training in the summer with a team and then brought back to our own building. The district brought in the trainers a couple of times throughout the year to help us out.

As shown in Figure 23, of eight principals responding, seven or 87.5% reported that WFSG were initiated by the district. One principal reported that administrators initiated WFSG.
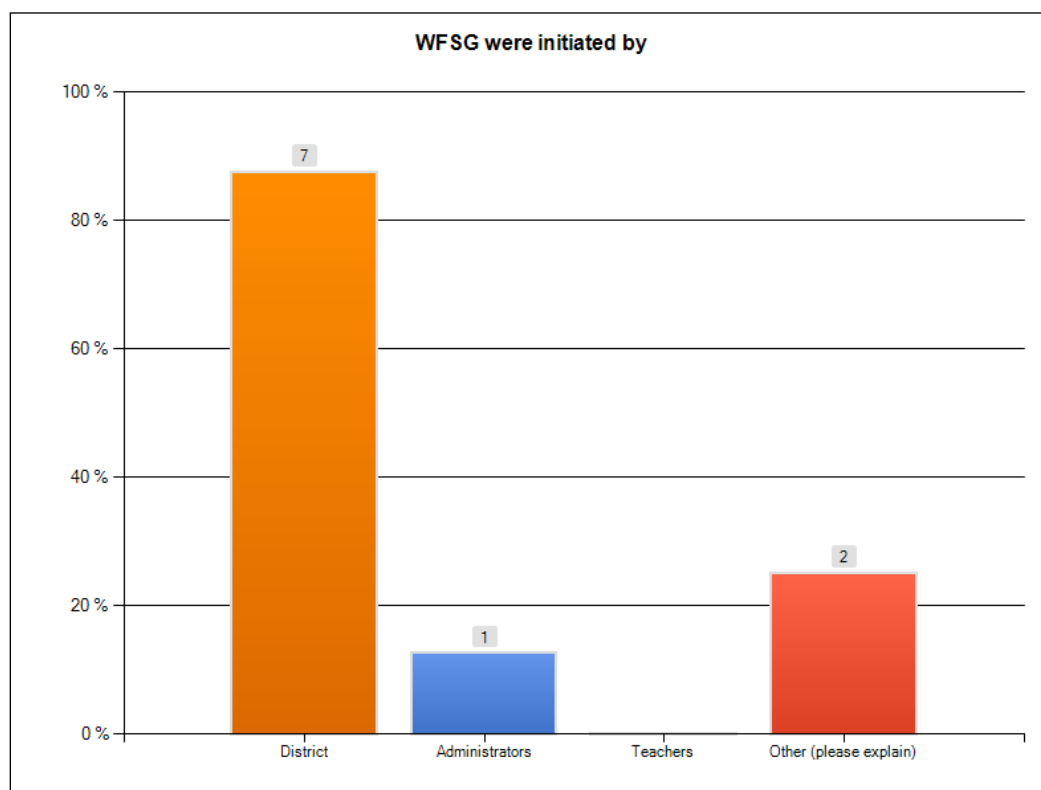

Figure 23. Principal perception of who initiated WFSG.

Of eight principals responding seven of them reported that the district initiated WFSG (see Figure 23).

Principals commented on who initiated WFSG:

- This concept of Professional Learning Communities has been recognized as a proven practice in staff development for quite some time. We were going to implement them regardless of whether the district supported the model.

- We initiated them ourselves before the district decided to make it a priority.

Additional comments by principals. Principals offered additional comments

regarding the impact of WFSG on student learning:

- I feel that WFSG provided a good process that teachers can work with student areas of weakness that they feel is important. Teachers have developed a feeling of community and ownership.

- I would just say that I feel very strongly about the importance of WFSG for the purpose of helping teachers grow. Each teacher has developed leadership in this process that you do not see in "sit & git" types of staff development. The support and collegiality of the teams is an absolutely essential component for teachers to go outside their comfort level and try new strategies and approaches. WFSG are plain and simple (in my mind) the only way to provide high quality staff development in schools.

- Due to a change in building administrator, Central has been slower to implement WFSG than some other schools but we made significant progress this year and expect that they will be even more successful next year. Our main focus this year was to increase the gathering and use of data to make instructional decisions for students and increase differentiated strategies in and out of classrooms. WFSG were a big part of our efforts to realize those goals.

- WFSG's are really beginning to take hold in earnest. I really think that they are becoming a cultural descriptor due to the emphasis we have had placed on them and the connectedness they are making with staff. The future format that will be supported by the district may have a real impact on this development since the initiation of the concept started at the district level with greater support than what it will have in the near future. I see this as a little paradoxical since the district would like to actually increase the use of WFSG's as the driving force or delivery vehicle for our School Improvement and Differentiated Instruction programs. Hopefully, WFSG's will be continued to flourish through this critical stage.

- I like using WFSG as a vehicle to help teachers keep their minds (and doors) open to other ideas. It has become more comfortable for teachers to share their successes along with their failures because before, we would just teach with our doors shut.

- WFSG worked well in my building this year because we used school time to implement it. We hired an additional P.E. teacher on music days so that students would have back to back music and P.E. classes while our teachers gathered together. This only worked with grades 2-5. We wouldn't be able to cross group using this plan.

District Administrator Results

Two district administrators where interviewed in July 2009. One of the administrators was associate superintendent and the administrator in charge of curriculum. The other administrator was the person in charge of the data and providing teachers in WFSG with the data needed to begin their work and determine student needs. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Some major themes emerged.

Through the teacher and principal survey responses, there was an occasional comment that WFSG will not last in Kearney, but that was not the message from the two district administrators. It was quite the contrary, as they both emphasized that WFSG had been fully endorsed and will be supported by the district in the future. Both administrators who were interviewed mentioned that the superintendent has told staff that there are some things that are clear and unchangeable in the district. One of those clear and unchangeable initiatives will continue to be WFSG. The superintendent has told staff repeatedly that "the way we do business is through WFSG." The superintendent's strong support of the WFSG process in this district has solidified the future of WFSG and started to change the culture of the school.

WFSG as a vehicle for school improvement. The emerging theme of these interviews was WFSG are the vehicle or process to be used for school improvement. The curriculum director said,

> The Whole-Faculty Study Groups are our school improvement process. As they [teachers] get on board with it they see this is the vehicle now. It isn't something separate or different. And the other thing is that they had a tendency to think that, "Oh well, in two or three years this will be gone and there will be something else." We have said, "No, this is the horse that we are going to ride."

Principals and teachers have access for more and more relevant student data each year. DIBELS scores have improved since the DIBELS assessments inception to the district three years ago. The perception of both administrators was that student learning is improving and teachers are changing practices. However, both administrators were hesitant to say that WFSG are the sole reason for the increase in student learning as shown through improved test scores. Newly introduced programs like the adoption of the new Treasures reading series and researched based interventions used in the University of North Carolina's TRI program had an important impact on student learning. In addition, some elementary schools within the district were implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) which is through the special education department, and neither administrator knew much about the RtI program. With the initiatives new to the district like TRI, the new Treasures reading series, and Response to Intervention (RtI) measuring the impact of WFSG on student learning was more difficult.

The WFSG model of professional learning communities. Another major theme that emerged from both administrators was the WFSG model of Professional Learning Communities matches the district's needs. Increasingly, the district has been using student data to make decisions. The use of student data by administrators and teachers to make decisions through WFSG fit the direction of the district. The WFSG model was to use data to determine the needs and then use student data in action plans to measure the effectiveness of interventions. The associate superintendent remarked that

their professional development design committee made a decision to select WFSG since WFSG principles matched the components that the committee members were trying to find for their district. These components included (a) job-embedded staff development, (b) ongoing, (c) standards based, and (d) staff oriented staff development.

