LOCAL CASE MANAGEMENT TEAMS: A CASE STUDY OF A WHOLE APPROACH TO

NINTH GRADE INTERVENTION FOR STUDENTS AT RISK FOR HIGH SCHOOL

DROPOUT

by

Jessica Anne Grant

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

Based on existing empirical research, schools continue to use single intervention programs for intervening on behalf of at-risk students despite the fact that those programs do not meet with significant success in decreasing dropout rates. The problem is that the phenomenon of multidimensional approaches to intervening on behalf of ninth-grade students has yet to be explored and understood. The purpose of this single case study was to describe the critical case of Local Case Management Teams utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah. The following research question guided this study: How do local case management teams describe their experiences in ninth-grade intervention/dropout prevention? The theory that guided this study was Communities of Practice by Lave and Wegner (1991) as it explains the relationship between Communities of Practice and Local Case Management Teams. A single case study design was utilized to provide an in-depth analysis of this critical case, bounded by time and activity, and using a variety of data collection procedures and analysis strategies over a sustained period. The participants were chosen using purposeful sampling. Data included interviews, observation, and document analysis and were analyzed using traditional case study analysis methods including memoing, pattern matching, within-case synthesis, and resulted in the development of several themes. Time, accountability, knowledge, escalating intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to success, and multidimensional programming were identified as central themes to this research. Although the participants reported differing experiences, their responses to this type of programming was overwhelmingly positive.

Keywords: at-risk, communities of practice, early-warning-indicator-system, multi-tiered system of support, multidimensional intervention program, single intervention program

Dedication

To my husband, Joel, love is a faith. Walking in this life next to you is grasping a hint of eternity and in my heart will always be your home. It is with tremendous gratitude that I dedicate this, the culmination of my life's work thus far in education, to you and our life's work in Jacob-boy-genius, Ma-cinnamon, and Colie-Puppy-Attack-Dinosaur. Henry David Thoreau was right when he said, "the price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it."   My time with you and on these pages was worth every exchange.

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List of Abbreviations

Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE)

Career and Technology Education (CTE)

Check & Connect (C&C)

Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCP)

Data, Research, and Service Request Department (DRSRD)

Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS)

Early Warning Indicator Systems (EWIS)

English Language Learners (ELL)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Early Warning System (EWS)

Evidenced-Based Practice (EBP)

Free And Reduced Meals (FARM)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Institute for Educational Sciences (IES)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Local Education Agency (LEA)

Local Case Management Teams (LCMT)

Mooseland County Public Schools (MCPS)

Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Professional Learning Team (PLT)

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

School Resource Officer (SRO)

Small Learning Community (SLC)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

Teaching Assistant (TA)

What Works Clearinghouse (WWC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Single intervention programs for students at-risk for dropping out of high school refer to programming that only applies a single intervention strategy, i.e. mentoring, career academies, Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), etc. Multidimensional intervention programs refer to programs that utilize multiple interventions to support students at-risk for dropping out. In the research, at-risk will generally refer to students who, due to one or more factors including, but not limited to, family history, peers, health, mobility, neighborhood crime, resources, previous academic success and/or engagement, have an increased chance of poor outcomes (Allensworth, 2013). The purpose of this single, critical case study is to describe Local Case Management Teams (LCMT) utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students in a large suburban school district called Mooseland County Public Schools (MCPS) (pseudonym) in Utah.

The problem that necessitated the research for this study is that the phenomenon of multidimensional approaches to intervening on behalf of ninth grade students has yet to be explored and understood. Current empirical research reveals that schools continue to use single intervention programs for intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students despite the fact that those programs do not meet with significant success in decreasing dropout rates. This is based on an extensive literature search and examination. The potential audiences for this research are those in the field of education, specifically those leaders who create and participate in intervention programs in school districts. This chapter highlights the background for this study, the situation to self of the researcher, the problem and purpose statements, the significance

of the study, the research questions, and definitions of key terms. Lave and Wenger's (1991)

theory of communities of practice provides the theoretical framework for this study.

<div align="center">**Background**</div>

Even at the outset of preparation for this research, it was easy to see how the historical,

social, and theoretical components are closely interrelated. The historical background

surrounding at-risk students and how they came to be at-risk will allow one to understand the

social implications of their future as high school dropouts. Such social implications lead to the

theoretical underpinnings that school districts can utilize to minimize the number of at-risk

students who drop out when they embrace a multidimensional approach to dropout prevention.

Historical

Although the term *at-risk youth* was conceived in the early 1980s after a cautionary

policy report emerged that warned our nation of "a rising tide of mediocrity" (United States

National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 15) within our school system, the

United States has cycled through its share of nomenclature and taxonomy surrounding the

children who need our help the most. Although America saw a rise in addressing these children,

who were first known disparagingly as *juvenile delinquents* as early as 1940, one only has to dig

a little deeper into our shared history as a nation to see that this issue goes much deeper than the

caricatures popularized throughout the 1950s and 1960s in images from pop culture including

West Side Story and *Rebel Without a Cause* ("Our City Charities," 1860).

American history is riddled with examples of our shared sentiment as a nation toward

intellectuals and intellectualism. Psychologist David Anderegg (2007) placed much of the blame

for students' academic failures squarely on the shoulders of Americans and the popularly held

stereotype of "the nerd" (p. 18). This stereotype, he argued, is deeply embedded in American

anti-intellectualism. Anderegg explained that Americans act like it is fun to tell our children that "people who are smart and do well in school and like science fiction and computers are also people who smell bad and look ugly and are so repulsive that they are not allowed to have girlfriends," but then are baffled that it is difficult to motivate those same children to do well in school (Anderegg, 2007, p. 33).

The beginning of the nerd stereotype can be evidenced early on in American literature by studying Washington Irving's fictional character, Ichabod Crane (Irving, 1963). Awkward, yet scholarly, schoolteacher Ichabod Crane was scared out of town by his romantically-written rival, pumpkin-headed Brom Bones. Mr. Bones became the new American anti-intellectual hero, while Ichabod Crane's former landlord burned all of Ichabod's books musing that he would "send his children no more to school, observing that he never knew any good to come out of this same reading and writing" (Anderegg, p. 68). *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, embraced by Americans, teaches a dangerous lesson to children across the country: Reading is dumb and teachers are dull, self-deceived harbingers of this same stupidity.

Hofstadter (1963), in his Pulitzer Prize winning book on the social movements that changed the role of intellect in American society, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life,* argued that anti-intellectualism was a consequence of the democratization of knowledge. He pointed to multitudinous problems that have arisen in education through indifference including "underpaid teachers, overcrowded classrooms, double-schedule schools, [and] broken-down school buildings" (Hofstadter, 1963, p. 300). However, he pointed the finger at anti-intellectualism as the primary cause of education's failings. In particular, he cited the "cult of athleticism, marching bands, high-school drum majorettes, ethnic ghetto schools, de-intellectualized

curricula, the failure to educate in serious subjects, [and] the neglect of academically gifted children" (Hofstadter, 1963, pp. 300-301).