The district administrators first looked at choosing the DuFour model, but the expense was too much and "untouchable" for the district. Then the Nebraska Department of Education Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) brought Carlene Murphy, founder of WFSG, to the state. The district administrator went on to say this was an affordable way to bring to us the PLCs that would match our professional goals.

The Curriculum and Assessment Director liked the WFSG model because of the focus on student data. District data is given to the WFSG and each WFSG collects its own data for the action plans. WFSG were small groups of 3 to 5 teachers who focused on "What are our concerns, and what can we do to improve student learning?" He went on to say, "In the small groups everyone must participate. It forces everyone to be a part of the discussion."

Changes in teacher practices. When asked, "Have the teaching practices of the grade K-3 teachers (what they teach and how they teach) changed this year as a result of their WFSG work?" the associate superintendent responded with an emphatic, "Yes!" However, it was mostly because action plans centered on some of the new reading series with new material and strategies to use. The TRI teachers had new strategies and interventions to implement through their WFSG. The associate superintendent articulated the change in teacher practices:

So practices did change and will continue based on the work that they have done this year. It probably affected the clarity of the understanding of those practices even more than the multitude of the practices that were put in place. It was just a clear refinement of the way to do things and present curriculum so kids can learn.

When the researcher had talked to the associate superintendent months earlier about the possibility of using her school district as the site for this research project, she had mentioned that they had implemented a new reading series and that may complicate the WFSG study. During the interview for the study, the associate superintendent's response to the statement, "So the fact that you implemented a new reading series worked well with your WFSG," was

It worked very well. . . . Their process in the reading instruction got better. The clarity of their curriculum work got better. The area of needs, they as a group with a group of students, something that they problem solved probably did not improve as much as the year before when they based all the work on a need, as defined building need. We kind of consider it a transition year. We used WFSG as adoption so teachers wouldn't have this to do and that to do. Yes, and as far as the TRI is concerned that really did establish some change in behavior because those teachers really did have specific strategies that they did use, that were new to them, that were implemented, and did increase student learning.

District administrators were initially concerned that measuring the impact of WFSG on student learning and educators' perceptions of the impact of WFSG would be difficult given that the new reading series was implemented at the same time. However, they began to realize through discussion of the impact of WFGS that beginning WFSG had allowed teachers to collaborate and learn the new series more quickly than with new curriculum in the past.

Principal support of WFSG. Both district administrators emphasized the importance of principal support. There were two buildings where the principals were not trained in the WFSG model the summer before the implementation when all the other principals were trained. Both administrators commented on the difference between

buildings depending on the support of the principals. Buildings who did not have trained principals struggled. While the principals were supportive as the associate superintendent stated, "They didn't understand it well enough to answer the hard questions."

Summary

Student learning was impacted positively, and WFSG did play a role in increased student learning. DIBELS scores for kindergarten through third grades did show a significant increase from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. However, there was not a significant difference in student learning as measured through DIBELS scores between two groups of students in second and third grades. Second and third grade student DIBELS scores were grouped by teachers' action plans or focus in WFSG. The two groups were (a) teachers focused on reading fluency, and (b) teachers not focused on reading fluency. The scores from students of the teachers in the two groups were compared to each other.

There were several findings in teacher and principal surveys and district administrator interviews:

(1) The perception was that increased student learning occurred through the WFSG process with district support by providing new curriculum and training for teachers in new practices and strategies. The WFSG process was a vehicle for teachers to continue learning in the most relevant of environments, their classrooms.

(2) Although educators' (teachers, principals, and district administrators) perceived that student learning had increased, most educators were reluctant to attribute improved student achievement solely to WFSG. Many comments were about the new reading series and strategies learned through a TRI grant the district had received. The

new district reading curriculum and strategies learned through a grant were resources

discussed and analyzed in WFSG. One component of WFSG is to work on curriculum

and new teaching strategies through the WFSG process.

(3) A majority of the teachers, principals, and district administrators perceived

that new teacher practices and strategies were learned as a result of the work in WFSG.

Teachers reported that learning from other teachers in WFSG was the primary way new

practices and strategies were learned.

(4) The researcher was surprised at the level of acceptance and ownership that

was reported by educators for the WFSG process. There were some, especially teachers,

who did not see the value in WFSG. However, for the most part, educators did see the

importance and potential of collaboration through WFSG. Considering this was only the

second year of implementation, WFSG seem to be on their way to becoming a part of the

elementary culture in this district.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Whole Faculty Study Groups on student achievement and teacher practices in grades K-3 of a Nebraska school district.

The study examined both student achievement and educator perceptions of teacher practices and student learning. To measure the impact on student achievement, scores form Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literature Skills (DIBELS) assessments were collected and analyzed. To measure educator perceptions, teachers and principals were surveyed and central office administrators were interviewed and the survey and interview results were compiled.

The central research question was whether WFSG had an impact on student learning for kindergarten through third grade elementary students. This central question was addressed through four sub-questions:

1. For kindergarten and first grade students whose teachers focused on reading fluency, was there a difference in the percentage of students who met the DIBELS benchmarks in the fall and in the spring?

2. For second grade and third grade students, was there a difference in the changes in individual reading fluency scores as measured by DIBELS in the fall and the spring between those students whose teachers were in WFSG that focused on reading fluency and those students whose teachers were in WFSG that focused on skills other than reading fluency?

3. Did teachers and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on teacher practices?

4. Did teacher and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on student achievement?

Summary

The central research question and four sub-questions will be summarized in this chapter.

Impact of WFSG on student learning. Sub question (1) For kindergarten and first grade students whose teachers focused on reading fluency, was there a difference in the percentage of students who met the DIBELs benchmarks in the fall and in the spring?

Because the kindergarten and first grade teachers in study groups all focused on reading fluency, student scores in those grade levels were compared with the DIBELS established benchmarks. Change was measured in the percentage of student scores that were at the established benchmark level in the fall assessments compared to the percentage of student scores that were at the established benchmark level in the spring assessments.

Kindergarten student data results. For the purpose of this study, kindergarten student scores were assessed in one area, Letter Naming Fluency (LNF). As shown in Table 13, for kindergarten students assessed in LNF, about 8% scored at the established benchmark level at the beginning of the year, and about 72% scored at the established benchmark level or higher at the end of the year showing a significant (p < .001) improvement.

Table 13

Kindergarten DIBELS Scores

DIBELS Assessment	Beginning of the Year	End of the Year	Change in percent	Significance
Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)	8%	72%	64%	(p<.001)

First grade student data results. First grade students were assessed in three areas: Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) beginning of the year to end of the year, Nonsense Work Fluency (NWF) beginning of the year to end of the year, and Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) middle of the year to end of the year. The results are shown in Table 14.

Table 14

First Grade DIBELS Scores

DIBELS Assessment	Beginning of the Year	Middle of the Year	End of the Year	Change in percents	Significance
Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF)	68.9%		91.7%	Increased by 22.8%	(p<.001)
Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)	20%		70%	Increased by 50%	(p<.001)
Oral Reading Fluency (ORF)		39%	68.7%	Increased by 29.7%	(p<.001)

For the PSF, 68.9% of the first grade students scored at the established benchmark at the beginning of the year, and 91.7% scored at the established benchmark at the end of

the year. This was significant (p < .001) improvement as measured by the McNemar test of dependent proportions.

For first grade students assessed in NWF beginning of the year to end of the year, 20% scored at the established benchmark level at the beginning of the year, and 70% scored at the established benchmark level or higher at the end of the year, showing a significant (p < .001) improvement.

The third test given to first graders was the ORF. This test is given to first graders in the middle of the year and then at the end of the year. In the middle of the year 39% of the first graders scored at the established benchmark and at the end of the year 68.7% scored at the established benchmark level. Again these percentages are significantly different from each other based on the results of the NcNemar test of dependent proportions, p < .001.

Kindergarten and first grade students demonstrated significant growth during the 2008-2009 school year in reading skills as assessed by DIBELS.

Sub-question (2) For second and third grades, was there a difference in the changes in individual reading fluency scores as measured by DIBELS in the fall and the spring between those students whose teachers were in WFGS that focused on reading fluency and those students whose teachers were in WFSG that focused on skills other than reading fluency?

Second and third grade student scores were analyzed by a different method than the kindergarten and first grade scores. Since some of WFSG action plans focused on reading fluency and some action plans focused on other academic areas, therefore, the second and third grade WFSG were divided into two groups:

1. students of teachers who focused on reading fluency in their WFSG, and

2. students of teachers who focused on skills other than reading fluency in their WFSG.

The scores of the students whose teachers were in the first group where WFSG action plans were written to focus on reading fluency were compared with the students whose teachers were in WFSG that had actions plans written to focus on academic skills other than reading fluency. Both the second and third grade student scores were compared from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. Both second and third grade student scores were in the areas of OFR, RTF, and WUF.

Second grade student data results. A two-way mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted in all three areas for second grade scores with groups (fluency vs. not fluency) as the between-subject factor and the assessment data (beginning vs. end) as the within-subjects factor. The results are shown in Table 15. For all three areas assessed (OFR, RTF, and WUF) the improvement of the assessment data (scores) was significant. However, the group effect was not significant. All students were improving their reading fluency skills, but students whose teachers were focusing on reading fluency did not improve significantly over the students of teachers who were focusing on other subject areas in their WFSG.

For second grade DIBELS scores, a two-way mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted in three areas, ORF, RTF, and WUF. For all three areas assessed (OFR, RTF, and WUF) the improvement of the assessment data (scores) from the beginning of the year to the end of the year was significant ($p < .001$).

However, the interaction of the groups (fluency vs. not fluency) was not significant (see Table15).

Third grade student data results. Third grade student scores were analyzed in the same was as second grade student scores. As with the second grade student scores, a two-way mixed factorial ANOVA was conducted in all three areas (ORF, RTF, and WUF) for third grade student scores with groups (fluency vs. not fluency) as the between-subject factor and the assessment data (beginning vs. end) as the within-subjects factor. The results are shown in Table 16.

For two areas assessed (OFR and RTF) the improvement of the assessment data (scores) from the beginning of the year to the end of the year was significant ($p < .001$). The third area, WUF was not significant with improvement from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. It was not known why the third grade WUF scores decreased from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, yielding inconsistent results from the other DIBELS assessment data in other grades.

The interaction of the groups (fluency vs. not fluency) was not significant. As shown in Table 16, for third grade in three areas of ORF, RTF, and WUF with groups (fluency vs. not fluency) as the between-subject factor and the assessment data (beginning vs. end) as the within-subjects factor, the group effect and the interaction of groups and assessment data were not significant.

Table 15

Second Grade DIBELS Scores

DIBELS Assessment (Words per Minute)	Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) Beginning	Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) End	Two-way mixed factorial ANOVA	Retell Fluency (RTF) Beginning	Retell Fluency (RTF) End	Two-way mixed factorial ANOVA	Word Use Fluency (WUF) Beginning	Word Use Fluency (WUF) End	Two-way mixed factorial ANOVA
Group One WFSG Fluency	55.81	97.88	p=.831 Group Effect Not Sig.	26.05	46.32	p=.471 Group Effect Not Sig.	44.02	57.01	p=.588 Group Effect Not Sig.
Group Two WFSG Not Fluency	56.6	98.35	p=.982 Interaction group & Assess. Not Sign.	25.18	43.77	p=.448 Interaction group & Assess. Not Sign.	42.7	56.66	p=.704 Interaction group & Assess. Not Sign.

Table 16

Third Grade DIBELS Scores

DIBELS Assessment (Words per Minute)	Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) Beginning	Oral Reading Fluency (ORF) End	Two-way mixed factorial ANOVA	Retell Fluency (RTF) Beginning	Retell Fluency (RTF) End	Two-way mixed factorial ANOVA	Word Use Fluency (WUF) Beginning	Word Use Fluency (WUF) End	Two-way mixed factorial ANOVA
Group One WFSG Fluency	81.91	111.16	p=.477 Group Effect Not Sig.	40.52	47.48	p=.710 Group Effect Not Sig.	57.74	52.56	p=.363 Group Effect Not Sig.
Group Two WFSG Not Fluency	82.55	115.99	p=.065 Interaction group & Assess. Not Sign.	40.53	48.53	p=.692 Interaction group & Assess. Not Sign.	53.01	53.28	p=.046 Interaction group & Assess. Not Sign.

As expected, there was a significant increase in learning for all second and third students in all DIBELS assessments (with the exception of third grade WUF DIBELS assessment). However, for the comparison of the groups (fluency vs. not fluency) there was not a significant difference in the learning of one group of students over the other. There are several possible reasons:

- Perhaps the WFSG were not following their action plans as there was a limited amount of follow up data posted on the WFSG collaborative website.

- Possibly every teacher was focused on reading fluency regardless of the area of focus listed on the action plan. All student scores, regardless of their teachers' WFSG's focus on action plans, were significantly higher at the end than at the beginning.

- It was a subjective decision on the researcher's part to divide WFSG into two groups. Some WFSG in the "not focusing on fluency group" were focusing on reading comprehension or other reading skills. In reality the focus of both groups (fluency and not fluency) may have been basically the same regardless of what was listed on the action plans and meeting logs.

Perceived impact on teacher practices. Sub-question (3) was "Did teachers and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on teacher practices?"

Of the three groups that were surveyed or interviewed, all agreed that WFSG did impact teacher practices. All principals responding (100%) reported that teaching practices had changed as a result of the WFSG in their buildings. Principals noted that the "collaborative discussions focused on specific student needs were helpful in

schoolwide efforts to increase a collaborative approach between classroom teachers and

specialists to increase individualized instruction strategies." Another principal stated

> Teachers actually introduced and implemented strategies specific to student needs. Groups developed charts to track student performance on daily, weekly charts that indicated the success with the learning objectives involved in the interventions they presented to the students. Those charts and measures served as the focal points for continuing or discontinuing interventions. In addition, interventions were modified or "tweaked" to increase their effectiveness.

Of the 42 teachers who responded to the survey, 29 (69%) replied that their

teaching practices (what they taught and how they taught) changed as a result of their

WFSG work. Teachers responded on surveys that specific strategies were discussed in

WFSG and implemented in their classrooms. Many of the changes in teacher practices

and strategies were derived from the Treasures reading series and the TRI grant. One

teacher commented that she had "better insight on what to focus on when helping

students learn to read and the process."

Perhaps the Associate Superintendent summed it up best when she commented

about teacher practices changing as result of work in WFSG.

> Mostly because plans again centered around some of the new reading adoption with new materials and strategies to use. Definitely their practices changed. Even for the TRI teachers, because of the ways they were doing things. So practices did change and will continue based on the work that they have done this year. It probably affected the clarity of the understanding of those practices even more than the multitude of the practices that were put in place. It was just a clear refinement of the way to do things and present curriculum so kids can learn.