     Horace Mann, considered the father of the Common School, used his position as the first Secretary of the newly-created Massachusetts Board of Education in 1837 to endorse and legislate major educational reform (Hofstadter, 1963). However, according to Hofstadter (1963), Mann was more concerned with persuading both the wealthy and the general public of the importance of education rather than having an interest in the fundamental values of the mind. Even today, "schools are beholden to an insecure public, which demands evidence of efficacy" (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017, p. 667). As such, Mann used education's role in achieving an acceptable form of "democratic society" as a means to convince Americans that under "popular government, popular education" was a necessity (Hofstadter, 1963, p. 305). Unfortunately, this led to curriculum that, rather than valuing intellect, focused merely on the public and private utility of knowledge (Hofstadter, 1963). According to Hofstadter (1963), those who authored textbooks were satisfied to pay the price of having fewer great scholars. And, any child who accepted the rhetoric of their assigned readers would believe that scholarship was aggrandizement better left to the "inferior" Europeans (Hofstadter, p. 308).

     To exacerbate further America's reluctance toward intellectual values was the low esteem with which teachers were regarded. After all, Irving's Ichabod Crane was still the predominant stereotype of the schoolteacher in American literature (Hofstadter, 1963). Even when Hofstadter (1963) wrote his book, schoolteachers were still considered to be of lower status in America than in any other country. In Bestor's (1985) *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools*, he wrote a derisive review of the American public education system suggesting that government education policies and teacher education programs fashioned an

unyielding organism of prescribed schooling that trapped the classroom teacher in didactic

philosophy and disproportionate directives that had naught to do with the freedom of science and

learning. According to Peters (2018), this has been compounded recently "with the introduction

of national standards, greater compliance regulation and other features of neoliberal

managerialism that have the effect of muzzling the teacher, deprofessionalizing and burdening

them with huge amounts of administration" (Smith, 2018, p. 4).

Anti-intellectualism continues to be a serious problem in education, one that is intensified

by popular culture and populist beliefs, which offer various punishments for ability and success.

In American high schools this punishment comes in the form of collective harassment and

persecution by classmates, threats against education, and the promotion of mediocre sameness.

During the vociferous campaign of McCarthyism in the late 1940s and through most of the

1950s, anti-intellectualism flourished with its crucible of assaults on scholars, intellectuals, and

writers (Peters, 2018). This culture of anti-intellectualism was further reflected in Jacoby's

(1987) *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in The Age of Academe* where he examined the

disappearance of the public intellectual in America and argued that America is no longer

producing new ones to replace the previous generation of intellectuals.

Unfortunately, this anti-intellectualist behavior is learned in childhood when children are

busy studying the world by dividing it into categorical distinctions that are simple at first and

become more elaborate later as they mature. Furthermore, since everything in the world of

children is assigned value, this black-and-white thinking becomes detrimental to those who

continue to embrace this worldview: Immature students often suffer in school because they will

not do homework for a teacher they do not like; however, they should learn that they can and

should do their homework and learn from someone they do not like (Anderegg, 2007). This

unyielding, dichotomous thinking often makes an appearance in times of severe anxiety and fear, which is often present when children undergo tremendous physical and psychological change as they transition into young adulthood. However, it is difficult to blame students for resorting to this type of response when they are engaged in an unrelenting push for higher test scores that produces only small increases on standardized tests as a result of narrow instruction on concentrated objectives, yet have not been encouraged to pursue "intellectual habits of mind" (Noddings, 2007, p. 29). Noddings (2007) is concerned that we may be diminishing intellectual life to mental toil.

Anti-intellectualism not only punishes at-risk students, it also has punitive implications for children who are academically gifted upon entering the public school system. In fact, many programs in public school have historically devalued intellectual pursuits (Howley, Pendaris, & Howley, 1993). Many activities aimed at enriching the academic lives of these gifted students are irrelevant to academic achievement and instead promote social behaviors such as leadership training, small group interactions, and problem-solving skills that are isolated from any specific academic content (Howley et al., 1993). Therefore, these programs have lacked merit, and, as observed by Borland (1989), often consist of "an array of faddish, meaningless trivia—kits, games, mechanical step-by-step problem-solving methods, pseudoscience, and pop psychology (p. 174). Ultimately, by exaggerating the emotional and social risks of acceleration and intellectualism, these programs dissuade students from participating in intellectually challenging programs (Howley et al., 1993).

It is also worth mentioning that most children through the early years of high school identify nerds or intellectuals as being distinctly male, which is due primarily to 19th-century stereotypes of how men were depicted in fiction (Anderegg, 2002). This impact can be seen

manifested in the classroom in the behavior of ninth grade boys in particular. Unlike disabilities

and other afflictions, there is an element of choice in whether or not one becomes a nerd. In fact,

for some adolescents it is so shameful to be labeled a nerd that they attempt to go underground

with their predilection for intellectual pursuits and choose not to take advanced classes and not to

do well in school (Anderegg, 2002). When a teacher asserts authority, many of these boys have

to consider whether it is a situation where it is essential to cultivate a reputation as someone who

will fight back, or whether that conflict will not compromise their reputation (Heppen et al.,

2017). Furthermore, "If they do not distinguish between these situations, then they will always

comply (and risk being terrorized on the street) or they will always resist (and do poorly in

school)" (Heppen et al., 2017, p. 37). While many adolescents are able to distinguish

efficaciously between these situations, some misinterpret the situation they are in and adopt an

erroneous automatic response that is negative (Heppen et al., 2017).

　　　　For teenage girls, intellectualism has historically been associated with ugliness, and they

have been told that appearing smart is a turn-off for men (Anderegg, 2002). While eventually

most children grow out of these rigid views of intellect versus attractiveness, for many

exceptionally socially immature ninth graders, this realization may come too late. Students,

particularly those already struggling with academics, may also start to lose interest in school

during those middle school years and often have a hard time transitioning to high school

(Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Combined with a declining interest in school and achievement,

particularly among ninth grade students, this emphasis on "beauty-and-sex-above-all-else" is a

dangerous phenomenon of popular culture (Anderegg, 2002).

　　　　Anti-intellectualism has become this generation's social baggage. According to Stratford

(2018), this is otherwise known as the "ongoing 'zombification' of education (and society)"

(Stratford, 2018, p. 1). Peters (2018) pointed out that this zombification is not exclusively an American plague. Instead, he compares it to an infectious virus that multiplies within the living cells of public discourse. Furthermore, he asserts that in this age of technology, it has become a virus of the digital ecology (Peters, 2018). Since adolescents have made this digital landscape their modern playground, it is no wonder that they have become the intellectual zombies about which Stratford (2018) warned us.

However, the question remains: What can be done to assist schools in bridging the gap between popular culture and academic success? It is risky to be a high-achieving student in this day and age when so much value is placed on appearance, money, and athletic ability, and people are rewarded and admired in a multitude of ways for such "talents." As society continues to be ravaged by fake news and post-truth, anti-intellectualism is at the heart of the destruction of the value of our education systems and society. However, this may be where the discussion begins on how schools and educators can build better communities (Stratford, 2018). Since adults set the example for children, it would appear that it is adults who must deliver the message that school and education are important.