A majority of teachers (29 of the 42 responding teachers), reported that teacher

practices did change due to WFSG. However, there were 13 teachers who responded that

WFSG did not impact or change their teaching practices in any way.

All of the other teachers and principals reported that teacher practices had

changed as a result of the student learning needs address in the WFSG. However, the

leadership of the district was looking to the future and searching for sustainability through changing the culture of the district. The Assistant Superintendent commented

> We have really changed the culture. It is not where we want to be. We want to see more of it. It has been positive. We have opened up a lot of doors between teachers and among teachers. We have raised the level of professional dialog. I think that is really, really important.

Perceived impact of WFSG on student learning. Sub question (4) was "Did teachers and administrators perceive that WFSG had an impact on student achievement?'

Survey invitations were sent by email to 75 kindergarten through third grade elementary teachers and nine principals. Surveys were conducted through Survey Monkey (an online survey instrument). Data were gathered from the 2008-09 school year at Kearney Public Schools. Teacher and Principal surveys were completed by May 25, 2009.

Certified teachers and principals were asked about their perceptions of the impact of WFSG on student learning and to analyze changes in instructional practices.

Of the 75 teachers invited to participate, 42 teachers responded. The average teacher rating on a scale of one to five, with one as no impact and five as a significant impact, was 3.57. Of the nine principals invited, eight principals responded with an average rating for student learning at 4.25.

Although both teachers and principals perceived that WFSG did improve student learning, principals had a more positive response.

WFSG as a professional development model. A purpose of surveying the teachers and principals was to evaluate the perceived impact of WFSG as a professional development system by addressing two basic questions: (a) what did you learn that makes

a difference in your professional practice? and (b) What was the impact on students'
learning?

In Guskey's five levels of evaluation of professional development, the highest
levels are (4) participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and (5) student learning
outcomes. In evaluating the quality of the job-embedded WFSG professional
development, the topics of (1) changes in teacher practices or use of new knowledge and
skills and (2) increased student learning must be addressed.

A small percentage of teachers did not see the value of WFSG and felt that the
WFSG initiative was forced upon them by administrators and the district. They indicated
that they had been doing fine without meeting with other teachers and did not see any
reason to change.

However, most of the teachers believed that the opportunity to work
collaboratively with colleagues was of great value. One principal commented on the
changing culture:

> WFSG has become part of what teachers do. They truly have begun using
> themselves as major resource support for each other. . . . I am pleased that we
> have moved past the state that WFSG made us feel like we were serving a
> process. We have moved to a process that serves students and staff.

Teachers were in charge of their own professional development. Teachers used
many sources to learn instructional practices. However, when asked how they learned
new strategies teachers overwhelmingly said they learned about new strategies from other
teachers in their WFSG. They depended on collaboration when learning new
instructional practices and strategies. Learning from the TRI grant, the new reading
series, and workshops were also important, but teachers reported learning from each other
twice as often as other options.

District administrators, most principals, and many teachers credited WFSG as a professional development system that impacted changes in teacher practices. One teacher commented, "I believe that having the opportunity to collaboratively work with my colleagues is of great value. The discussions that we have and the materials and ideas that we share are invaluable."

Educators were reluctant to contribute rising test scores or improved student learning to WFSG as evidenced by this teacher's statement, "I have some new strategies as a result of WFSG. I'm not really sure that WFSG is the reason for my students' rising scores, as I work extremely hard to raise scores. My kids did great before WFSG!"

Even district administrators were cautious about attributing increased student achievement solely to WFSG. As the Curriculum and Assessment Director explained:

> I have seen a big increase in DIBELS scores. Now, I can't probably attribute it all to Whole-Faculty Study Groups, but all day kindergarten can certainly have an effect. And I was particularly interested in the TRI data and particularly in some of the buildings and particularly some of the high poverty –Bryant and Kenwood- where our scores are low to begin with and see the difference when they put those strategies into play. And they have really raised the level at least on the DIBELS.

Recommendations

With the introduction of a the Nebraska State Accountability (NeSA) system and the release of the results for all Nebraska school districts in August 2010, comparative data will continue to be available to evaluate the professional development practices of school districts. The ultimate evaluation of professional development is based on what students learn. There are several suggested recommendations for changes in practice that were revealed through this study.

Recommendations for practice. There were lessons learned from this study that provide recommendations for practice for improving schools and improving student learning.

- Job-embedded, teacher collaboration is an effective form of professional development. However, this form of professional development will be most effective if the school district provides time for teachers to meet within the day. Consistently and regularly scheduled time will assure that teacher collaboration will become a part of the culture of the school.

- Teachers will have more ownership in job-embedded professional development models if they have a part in the decision making process of the implementation and development of the professional learning community, regardless of the type or elements of the Professional Learning Community (PLC).

- Principals are instructional leaders and must be supportive and provide leadership for Professional Learning Communities and job-embedded practices within their schools in order to change teacher practices and impact student learning. In this study, buildings principals, who missed trainings and did not have the knowledge or motivation to support Whole Faculty Study Groups (WFSG), had a more difficult time with teacher "buy in."

- Providing needed financial resources and other resources to support the work of WFSG is a key element.

- There is a continual need for training on effective teacher practices, access to curriculum, and availability of research based interventions. Training teachers

outside of WFSG time and then allowing teachers time to collaborate and use

the newly received training is an effective model for improving teaching and

learning.

- Reliable student data and training for teachers on how to use that data in

    WFSG and other job-embedded professional development processes is

    another important element in the success of any job-embedded model that

    focuses in improving student learning by using student data.

Fullen (2010) discussed challenges of change at a conference for educators. One

of the secrets of the implementation work and *Six Secrets of Change* was entitled

"Learning the Work." Fullen commented on workshops and courses to train teachers

along with continuing the work:

> Professional development (PD) in workshops and courses is only an input to
> continuous learning and precision in teaching. Successful growth itself is
> accomplished when the culture of the school supports day-to-day learning of
> teachers engaged in improving what they do in the classroom and school. (p. 7)

Recommendations for future studies. There is a need for future studies. There

are several possible recommendations for future studies.

- More studies are needed on the impact of job-embedded staff development on

    student learning including the amount of time dedicated to job-embedded

    activities, the structure of job-embedded staff development, administrative

    support given to educators involved in job-embedded staff development, and

    training for educators in areas such as use of data, specific teacher practices,

    and new curriculum.

- More research is needed defining the characteristics of effective Professional

    Learning Communities as measured by increased student learning.

- More research is needed on effective methods of changing the culture of schools.

- More research is needed on how the culture of school buildings and districts can be changed to embrace teacher collaboration and job-embedded staff development models. How can school districts transform teacher collaborative practices from emerging stages into sustainable learning cultures?

- More research on models of professional learning communities and their effectiveness in improving student learning is needed. Little research has been done to measure the effectiveness of Whole Faculty Study Groups on student learning. However, much has been written and discussed about teachers working in collaborative groups as a powerful professional development system.

Conclusions

The central research question was whether WFSG had an impact on student learning for kindergarten through third grade elementary students. In the Kearney Public Schools, this mixed method study found that WFSG did have an impact on student learning. Student achievement did increase from the beginning of the year to the end of the year as measured by Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Teacher and principal surveys and district administrator interview results indicated that educators' perceptions were that student learning did increase and teacher practices did improve. District administrators did consider WFSG to be an important part of the school improvement process for the district. Although it is difficult to discern whether

the Targeted Reading Intervention (TRI), the new Treasures Reading Program, or the

WFSG are responsible for improved learning, it does appear that the collaboration of the

teachers does make a difference according to teachers, principals, and district

administrators. It appears that WFSG were the vehicle or process for the collaboration to

happen. The TRI research program and the Treasures reading series contained the

content, assessments, interventions, and suggested teacher practices that teachers were

able to discuss and implement in their WFSG. It also appears that the TRI and purchase

of new reading series enhanced the effectiveness of the WFSG for the teachers who were

open to collaboration and sharing of new ideas.

The associate superintendent expressed concern at the beginning of the study

about discerning the impact of WFSG on kindergarten through third grade elementary

students' achievement and learning since the district had invested in a new reading series

and was involved in the TRI grant with University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

However, after the year was completed, it appeared that all the initiatives worked

together and enhanced the effectiveness of each other. She commented after the year was

completed:

> It worked very well. In fact, in reading some of Murphy's research, one of the
> conditions in establishing WFSG is to learn new curriculum. We found that
> worked quite well for teachers in learning their curriculum. What was apparent
> was honing in on an area that was a definitive need that they wanted to work on
> and straighten out and make better. Their process in the reading instruction got
> better. The clarity of their curriculum work got better. . . . Yes, and as far as the
> TRI is concerned that really did established some change in behavior because
> those teachers really did have specific strategies that they did use, that were new
> to them that were implemented and did increase student learning.

In Nebraska, and every other state in the nation, teachers and administrators are

held accountable for student learning. Because of the legislative and societal demands,

all students are expected to read on grade level in the early grades. All students are

eventually expected to graduate from high school. All students are expected to go on to

college or acquire job skills. School districts must find ways to improve student learning.

Schools must have professional development systems in place that help teachers

become more effective. Job-embedded professional development, through the

collaboration of teachers using student data to change teacher practices with the goal of

improving student learning, is the type of collaborative culture that many schools are

striving to achieve.

There is a sense of urgency to change the cultures of our schools to reflect the

changing world and meet the ever increasing demands of state and federal legislation.

Yet there is so much optimism. Clauset et al. (2008) said it well:

> As I look into the future of the schools that my great-grandchildren and their
> children will attend, I see schools that are learning communities and learning
> laboratories for everyone. Teachers and leaders view themselves as students,
> always learning, experimenting, and exploring in collaboration with their
> colleagues. Students view themselves in the same ways with confidence and self-
> reliance, with success, and with an eagerness to know and understand their worlds
> and the people in them. (p. 228)

We may have some educational problems. However, together we will meet the

challenges that face us. We will collaborate to find answers to improve student learning.

We will solve our educational problems with great educators who will work together to

find strategies and practices that are effective in an ever changing world.

Education has always been important in the United States of America and is the

foundation on which this great country is built. There is so much that is right with

education in America. Zhao (2009) stated we should build on our traditional strengths

and diversity to make the needed changes in American Education:

To meet the challenges of the new era, American education needs to be more American, instead of more like education in other countries. The traditional strengths of American education-respect for individual talents and difference, as broad curriculum oriented to educating the whole child, and a decentralized system that embraces diversity--should be further expanded, not abandoned. This is not to say American education is perfect. On the contrary, American education needs major changes, but the changes should be oriented to the future instead of the past or present. The changes should be made out of hope for a better tomorrow instead of fear of losing yesterday or today. (p. 82)

There is a problem with our schools. Americans are being told our educational system in the United States is not what it needs to be and changes must be made. However, schools should not discard all the good things that have been developed over the history of education in this country. There are many positive things about the education system in the United States upon which to build.

In this changing world, schools must adapt. As educational demands increase, so do the pressures to improve student learning and provide teachers with the tools to change teacher practices. Changing the culture of our schools into collaborative environments where all teachers and all students continue to learn is a daunting task; however, it is urgent that we undertake this task now and continue on with the work of education in the 21st Century.

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Appendix A

Letter of Permission from Midwestern School District

Kearney Public Schools

Excellence In Education

3.17.09

Re: Cinde Wendell Dissertation Study

To Whom It May Concern:

Please accept this letter as notification that Cinde Wendell has permission to collaborate with Kearney Public Schools to use teacher/student data to complete her dissertation/research project. The title of the research is: *A Case Study of Implementation of Whole Faculty Study Groups in a Nebraska School District.*

Sincerely,

Carol Renner, PhD
Associate Superintendent
Kearney Public Schools

11.01.10

To Whom It May Concern:

Please consider this a letter of permission to use of the name 'Kearney Public Schools' in the dissertation of Cinde Wendell. The school requests a copy of the dissertation and any supplemental, public, materials that will use the name Kearney Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Carol Renner, PhD

Associate Superintendent

Kearney Public Schools

Appendix B

Letter of Permission to Identify by Name from Midwestern School District

Kearney Public Schools
Excellence Is Our Expectation

11.01.10

To Whom It May Concern:

Please consider this a letter of permission to use of the name 'Kearney Public Schools' in the dissertation of Cinde Wendell. The school requests a copy of the dissertation and any supplemental, public, materials that will use the name Kearney Public Schools.

Sincerely,

Carol Renner, PhD

Associate Superintendent

Kearney Public Schools

Appendix C

Teacher Survey

Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

1. Teacher Consent Form for WFSG Survey

TEACHER SURVEY
A CASE STUDY OF WFSG
IRB APPROVAL #:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
The title of this study is The Perceived Impact of Whole Faculty Study Groups in a Nebraska School District. The purpose of this study is to research the student learning of kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teachers in Whole Faculty Study Groups (WFSG) at Midwestern school district. This study will strive to answer (1) What role do WFSG play in student achievement and learning, (2) What role do WFSG play in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teacher practices, (3) If there has been a change in student achievement and teacher practices since WFSG were implemented, have WFSG as a professional development system impacted that change?

PROCEDURES
Participation in this study will require approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. You will be asked to provide your perspective to questions regarding your experiences with WFSG. Your survey will be sent electronically through a secure server to the investigators using Survey Monkey. Your responses will remain confidential. Only the principal investigator and the secondary investigator will have access to research information.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. You may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

BENEFITS
While there are no direct benefits to this research, you may find that answering questions about WFSG and providing your insights to be an enjoyable experience. Information gathered from this study will be used for a doctoral dissertation.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. Electronic data will be stored on the online secure system; other files will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator and her advisor. The information obtained in this study may be published in professional journals or presented at professional meetings. Data, including documents and audiotapes from the interviews will be destroyed 2 months following the completion of the study.

COMPENSATION
There will be no compensation for participating in this research project.