Social

Students in the United States approach education from a variety of family circumstances, financial situations, and cultural backgrounds. As a result, our schools are faced with exceptional challenges as they attempt to deliver equitable learning opportunities for all students. There is no question that these factors, along with their parents' own scholastic backgrounds, influence a child's educational opportunities. Being born to a teenage mother, a mother with less than a high school education, a mother who lives in poverty, and/or an unmarried mother has been associated with "children experiencing problems such as repeating a grade, requiring

special education services, and being suspended and dropping out of school" (NCES, 1997, p. 1).

Furthermore, minority students from low-income families, who are an ever-growing portion of

the student population, are more at risk for poor school outcomes (NCES, 1997). More recently,

changes in student composition, to include an ever-growing number of students who are English

Language Learners (ELL), affect the social context of at-risk students.

Despite the fact that it has been well-documented since the 1960s that all students enter

the classroom with varying backgrounds and prior knowledge, and that high-stakes

accountability has a significant impact on teaching and learning, current high-stakes assessments

continue to expect all students to achieve the same level of competency at the same time (NCES,

1997). In fact, numerous individuals who are invested in both education and politics see

standardized testing as necessary for academic improvement and believe that a standardized,

measurable curriculum leads to improvements in instruction (Farenga, Ness, & Sawyer, 2015).

These top-down shifts in structure, methodology, and pedagogy seek to standardize practice and

to deliver evidence that the value of the learning experience is getting better for students

(Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017).

However, empirical evidence indicates that, as standardization continues to flourish,

educational theory indicates that the classroom teacher, not standardization, is the most effectual

instrument of change for students (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). Furthermore, opponents of

high-stakes testing disagree with the practice of relying on the data produced by these tests to

evaluate students. Opponents also believe that these tests can result in negative consequences for

many children, and that the unattainable proficiency goals set forth in No Child Left Behind

(NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), though well-intentioned, naturally have

led to undesirable consequences including reduced instructional time, fewer academic

opportunities, and heightened anxiety for students (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2001). Noddings

(2017) stressed:

>Students do not come to us as standard raw material, and we should not expect to
>
>produce standard academic products. Intellectual life is challenging, enormously
>
>diverse, and rewarding. It requires initiative and independent thinking, not the tedious
>
>following of orders. It should not be reduced to mental drudgery. (p. 32)

Additionally, the use of high-stakes data to ensure that teachers are also following orders and as

a means for rating their effectiveness has resulted in educators digging in their heels at a time

when the expectation for additional collaboration has increased (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Farenga, Ness, and Sawyer (2015) examined evidence that indicated average students

drop out of school because of their perception of being negatively labeled "average" and what

the accompanying implications of that label include (e.g., finding schools to be antagonistic)

(Farenga et al., 2015, p. 18). Furthermore, the authors argued that dropping out, in many cases,

could be redefined using the term *push out.* Farenga et al. (2015) reported that in many cases

students who earn low tests scores are retained in the ninth grade to prevent them from

matriculating to tenth grade and taking those standardized tests (Shriberg & Shriberg, 2006).

Farenga et al. (2015) also revealed that certain cultural groups are more apt to be *pushed out* than

others: "[A]pproximately 76.8 percent of Asian students and 74.9 percent of white students

finish high school, these figures drop to 53.2 percent for Hispanic students, 51.1 percent for

Native American students, and 50.2 percent for black students" (p. 15). This data is further

impacted by gender since the numbers significantly increase for males.

Furthermore, if those males are African-American or Latino, they are more likely than

any other cultural group to be suspended or expelled from school, which occurs at a higher rate

in underperforming students at risk for dropout (Fergus & Noguera, 2010). These figures reveal a distinct trend that is often further worsened by poverty, is consistent with "push out" theories and other research, and which has argued that racial minorities and other at-risk students are more likely to be marginalized or neglected by school staff (Peguero, Ovink, & Yun, 2016). Although Farenga et al. (2015) acknowledged hidden cultural and gender related components that may contribute to high school dropout rates, and that "an uneven distribution of dropout rates exists along [those] cultural lines," (Farenga et al., 2015, p. 18) they were also able to identify a significant correlation between low test scores and dropout rates for all at-risk students.

Fazel-Zarandi, Feinstein, and Kaplan (2018) estimate that there are potentially as many as 29.1 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the United States. Most of these families have emigrated from Mexico, and Central and South American countries. Unauthorized children or children who live in unauthorized families in the United States are at risk to experience significant disruptions to their educational and psychosocial functions (Sulkowski, 2017). Consequently, the responsibility to provide these students with a free and appropriate education along with necessary academic and behavioral supports falls squarely on the shoulders of our public schools. Fortunately for these students, schools are known to be spaces where undocumented students and their families are protected from concerns they may potentially face in the outside the walls of those institutions, which emphasizes the school's role in the lives of undocumented students (Nguyen & Kebede, 2017). Even as far back as the 1990s Gibson (1998) observed,

> Although schools have no direct control over the larger societal risk factors facing many of
> today's immigrant children, they do have influence over the social and instructional

environments within the school setting. Students most at risk are those from poor and

minority backgrounds who view schooling as an alienating force providing unequal

opportunities, who feel their identities and languages are undermined or deprecated at

school, and who feel stuck in remedial tracks that offer them little meaningful education.

(pp. 629-630)

Given that government policies on the education of undocumented students are vague at best, it

is crucial that this population of at-risk students continues to be addressed along with their other

at-risk peers.

While policymakers seem immune to the plight of all of these students, the consequences

these tests have on the students are very real. There is a long history of research that has

indicated the stakes involved in test-based accountability policies and practices are associated

with a variety of negative educational outcomes including, but not limited to, a failure to

graduate (Embse, Schultz, & Draughn, 2015). Instead of top-down testing and accountability

practices, policymakers need to shift their efforts to finding ways to engage at-risk students with

workable approaches that are classroom and student-focused.

Theoretical

Lave and Wenger (1991) described communities of practice as groups of people who

engage in the development of communal learning in a common domain of human endeavor.

Perhaps the most well known example is the community of practice that developed in the 1980s

among the Xerox customer service representatives who repaired the machines in the field

(Brown & Duguid, 2000). The service representatives began trading tips and tricks during

informal meetings, and eventually Xerox recognized the value of these collaborations and

created, Eureka, a project to facilitate these interactions (Brown & Duguid, 2000). In education

this can be applied by examining the following scenario: A teacher who is invested in working with students who are at risk for dropout and who has some background/training in it is invited by the school administration to join the school's LCMT, whose members discuss various strategies for identifying at-risk youth and facilitating plans to better their chances for success. It was my intention to use Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice to understand those LCMTs.

Much research has been done on dropout intervention, which is a timely topic for many districts across America. Some of this research pointed out that students all come with varying levels of issues that need to be addressed in order to prevent them from dropping out (Rosch & Owen, 2015). Furthermore, schools spend vast amounts of money and manpower on preventing students from dropping out, particularly during the ninth grade year. They purchase in-services for specific training in single intervention programs, and then wait to see if those programs will or will not work with their student population. However, for evidence-based intervention(s) to succeed, at the minimum, they need to be implemented well. All too often, those dropout prevention programs rely predominantly on teachers and principals, but most at-risk students also need help from counselors, social workers, and school psychologists (Rosch & Owen, 2015).

Every intervention, whether it is at the district or school level, needs someone to keep the fidelity of the intervention in place, to align and tailor the intervention to local conditions, and to look unceasingly to advance the program (Rosch & Owen). In theory, this is supposed to be the school principal. However, communities of trained experts not only need to be assembled in school systems to reach out to all at-risk students but also to extend their knowledge, tacit or otherwise, to help when a student suddenly surfaces as at-risk (Wenger, 2002). Appreciating the

collective relationship between knowledge and the individuals who bear that knowledge is what makes a community dynamic, effective, and productive (Wenger, 2002). Important to the success of at-risk students in the classroom is the social fabric of learning the LCMT provides (Wenger, 2002).

In conclusion, this research extended the existing knowledge in this area of study by providing an understanding of the impact of LCMTs as communities of practice have on students at-risk for dropping out of high school. The research could benefit schools in preparing them for future at-risk students, which in turn benefits the at-risk students. Finally, this research adds to and expands upon a small body of existing literature by investigating and refining how communities of practice, specifically LCMTs, can impact the graduation outcomes for at-risk ninth grade students.

Situation to Self

This study is important to me because I taught and mentored ninth grade students at-risk for dropout for many years. I have been teaching students in need of intervention in order to graduate for my entire secondary teaching career. I gravitated toward teaching these students because, growing up, I would have been labeled at-risk and am well-acquainted with the feeling that no one in school cared whether or not I was succeeding, no one was paying attention to my struggle, and no one was offering me any help.

At-risk students at most of my previous positions typically were helped through an email sent to the teachers asking them to assist the student or students in getting back on track. Generally, the teachers with whom I worked were neither prepared nor equipped to deal with the intricate nature of why the student was at-risk in the first place, much less failing. However, while working for MCPS, I was afforded the opportunity to work as the teacher component to an

LCMT whose goal was specifically to address those at-risk youth. The LCMT would recommend that a student be placed in my ninth grade academy course based on the collective recommendation of the team. The skills that students were taught went well beyond those needed to merely study. Students also received daily mentoring through the course and were taught positive self-advocacy along with behavioral and social skills.

At-risk students were identified and brought up in LCMT through a variety of means. First, guidance counselors used a basic formula to identify students who were potentially at-risk based on the number of 'F' grades that appeared on their school transcripts prior to each meeting. Second, the ninth grade Professional Learning Team (PLT) submitted to the team each month the names of students it believed to be at-risk for eventual credit deficiency. However, the referrals were not limited to these more formal processes for the identification of students. Teachers, parents, and counselors could submit a student's name for consideration if they believed that a child would benefit from LCMT intervention. The LCMT was then responsible for designing either a formal or informal plan, dependent upon the severity of the issues presented, for addressing the needs of those students. The LCMT felt the communal responsibility continually to address the needs of those students to increase their achievement while also assisting students in progressing to the tenth grade with all of their core credits accrued and their social-emotional needs met.

Although time consuming, addressing at-risk youth is a priority at most secondary schools based on various national, state, and local accountability initiatives. I was interested in learning more about LCMTs experiences with this multidimensional intervention model. More specifically, I was interested in learning from the individual teams who are experiencing success intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. I hoped to gain a better perspective of the

teams and a fuller understanding of the complexity of their structure. The perspectives of LCMTs are missing from current literature.

While districts are spending tremendous amounts of money to intervene on behalf of at-risk youth and to keep them on track for graduation, most of those interventions are one-dimensional, and those decisions are being made without any available published literature reporting first-hand accounts from a successful multidimensional intervention model. LCMTs can provide insight that numbers and averages cannot. I am concerned with hearing the stories behind the numbers and using the voices of LCMTs to challenge other districts to redesign their ninth grade intervention programs based on LCMT's experiences and perceptions. I hope that school districts will read this study and start investigating ways to use this type of qualitative data to devise their own holistic communities of practice to increase the number of at-risk students who successfully end up graduating from high school after four years.

It is imperative that researchers understand the paradigm and philosophical assumptions that underline their research and are able to articulate those assumptions when the intention is to present that research to an audience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because the field of educational research is eclectic, and borrows from many other disciplines, it is my belief that multiple assumptions will need to be addressed in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is my hope that this level of openness to the differing assumptions will allow the audience to resolve the differences between author-researcher and the audience for the research before they become a prime focus for critique (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The research paradigm through which my methods, methodology, and theoretical perspective were developed is the constructivist/interpretive paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The constructivist/interpretive paradigm is supported by observation and interpretation and

emphasizes the need to put analysis in context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). It is concerned with understanding the world from the subjective experiences of individuals. This constructivist/interpretive paradigm is the underlying reason for selecting a qualitative approach to the study of this phenomenon. Instead of using measurement oriented methodologies, I believe that a meaning-oriented methodology that relies on a subjective connection between the researcher and the participants is more effective because it focuses on the full intricacy of how humans make sense of their lives (Maxwell, 2005).

The constructivist/interpretive approach also explains the subjective reasons and meanings that underlie social action. Thus, I first observed in order to collect information about the LCMTs and ultimately interpreted those observations to make meaning of the information that was collected. The participants' backgrounds and realities were studied, and I relied on the participants' views of their experiences to develop an understanding of the LCMT (Yin, 2013). Walsham (1995) indicated that in interpretive case studies, theory can be used as part of an iterative process of data collection and analysis or to generate new theory. The iterative process will be applied in this critical case study research since it is not my interest to generate a new theory, but to use the theory of communities of practice as an interpretive lens.

By their very nature, communities of practice are socially constructed. The individuals in communities of practice develop a subjective meaning of their experiences by their social and historical interactions with the others in the group and the norms in which the group operates (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Just as the tacit knowledge of the community of practice is not separate from the individuals in the community who construct it, so it is my responsibility as the researcher to interpret and construct their social environment and, in turn, their reality (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). My final report is a reflection of my constructed views of the participants

and is generalized based on those views and the implications of the philosophical assumptions

that accompany them (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). In the constructivist/interpretive paradigm, this

is accomplished by drawing inferences or by judging the match between the information and a

conceptual pattern or patterns (Yin, 2018).

Using a critical, single case study approach, I operated under the ontological

philosophical assumption that there are multiple realities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore,

this included the understanding that there is no single reality or truth in social research. This

assumption was embraced in order to understand the participants' reality within their community

of practice and to describe the different perspectives of the participants.