OPPORTUNITY TO AKS QUESTIONS
You have now been informed of your rights as a research participant. You may ask any additional questions before agreeing to participate in this study. You may call the investigator at any time: telephone (308) 995-8663, or email wendell@esu11.org. Or you may contact the project supervisor, telephone (402) 472-0970. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone (402) 472-6965.
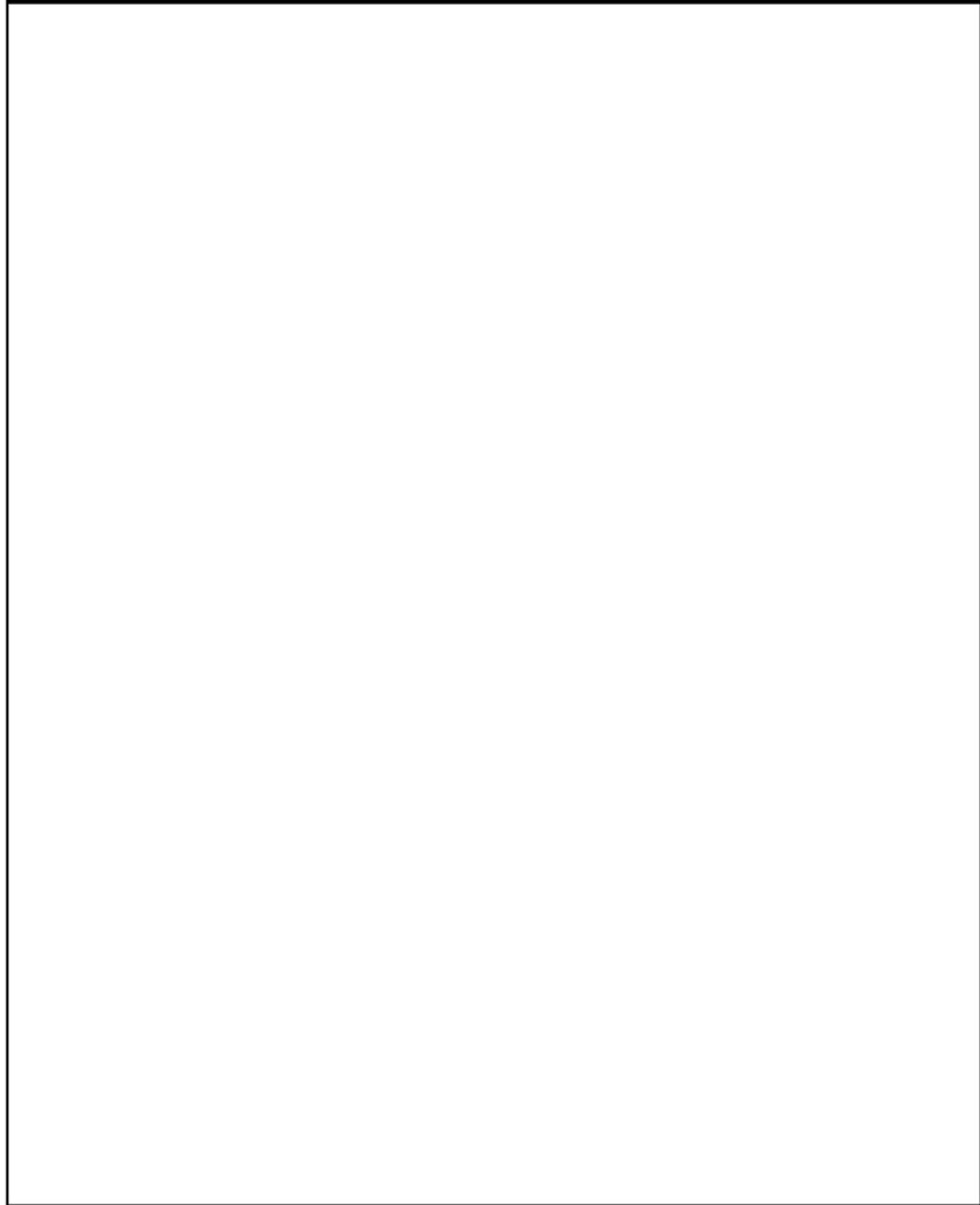
FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW
You are free to decide whether or not you will participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time.

CONSENT, RIGHT TO RECEIVE A COPY
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your participation certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. If you would like to receive a copy of the findings of this research after the completion of this project, contact the Primary Investigator.

Cynthia Wendell, Principal Investigator (308) 995-8663
Dr. Donald Uerling, Secondary Investigator (402) 472-0970

Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

2. Default Section

* 1. I will participate in this research and agree to the terms as indicated in the consent form.

○ Yes

○ No

* 2. In which school do you teach?

☐ Bryant	☐ Glenwood/Stone	☐ Windy Hills
☐ Central	☐ Northeast	☐ Riverdale
☐ Emerson	☐ Park	☐ Meadowlark

* 3. What grade do you teach?

☐ K

☐ K/1

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 2/3

4. Which student learning needs did your Whole Faculty Study Group list on your action plan and address this year? Please write them in the space below.
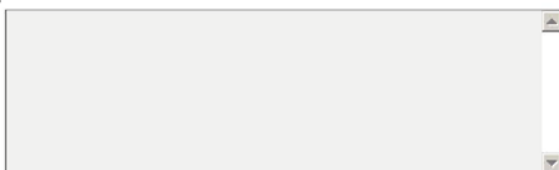
5. Including you, how many kindergarten, first, second, or third grade teachers are there in your WFSG?

K	▢
K/1	▢
1	▢
2	▢
2/3	▢
3	▢

Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

6. Check the action research steps you have a done in your WFSG this year and add anything else your group has done.

☐ Diagnose students' current levels of performance (relative to need)

☐ Develop assessment tools

☐ Identify strategies/materials to use in our classes to address need

☐ Plan lessons for how each member will use the strategy/material

☐ Develop/design materials to address need

☐ Demonstrate/practice lessons or strategies members have used or will use in class

☐ Articulate strategies we use

☐ Examine samples of student work for evidence of student understanding

☐ Analyze data showing the results of using strategies in our classrooms

☐ Other (Please Describe)

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7. Have your teaching practices (what you teach and how you teach) changed for the student learning needs addressed this year as a result of your WFSG work?

○ Yes

○ No

8. If you answered "yes" to question #7, please describe how your teaching practice changed this year as a result of your WFSG work.

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Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

9. Has the work of your study group this year had an impact on the learning of your students with regard to the learning needs your group addressed?

	1	2	3	4	5
Please rate the impact on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = none; 5 = significant impact)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Optional Comment

10. Do you have data from classroom assessments or other assessments such as DIBELS to document changes in student learning as a result of your WFSG work?

◯ No Data

◯ Partial Data

◯ Lots of Data

Optional Comment

11. Did your practices as a teacher change because of WFSGs?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If yes, how? If not, why not?

Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

12. Did you use instructional practices or strategies in your classroom this year that you did not use last year because of WFSGs?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If so, what are they?

[ ]

13. How did you learn of these instructional practices or strategies?

[ ]

14. Did all of the teachers in your WFSG or just some of the teachers in your group use the instructional practices or strategies in their classrooms?

☐ All of the teachers in my WFSG used the instructional practices and strategies in their classroom.

☐ Some of the teachers in my WFSG used the instructional practices and strategies in their classrooms

Optional Comment

[ ]

Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

15. Would you attribute a change in attitude, change in awareness, or a change in teacher practices a factor in improving student learning through WFSGs? Check all that apply.

☐ Change in attitude

☐ Change in awareness

☐ Change in practices

☐ Other

Please explain

[ ]

16. What opportunities has your WFSG had to share your work with other WFSG and to learn from them?

[ ]

17. How has your administrator supported the work of your WFSG?

[ ]

18. How was implementation of WFSG advocated, facilitated, and supported by your district?

[ ]

Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

19. WFSG were initiated by (check all that apply)

☐ District

☐ Administrators

☐ Teachers

☐ All of the above

☐ Other (please explain)

20. Please write additional comments about WFSG and their impact on student learning here.

21. Do you have any additional comments?

Teachers - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

3. Thank You

Thank you for completing this survey. Your time and your responses are appreciated very much.