Epistemology encourages the researcher to get as close as possible to the participants

being studied to utilize the subjective evidence gathered in an effort to understand and know the

participants and their experiences firsthand (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was my intention to

minimalize the "objective separateness" between the subjects of my case study and myself (Guba

& Lincoln, 1988, p. 94). The more time I spent with the participants, the more likely it was that

I would "know what they know" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20).

Axiological assumptions focus on the role of the qualitative researcher's values in their

research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In acknowledging my axiological assumption that I place

personal value in the research and come with biases, I very clearly define my "position" and

report my "values and biases" regarding the study throughout this entire section (Creswell &

Poth, 2018, p. 20). Because this study is "value-laden," there is the potential that my presence

will be apparent throughout the text (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20).

The methodological assumption that my research will be shaped by my experiences

during the research process was used throughout this study to approach the research through

inductive logic (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). I understand that it was possible for my research questions to change during the study based on the need to understand the problem better. As such, it was my intention to remain flexible during the data collection process in order to follow the path the research led me on to establish the most detailed knowledge of the LCMTs possible (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 22).

Problem Statement

A crucial experience that remains constant for every child is the educational experience. At-risk children, like all children, spend a significant amount of their day in school. When these youths do not graduate, they are often condemned to a lifetime of poverty. Schools and governments should be highly motivated to scrutinize why this particular group of students finds little to no excitement in learning. According to the National Dropout Prevention Center (NDPC), the 5.7% of individuals who drop out of high school cost the country more than $200 billion during their lifetimes in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue (NDPC, 2018). Furthermore, 75% of America's state prison inmates are high school dropouts (NDPC, 2018). The Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE) indicated that students who drop out are more likely to receive public assistance including Medicaid, food stamps, and housing assistance than those who graduate (Alliance, 2009).

For the dropouts themselves, the cost of dropping out of school is even higher. When they do secure jobs, the jobs tend to be lower paying jobs with pitiable benefits. After they reach the age of 25, high school dropouts lose on average $10,000 every year in income (NDPC, 2018). Over the course of the last 25 years, dropouts have earned, roughly, a dismal one-third less than high school graduates. In our increasingly competitive job market, a high school diploma can be seen as a minimum prerequisite for entry into today's world of work. When one

controls for prior risk factors, research has also discovered that those who drop out of high school are also at an increased risk for sickness and disability (De Ridder et al., 2013).

The greater academic demands of high school, along with the added depersonalization of the larger school environment, can add to students' disengagement and diminished sense of enthusiasm for school (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Without any follow-up from the school, students may start skipping school and failing classes (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). This potentially accounts for why more students fail ninth grade than any other grade, which is associated with ultimately dropping out of school (Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

Since success during the ninth grade year is so crucial to preventing students from dropping out of school, and the lack of motivation for many of these children seems to be reaching epidemic proportions, educational leaders need to continue to seek and refine solutions to address this plague that seems to have afflicted these students (Parkay et al., 2014). While there is a great deal of literature available that defines the problem of the ninth grade year for at-risk students, there is not sufficient research to suggest best practice in addressing this problem. The school and the classroom play an important role in the life of students at-risk for dropout as they can provide a pathway for achievement, self-esteem, and self-worth.

Moreover, instead of being proactive, too many schools react after students have already failed and ultimately disengaged from school (Alliance, 2009). While educational leaders and researchers are already effective in realizing that a problem exists and that schools and districts that have strategies and interventions in place have a lower dropout rate, higher academic performance, and attendance, no single intervention program has proven to be effective in impacting the outcomes for students who are considered at-risk for dropping out of high school with any level of significance, specifically during the ninth grade year (Allensworth, 2013;

Freeman & Simonsen, 2013; Zalensky, 2013). Furthermore, there is no quality research available on the use of a multidimensional intervention that has shown to be effective (Dupèrè et al., 2015). The problem was that the phenomenon of multidimensional approaches to intervening on behalf of ninth grade students has yet to be explored and understood.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this single case study was to describe the critical case of LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students in a large suburban school district, MCPS, in Utah. Throughout the research, LCMTs were generally defined as a bounded group of administrators, guidance counselors, a school psychologist, special educators, teacher(s), and a resource officer and/or school social worker, who utilize their individual expertise (multidimensional approach) to successfully intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students (Yin, 2018). The theory guiding this study was Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory of communities of practice as it pertains to the social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time. All human beings bear the awareness that they know more than they can articulate but are not always as aware that the unspoken aspects of knowledge are often the most valuable and that interdependent systems enable dynamic responses to context-specific problems (Wenger et al., 2002).

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to dropout intervention as it relates to the under-utilized practice of incorporating a more holistic multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. In theory, LCMTs as communities of practice keep knowledge innovative, implement it, leverage it in processes, and spread it throughout the school organization (Wenger et al., 2002). The theory of communities of practice binds the whole system of LCMTs together around core knowledge requirements, which develops and applies the capabilities available

within the team to execute chosen intervention strategies (Wenger et al., 2002). The results of this study could potentially inform theoretical literature on the effectiveness and value of multidimensional programs that address ninth grade students at risk for dropout and on the effectiveness of communities of practice in intervening on behalf of those students.

Empirically, this study correlates well with other studies that have investigated various dropout intervention programs, whereby districts and schools are left to flounder for packaged intervention programs to address dropout intervention through singular approaches that may only address one component of a more holistic problem. The stakeholders for such empirical research are subsequent researchers who will be examining dropout prevention. Many studies focus solely on single-intervention programming and fail to examine approaches that combine those moderately successful interventions to develop an approach that is multidimensional. None of the articles reviewed focused specifically on the use of either a multidimensional approach to intervention for the at-risk ninth grade student or the use of LCMTs.

Practically, this study is of importance to public school districts throughout the United States due to the 5.9% of at-risk students who continue to drop out of high school altogether each year (NCES). The stakeholders are those involved at the district and school levels in developing programs and policy related to dropout prevention. A high dropout rate continues to exist in this country for a variety of at-risk student populations, which places a natural emphasis on the support they need during the crucial ninth grade year. By studying the LCMTs utilized by MCPS, other school districts may be motivated to create similar communities of practice with all of the additional supports and knowledge bases they provide for at-risk students beginning on the very first day of school. A long-term goal will be for these multidimensional programs to lead to increased graduation rates, which in turn could translate into brighter futures for these students.

Research Questions

Creating and defining research questions with substance and form is the most important step when designing case study research (Yin, 2018). The research design for this study was determined based on the research questions, which framed the problem, as well as the purpose of the study: To describe the critical case of LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. Based upon the aforementioned problem and purpose statements, the following research questions were created to guide this study.

Central Question

The following research question guided this study.

How do local case management teams describe their experiences in ninth grade intervention/ dropout prevention?

This question was chosen to elicit a broad overview of the LCMTs in which the MCPS staff members participated. This research question allowed the researcher to explore the idea that historical research overlaps with case study research in this instance that becomes a contemporary, fluid amalgamation of the past and present (Yin, 2018). The case study relies on this contemporary history being revealed through interviews with the participants.

Answers to this question highlighted the overall impact the LCMTs had on the participants and how these qualities impacted their success intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students by facilitating the development of common themes. Many researchers have called for multidimensional approaches to dropout intervention programming (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). Answering this central question allowed the researcher to find the most common answers among the participants to acquire a healthier understanding of how the LCMT community worked and impacted student success.

Sub-Questions

    1.   What factors influence LCMT's perceptions of the strategies involved in a

           multidimensional intervention approach for at-risk students?

Yin (1994) recommended that a theoretical framework should support the research questions for

case study research in an effort to define the parameters of the case(s). Theory shapes the

methods in perspicuous ways (Yin, 1994). This question also narrowed the inquiry to only

relevant information about the case(s) being studied (Yin, 2018). Information regarding each

aspect of the community of practice recognizes that the individual talents of the members of the

community impact the success of the LCMT, and that part of the challenge of intervention

programming lies in the development of such talent (Wegner et al., 2002). Furthermore, the sub-

questions explored the definition(s) of the case. Yin (2018) discussed developing research

questions that enable the researcher to reveal "(a) variations in program definition, depending on

the perspective of different actors, and (b) program components that preexisted in the formal

designation of the program" (p. 29). These conditions can be easily clarified by the triangulation

of the data derived from the interviews, observations, and document analysis. In a community of

practice there is a required baseline of knowledge that must be established and standardized in

order to focus the energies of the community, in this case the LCMT, on the more advanced

issues (Wegner et al., 2002).

    2.   How did these factors influence the degree to which they used these strategies effectively

           to target and personalize care in their work with at-risk students?

Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory of communities of practice serves as a conceptual tool that

was used in this sub-question to propel the inquiry onward toward more profound levels of

understanding. This question allowed the information collected from participants to highlight

any possible impact of the LCMT on at-risk students. Because a long-term goal of any school

system is to see students successfully graduate from high school, effective intervention programs, which meet the needs of all involved, is imperative. This question emphasizes elements that might be helpful to school administrators when amending future programming to meet this goal.

Definitions

1. *Anti-intellectualism*- in modern education is an evolution in the Western World whereby education and thought have moved away from the traditions that stemmed from the ancient Greeks, including the Socratic method. After the Industrial Revolution and the Progressive Movement standardized examinations replaced examination by essay at the expense of imagination, which is counter-intellectual and contributes to apathy, or a deadening toward academic achievement among students, who have been taught that testing is more important than learning (Anderegg, 2002; Howley, Pendaris, & Howley, 1993).

2. *At-risk*- students who, due to one or more factors, including, but not limited to family history, peers, health, mobility, neighborhood crime, resources, previous academic success and/or engagement have an increased chance of poor outcomes (Allensworth, 2013, p. 68).

3. *Career Academies*- career themed small learning communities that provide a college prep curriculum and team with employers, the community, and institutions of higher education (Cox, Hernandez-Gantes, & Fletcher, 2015).

4. *Communities of Care*- refers to "A place where students and teachers care about and support each other, where individual needs are satisfied within a group setting, and where members feel a sense of belonging and identification with the group" (Ellerbrock &

Kiefer, 2010, p. 396).

5. *Communities of Practice*- refers to the social theory that reasons that learning does not reside with the individual, but is a social practice of meaning making. Key to the theory of communities of practice is that they can arise in any domain of human endeavor (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

6. *Credit-deficient*- refers to the absence of one or more credits when a student moves from the ninth to the tenth grade (MCPS, 2018).

7. *Early Warning Indicator Systems (EWIS)*- utilizes background characteristics (eighth-grade test scores, mobility, overage, race, economic status, and gender), on-track in ninth grade (alone), GPA, course failures, and absences to predict on-time graduation (Allensworth, 2013).

8. *Mentoring Program*- a research-based intervention specifically designed for students to address their school engagement; implementation involves an adult who serves as a mentor and regularly meets with the student (Tsai & Kern, 2018).

9. *Multidimensional intervention program*- refers to programs that utilize multiple interventions to support students at-risk for dropping out of high school.

10. *Multi-tiered System of Support*- a broadly applied umbrella term/framework that is historically based on three tiers of support that are provided to the entire school population, though they ultimately focus on groups of students with common needs, and subsequently, very specific needs (Bohanon et al., 2016). The interventions used in MTSS can range from school-based approaches to community-based programming (Bohanon et al., 2016).

11. *Personalization*- a school culture that nurtures a personal experience for students facilitated by adults who express care and concern for students' well-being and educational success, while a positive, motivating school climate and student engagement are created and enhanced (Rutledge et al., 2015).

12. *Push out*- when students earn low tests scores and are retained in the ninth grade to prevent them from matriculating to tenth grade and taking the subsequent standardized tests (Shriberg & Shriberg, 2006).

13. *Single intervention program*- refers to programming that only applies a single intervention strategy ie. mentoring, career academies, Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS), etc. to support students at-risk for dropping out.

14. *Social-emotional*- includes the child's experience, expression, management of emotions, and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others (Cohen and others 2005).

15. *Trauma-Informed Schools*- schools that account for student experiences with incidents that are perceived as terrifying, shocking, sudden, or that potentially pose a threat to one's life, safety, or personal integrity (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016).

Summary

Chapter One provides the background to this single embedded case study, focusing on LCMTs as an intervention for at-risk ninth grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah. Multidimensional intervention programs are potentially far more valuable to school intervention programs, potentially leaving schools that employ a single intervention at a disadvantage. For me, this study has a great deal of meaning due to my personal desire to improve the outcomes for students at-risk for dropping out of high school. What necessitated the

purpose for this study, which was to describe the critical case of LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students, was that, based on existing empirical research, schools continue to use single intervention programs for intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students despite the fact that those programs do not meet with significant success in decreasing dropout rates. There are both empirical and practical significances to this study, which convey to many stakeholders including districts, schools, teachers, and students. The central research question and the two sub-questions allowed the interviews to remain a consistent line of inquiry throughout the fluid discussions with the participants in order to delve into an understanding of the LCMT and its impact on intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. The use of the terms single intervention versus multidimensional intervention refer to whether the programs utilize one intervention or multiple interventions to support students at-risk for dropping out.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Although most students face hurdles as they begin their ninth grade year, those who are considered at-risk find this transitional year to be particularly challenging (Allensworth, 2013; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). Students often enter ninth grade unaware that it is a critical year and that it will likely determine whether they will meet with success during their high school years, or if they will become disengaged from school and thus be more apt to drop out altogether. In fact, research has demonstrated a significant correlation between insufficient credit accrual in the freshman year and the likelihood that a student will not graduate in four years (Heppen et al., 2016).