Appendix D

Principal Survey

Principals - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

1. Principal Informed Consent for WFSG Survey

PRINCIPAL SURVEY
A CASE STUDY OF WFSG
IRB APPROVAL #:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
The title of this study is The Perceived Impact of Whole Faculty Study Groups in a Nebraska School District. The purpose of this study is to research the student learning of kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teachers in Whole Faculty Study Groups (WFSG) at Midwestern school district. This study will strive to answer (1) What role do WFSG play in student achievement and learning, (2) What role do WFSG play in kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teacher practices, (3) If there has been a change in student achievement and teacher practices since WFSG were implemented, have WFSG as a professional development system impacted that change?

PROCEDURES
Participation in this study will require approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. You will be asked to provide your perspective to questions regarding your experiences with WFSG. Your survey will be sent electronically through a secure server to the investigators through Survey Monkey. Your responses will remain confidential. Only the principal investigator and the secondary investigator will have access to research information.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. You may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

BENEFITS
While there are no direct benefits to this research, you may find that answering questions about WFSG and providing your insights to be an enjoyable experience. Information gathered from this study will be used for a doctoral dissertation.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. Electronic data will be stored on the online secure system; other files will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator and her advisor. The information obtained in this study may be published in professional journals or presented at professional meetings. Data, including documents and audiotapes from the interviews will be destroyed 2 months following the completion of the study.

COMPENSATION
There will be no compensation for participating in this research project.

OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS
You have now been informed of your rights as a research participant. You may ask any additional questions before agreeing to participate in this study. You may call the investigator at any time: telephone (308) 995-8663, or email wendell@esu11.org. Or you may contact the project supervisor, telephone (402) 472-0970. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone(402) 472-6965.

FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW
You are free to decide whether or not you will participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time.

CONSENT, RIGHT TO RECEIVE A COPY
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your participation certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. If you would like to receive a copy of the findings of this research after the completion of this project, contact the Primary Investigator.

Cynthia Wendell, Principal Investigator (308) 995-8663
Dr. Donald Uerling, Secondary Investigator (402) 472-0970

Principals - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

2. Principal WFSG Survey

* 1. I will participate in this research and agree to the terms as indicated in the consent form.

◯ Yes

◯ No

* 2. In which school are you an administrator?

☐ Bryant   ☐ Glenwood/Stone   ☐ Windy Hills

☐ Central   ☐ Northeast   ☐ Riverdale

☐ Emerson   ☐ Park   ☐ Meadowlark

3. How were your grade K-3 teachers grouped in Whole Faculty Study Groups (WFSG) this year? Check all that apply

☐ by grade

☐ by grade span (K-1, 2-3)

☐ by the category of student needs they selected

☐ by other means

Please describe

4. Which student learning needs did your grade K-3 WFSGs list on their action plans and address this year? Please write them in the space below.

Principals - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

5. How successful were your WFSGs with grade K-3 teacher members in focusing their action plans and their work on specific student learning needs? Please rate the success in focusing on specific student learning needs on a 1 to 5 scale.

	1	2	3	4	5
Please rate the impact on a 1 to 5 scale (1=none & 5=significant impact)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

6. Have the teaching practices of grade K-3 teachers (what teachers teach and how they teach) for the student learning needs addressed changed this year as a result of their WFSG work?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Optional Comment

[text box]

7. If you answered yes to question #6, please describe how the teaching practices of grade K-3 teachers changed this year as a result of their WFSG work.

[text box]

8. Has the work of your grade K-3 WFSGs this year had an impact on the learning of their students with regard to the learning needs the groups addressed?

	1	2	3	4	5
Please rate the impact on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = none; 5 = significant impact)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Optional Comment

[text box]

Principals - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

9. Do you or your grade K-3 teachers have data from classroom assessments or other assessments such as DIBELS to document changes in student learning as a result of their WFSG work?

- ☐ No Data
- ☐ Partial Data
- ☐ Lots of Data

Optional Comment

10. Did teacher practices change because of WFSGs?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If so, how?

11. Did your teachers use practicies or strategies that they did not use last year?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

If so, what were they?

Principals - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

12. Did you see evidence of these changes in practice in classroom walkthroughs or observations?

- [ ] Yes, clearly evident
- [ ] Somewhat evident
- [ ] Not evident

Optional Comment

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13. How did they learn of these practices or strategies?

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14. Did all of the teachers in a group try the strategies in their classrooms or did just some of the members of a group use strategies in their classrooms?

- [ ] All teachers used strategies in their classrooms
- [ ] Only some teachers used strategies in their classrooms

Optional Comment

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Principals - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

15. Would you attribute a change in attitude, change in awareness, or a change in teacher practices a factor in improving student learning through WFSGs? Check all that apply.

☐ Change in attitude

☐ Change in awareness

☐ Change in teacher practices

☐ Other (please explain)

16. What opportunities have your grades K-3 WFSGs had to share their work with each other and with other WFSGs and to learn from them?

17. How have you supported the work of your grade K-3 WFSGs?

18. How was implementation of WFSGs advocated, facilitated, and supported by your district?

Principals - Whole Faculty Study Groups Survey

19. WFSG were initiated by

☐ District

☐ Administrators

☐ Teachers

☐ Other (please explain)

20. Please write additional comments about WFSGs and their impact on student learning here.

21. Do you have any additional comments?

3. Thank You

Thank you for completing this survey. Your time and your responses are appreciated very much.

Appendix E

District Administration Interview Questions

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

1. District Administrator Informed Consent for WFSG Survey

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION INTERVIEW
A CASE STUDY OF WFSG
IRB APPROVAL #:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
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PROCEDURES
Participation in this study will require approximately 30-40 minutes of your time. You will be asked to provide your perspective to questions regarding your experiences with WFSG. Your survey will be sent electronically through a secure server to the investigators through Survey Monkey. Your responses will remain confidential. Only the principal investigator and the secondary investigator will have access to research information.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. You may choose not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

BENEFITS
While there are no direct benefits to this research, you may find that answering questions about WFSG and providing your insights to be an enjoyable experience. Information gathered from this study will be used for a doctoral dissertation.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Information obtained during this study, which could identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. Electronic data will be stored on the online secure system; other files will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will only be seen by the investigator and her advisor. The information obtained in this study may be published in professional journals or presented at professional meetings. Data, including documents and audiotapes from the interviews will be destroyed 2 months following the completion of the study.

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OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS
You have now been informed of your rights as a research participant. You may ask any additional questions before agreeing to participate in this study. You may call the investigator at any time: telephone (308) 995-8663, or email wendell@esu11.org. Or you may contact the project supervisor, telephone (402) 472-0970. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the investigator or to report any concerns about the study, you may contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board, telephone(402) 472-6965.

FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW
You are free to decide whether or not you will participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time.

CONSENT, RIGHT TO RECEIVE A COPY
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your participation certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. If you would like to receive a copy of the findings of this research after the completion of this project, contact the Primary Investigator.

Cynthia Wendell, Principal Investigator (308) 995-8663
Dr. Donald Uerling, Secondary Investigator (402) 472-0970

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

2. District Administrator WFSG Interview Questions

These are the basic questions for the interview. However, other supporting questions will most likely be asked during the interview process.

* 1. I will participate in this research and agree to the terms as indicated in the consent form.