This sentiment is echoed in research conducted across the country. The dropout problem is not exclusive to large urban school districts; it also is problematic for many suburban and rural areas. Retention and dropout rates are a significant problem locally, statewide, and nationally. Although the graduation rate for first-time ninth graders rose to 83% in the 2014-2015 school year, 5.9% of students in the United States still drop out of high school altogether, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). With the ninth grade year as a clear predictor for future preparedness and success, it is vital that schools understand that when students fail to complete high school, why so much of this failure or success is determined during this crucial year, and what successful interventions to mitigate this problem look like (Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

This phenomenon was viewed through the lens and scope of Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory of communities of practice. Investigating the criteria by which at-risk students are identified is fundamental to increasing graduation rates and meeting the demands placed on

secondary schools through state and federal legislation. Furthermore, examining federal mandates like NCLB (2002) and ESSA (2015) underpins the mitigating factors in the relatively stagnant dropout rate. Finally, the related literature explores the various interventions currently in place to diminish the dropout rate.

Theoretical Framework

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice reasons that learning does not reside with the individual, but it is a social practice of meaning making. Key to the theory of communities of practice is that they can arise in any domain of human endeavor. At its core, it is a social learning theory. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), it is useful for telling meaningful stories about the human condition. They also stated that it refers not to a group of people per se, but to the social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This theory was applied to the proposed study regarding the LCMT as a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that communities of practice structure people's social relationships among one another in various ways, which ultimately results in an unambiguous connection and functionality between them. While a team is defined by a joint task-driven undertaking that team members have to accomplish together, "A community of practice is a learning partnership related to a domain of practice. Members of the community of practice may engage in the same practice while working on different tasks" (Farnsworth et al., 2016, p. 143).

Since communities of practice develop patterns of competency over time, which is a reflection of their history and accountability, it is applicable to the success of the LCMTs that have shared in the intervention process with at-risk ninth graders. Furthermore, according to Wenger (2016), teachers, who are considered specialists in their field, do not just implement

research or policies because the connection between research and implementation is complicated. Because peoples' identities, along with the practice of teaching, are localized endeavors, and if identity is "viewed from a community of practice perspective, to be an organizing principle in the design of education, we will not create a curriculum of objective knowledge but focus our energies on designing learning contexts that promote identity negotiation" (Wenger, 2016, pp. 149-157). This theory advances the topic literature by allowing readers to understand that LCMTs will often do whatever it takes, regardless of the amount of assistance they have, to ensure that students succeed by working as a community of practice to interact and engage together in informal learning processes such as "storytelling, conversation, coaching and apprenticeship" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 9). This study presents itself as a possible advancement of theory, through research, by extending the notion of using communities of practice to guide individual school practitioners' knowledge growth while connecting the professional identities of the practitioners to the strategy of the organization (Wenger et al., 2002).

It further advances the topic of literature by supporting the understanding that communities of practice, and, in turn, LCMTs are structured based on three basic elements: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 2002). While the terms community and practice are implicit, the LCMT has the well-defined domain that places all of its members on common ground and provides them a sense of common identity: These educators can change the outcome for at-risk ninth grade students, which legitimizes the community by affirming its purpose in successfully intervening on behalf of those students (Wenger et al., 2002). This study proposes to advance this theory by bridging the gap between theory and practice utilizing engaged scholarship and inquiry as tools to identify the knowledge structure responsible for the LCMT's ability to steward and develop that knowledge (Wenger et al., 2002). Ultimately, working as a

community in this organizational framework can "help students before learning difficulties grow into permanent patterns of failure" (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016, p. 59). The related literature below serves to illustrate how multidimensional intervention programs, facilitated by a community of practice, can be the catalyst that make all of this happen and markedly improves outcomes for America's at-risk students.

Related Literature

Following an extensive literature review, several themes emerged in order to categorize information relevant to this study. First, I explain how students are identified as at-risk in detail. This allows the reader to understand that not all students present themselves as at-risk in a traditional sense. I will then discuss how early warning systems (EWS) have assisted schools in identifying at-risk students. A discussion of traditional single intervention programming follows. Career academies, mentoring programs, small learning communities, targeting absenteeism, teacher impact, engagement, a personalized school environment, MTSS, and communities of care, are all explored. This discussion includes both the positive and negative outcomes of these widely utilized interventions. Finally, information is shared regarding filling the gap in the research by exploring and understanding LCMTs as a multidimensional approach to dropout intervention.

Who Is At-Risk?

The cultural landscape in the United States has changed considerably, and it is projected that racial/ethnic minorities will represent more than half the aggregate youth population within 30 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). There is an abundance of research that demonstrates that the probability of dropping out is greater for racial/ethnic minorities and the rate of dropout is more common among students who attend urban and rural schools, particularly schools that may

also be plagued with problems (Peguero et al., 2016). In fact, the approximately 2,000 high schools in the United States where dropout is most prevalent are located in about 50 large cities and are attended predominantly by minority students (Young-sik, Hyun-Jun, & Lee, 2018).

According to Kim, Chang & Allen (2015), the high school dropout rates are even more striking when one considers immigrant or linguistic status: For White U.S.-born group, 5.2%; White born outside the US, 4%; Black U.S.-born, 6.2%; Black born outside the U.S., 5%; Hispanic U.S.-born, 8.6%; Hispanic born outside the US, 28 %; Asian US-born, 2%; Asian born outside the U.S., 4%, Pacific Islander U.S.-born, 5%; Pacific Islander born outside the U.S., 24%; American Indian/Alaska Native U.S.-born, 13%; American Indian/Alaska Native born outside the U.S., 18%; two or more races U.S.-born, 6%; and two or more born outside the U.S., 7% (Kena et al., 2014; National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Although Asian-Americans generally experience higher educational achievement than whites and other racial/ethnic minority groups, previous research indicated the perception that Asian Americans are equally as unaffected by underachievement as their white peers hides the degree to which Asian American students break down under the pressure of those high academic expectations (Chou & Feagin, 2008; Yu, 2006). Furthermore, according to Peguero et al., student characteristics such as being male and engaging in school misbehavior further increase the probability of drop out.

To exacerbate the issues of race and ethnicity further, many of these at-risk youth are also living without a parent in the home, lack secure shelter, and/or have few support systems to which to turn during this transitional period of life (Flennaugh, Stein, & Carter Andrews, 2018). Furthermore, based on the institutional definition of homelessness provided by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, many at-risk students from vulnerable populations also

experience homelessness by living with relatives, in shelters, substandard housing, or in abandoned buildings (Flenaugh et al., 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Consequently, the White House Council for Community Solutions (2012) has estimated that 17% (6.7 million youth aged 16 to 24 in the United States) are disengaged from school or work, have not completed high school, and do not have a diploma, GED, and/or employment (Flennaugh et al., 2018).

However, the phenomenon of dropout is complicated, and there are a number of other factors that potentially influence the possibility a student will drop out (Peguero et al., 2016). Regarding family characteristics, having a single-parent/guardian family structure and being in a lower socio-economic group decreases the likelihood of an adolescent finishing school (Peguero et al., 2016). Peguero et al. (2015) suggested too that as the children of immigrants assimilate into the American educational landscape, the likelihood that they will drop out of school increases. Past studies also indicated that the educational background of a parent is a significant factor in the likelihood that a child will drop out, and it is particularly true for students of Hispanic origin (Kim et al., 2015). Finally, an increase in mobility presents yet an added concern for students who are already members of vulnerable populaces with lower levels of education and lower occupational stations. (Langenkamp, 2016).