◯ Yes

◯ No

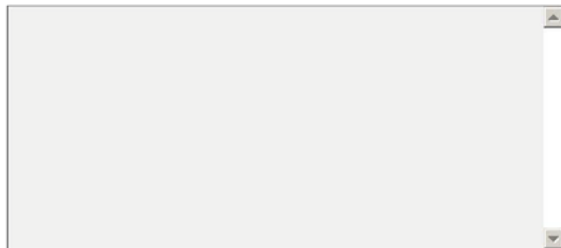**2. WFSG were initiated by**

☐ District

☐ Administrators

☐ Teachers

☐ Other (please explain)

[text box]

3. How did WFSGs begin in your district?

[text box]

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

4. Why was WFSG model of Professional Learning Communities chosen at Kearney Public Schools?
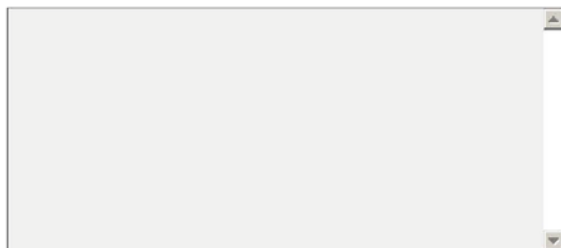
5. How were your grade K-3 teachers grouped in Whole Faculty Study Groups (WFSG) this year? Check all that apply. How was the decision made on grouping of teachers?

- [ ] by grade
- [ ] by grade span (K-1, 2-3)
- [ ] by the category of student needs they selected
- [ ] by other means

How was the grouping of teachers decision made?

6. Which student learning needs did your grade K-3 WFSGs list on their action plans and address this year? Were the groups effective in addressing these student needs?

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

7. How successful were your WFSGs with grade K-3 teacher members in focusing their action plans and their work on specific student learning needs? Please rate the success in focusing on specific student learning needs on a 1 to 5 scale.

	1	2	3	4	5
Please rate the impact on a 1 to 5 scale (1=none & 5=significant impact)	○	○	○	○	○

8. Have the teaching practices of grade K-3 teachers (what teachers teach and how they teach) for the student learning needs addressed changed this year as a result of their WFSG work?

○ Yes

○ No

Optional Comment

9. If you answered yes to question #8, please describe how the teaching practices of grade K-3 teachers changed this year as a result of their WFSG work.

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

10. Has the work of your grade K-3 WFSGs this year had an impact on the learning of their students with regard to the learning needs the groups addressed?

	1	2	3	4	5
Please rate the impact on a 1 to 5 scale (1 = none; 5 = significant impact)	○	○	○	○	○

Optional Comment
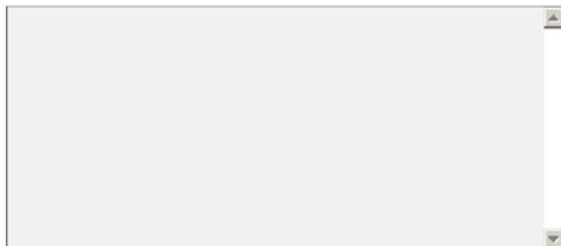
11. Do you or your grade K-3 teachers have data from classroom assessments or other assessments such as DIBELS to document changes in student learning as a result of their WFSG work? How is the use of data supported by the district?

☐ No Data

☐ Partial Data

☐ Lots of Data
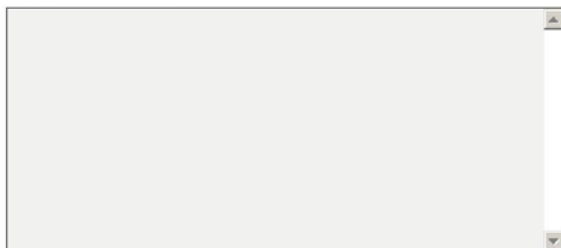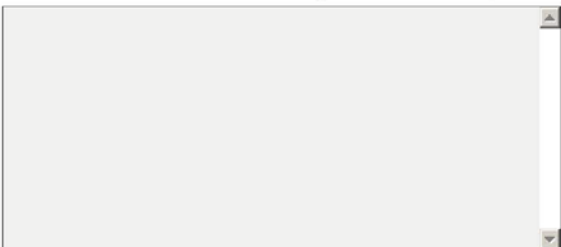
How is use of data supported by KPS and central office administrators?

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

12. Did teacher practices change because of WFSGs?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If so, how?

13. Did your teachers use practicies or strategies that they did not use last year?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If so, what were they?

14. What evidence of changes in teacher practices have you observed?

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

15. How did they learn of these practices or strategies?

16. Did all of the teachers in a group try the strategies in their classrooms or did just some of the members of a group use strategies in their classrooms?

☐ All teachers used strategies in their classrooms

☐ Only some teachers used strategies in their classrooms

Optional Comment

17. How have the K-3 grade teachers in your district accepted WFSGs process?

◯ Very Accepted   ◯ Somewhat Accepted   ◯ Not Accepted

Please Explain

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

18. How have the principals of your K-3 grade teachers in your district accepted WFSGs process? What role have the principals played in WFSGs at KPS?

◯ Very Accepted   ◯ Somewhat Accepted   ◯ Not Accepted

Please Explain

19. Would you attribute a change in attitude, change in awareness, or a change in teacher practices a factor in improving student learning through WFSGs? Check all that apply.

☐ Change in attitude

☐ Change in awareness
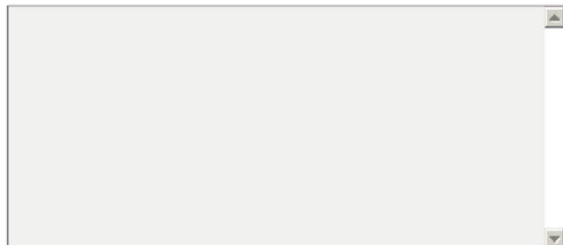
☐ Change in teacher practices

☐ Other (please explain)

20. What opportunities have your grades K-3 WFSGs had to share their work with each other and with other WFSGs and to learn from them?

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

21. How have you supported the work of your grade K-3 WFSGs?

22. How was implementation of WFSGs advocated, facilitated, and supported by your district?
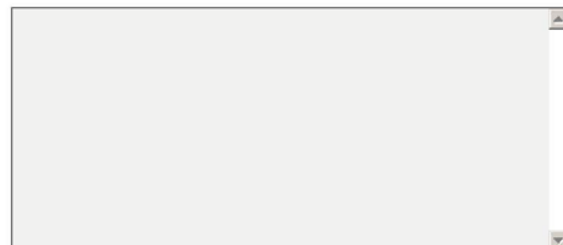
23. Have WFSGs become a part of the school improvement process for KPS? If so, how?

◯ Yes

◯ No

Please explain

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

24. What are the future plans for WFSGs in Kearney Public Schools?

25. Now that you have completed the second year in the implementation of WFSGs in KPS, what would you have done differently?

26. Please write additional comments about WFSGs and their impact on student learning here.

27. What should I have asked that I did not ask? Do you have any additional comments?

District Administration Interviews - Whole Faculty Study Groups

3. Thank You

Thank you for this interview on WFSGs. Your time and your responses are appreciated very much.

Appendix F

IRB Approval Letter

Nebraska
UNIVERSITY OF
Lincoln

May 4, 2009

Cynthia Wendell
Department of Educational Administration
1616 East Ave Holdrege, NE 68949

Donald Uerling
Department of Educational Administration
134 TEAC UNL 68588-0360

IRB Number: 2009059850 EX
Project ID: 9850
Project Title: The Perceived Impact of Whole Faculty Study Groups in a Nebraska School District

Dear Cynthia:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 05/04/2009. This approval is Valid Until: 05/03/2010.

1. Your IRB approval number has been added to the three consent pages. These documents have "-Approved.doc" at the end of the file name. If you need to make changes to the message please submit the revised message to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
▪ Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
▪ Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
▪ Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
▪ Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
▪ Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board. For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Mario Scalora, Ph.D.
Chair for the IRB