Until recently, studies have typically only focused on one type of precipitating event at a time and have only asked participants about a limited range of events that could be easily dated. This is largely due to the fact that families of at-risk students overarchingly do not enroll in longitudinal studies (Dupèrè et al., 2015). However, more recent research has determined, not surprisingly, that dropping out of high school is more of a process than an event (Dupéré et al., 2015). Dupéré et al. (2015) asserted that it is necessary to take into account the circumstances

around which dropping out occurs and to explore how various stressors impact that event. They argued situations that emerge for students not long before the decision to drop out is made could play an important role, and that the self-reported data from these students illuminates the importance of taking into consideration the vulnerability students may be experiencing when failure occurs in school (Dupéré et al., 2015).

Perhaps this understanding could also assist school staff in quickly identifying precipitating factors for students who, from all outward appearances, seem to be off to a good start, and then encounter obstacles along the way that cause them to reconsider their path to graduation. However, it is essential to note that simply because adolescents avoid the negative outcome from a pre-existing risk factor or do not have a risk factor to begin with, it does not mean that they are flourishing (Zaff et al., 2017). Those same adolescents may be without positive peers who encourage academic pursuits and/or teachers who are caring and competent (Zaff, 2017). Dupéré et al. (2015) concluded that studying the trajectory of students who encounter stressors or run into obstacles that are not congruent with schooling could assist schools in understanding when students experience increased vulnerability and what circumstances lead them to drop out.

According to Freeman and Simonsen (2015), very little in the way of policy and practice regarding intervention has actually had an impact on dropout and completion rates. The first issue they uncovered related to how we have historically identified students at-risk for dropping out of high school. According to Bowers, Sprott, and Taff (2013), researchers have identified four main types of students who drop out: students who are (a) disrupting school; (b) persistently struggling with academics; (c) bored with the process, or (d) quiet dropouts. However, researchers ultimately disagree on this number, and many believe there are actually only three:

quiet, cynical, and involved. (Bowers, Sprott, & Taff, 2013). The greatest percentage of at-risk students is thought by many researchers to exist in the quiet group. Those students are challenged by lower academic performance and attendance and are also far less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities. Regardless, to identify clearly the number and defining characteristics of students who are at risk for dropping out, potential dropouts cannot be viewed as a collective, and schools can therefore be guided toward more effective and targeted interventions if future research is conducted to identify and intervene successfully on behalf of those students (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015).

In the past, students have been the only ones blamed for their risk factors. Little attention has been given to school characteristics (Young-sik, Hyun-Jun, & Lee, 2018). However, Freeman and Simonsen (2015) pointed out that researchers have recently begun to discuss risk factors related to school characteristics. For example, once schools have accounted for the individual characteristics that impact students, students are still more likely to drop out when they perceive that the school they attend has unfair discipline practices or higher percentages of student misbehavior (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). Dropouts primarily are a result of a fraught relationship amid individuals, schools, and social problems, making it problematic to approach the school dropout issue at the national level (Young-sik et al., 2018).

Freeman and Simonsen (2015) concluded that these factors potentially account for a great deal of variation in dropout rates from one school to another. Furthermore, emerging literature is just beginning to point to system-level failure as a contributing factor to the dropout problem which requires multifaceted intervention (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Young-silk et al., 2018). Additionally, although dropout studies that focus on school level factors are on the rise, their emphasis tends to be on the correlation between school dropout and students' distinctive

characteristics by using the mean value of those characteristics as school characteristics rather than as school level features (Young-sik et al., 2018).

Early Warning

Researchers have spent a great deal of time determining the reasons why so many students drop out of high school. Nevertheless, there is little in the way of research to support viable solutions for how to prevent them from dropping out, despite the fact that the at-risk student should be a high priority (Kim et al., 2015). Identifying at-risk students is of the utmost importance so that early interventions can be developed and implemented to help those students to stay in school successfully. Empirical studies that have developed criteria for identifying at-risk students indicated that dropping out is a gradual process resulting from several factors including, but not limited to: family history, peers, health, mobility, neighborhood crime, resources, students' academic success and engagement throughout the primary, elementary, and the middle grades (Allensworth, 2013). Clearly, there are no facets of student's lives that do not affect their ability to learn and achieve in school. However, detecting these indicators is difficult because, more often than not, there is no one reason why students drop out (Marquez-Vera, 2016). In fact, it is a multi-faceted issue often called the "one thousand factors problem" (Marquez-Vera, 2016, p. 107). Unfortunately, the act of identifying who is at-risk seems almost insurmountable for schools in light of these overwhelming factors.

In examining the reasons why students fail courses during this critical year, Allensworth (2013) found that because student engagement declines during this transitional year, their attendance and grades tend to decline as well. These transitional periods in life act as turning points that possibly contribute to an accumulation of negative risk factors, and how students traverse educational transitions can potentially determine whether they will be successful in life

to attain economic stability, better health outcomes, and upward mobility (Langenkamp, 2016).

Student behaviors, in particular their course attendance, can cause students' educational

development to stagnate, which, in turn, may lead to dropout (Vanneste et al., 2016). This

appears to be an even better predictor than test scores, which may only be somewhat related to

course failure (Vanneste et al., 2016). In fact, factors such as eighth grade test scores, student

demographics, and socioeconomic status only explained 12% of the variance in failure

(Allensworth, 2013, p. 71). This pattern of student behavior can be correlated to the fact that

monitoring and support which occurred in eighth grade and meant students could not get away

with engaging in many poor academic habits, declines in the ninth grade, and good academic

habits become a choice (Allensworth, 2013).

Another probable reason students become disengaged from school and fail is a

transformation in social relationships that may alter or disappear due to a change of schools; the

earlier this occurs, the more likely it is to cause disengagement (Langenkamp, 2016). According

to Langenkamp (2016), this is due to the fact that the social ties adolescents develop through

school foster a sense of belonging. Furthermore, transfer students generally have less involved

parents and are overarchingly less likely to participate in extracurricular activities (Langenkamp,

2016). Thus, social relationships must be addressed as a critical dimension of a student's world

(Langenkamp, 2016). However, for students with a previous history of victimization, moving

schools may be seen as a positive opportunity to establish better relationships with peers

(Longobardi et al., 2016). If schools, parents, and administrators can develop an understanding

of how social relationships are affected during these transitions, they may be able to offer help

preventing this disengagement (Langenkamp, 2016).

An Early Warning System (EWS) is broadly defined as any system designed to alert

decision makers of potential dangers with the explicit purpose of preventing a problem before it becomes a genuine danger (Grasso, 2009; Marquez-Vera, 2016). More specifically, in education, an EWS is "a set of procedures and instruments for early detection of indicators of students at risk of dropping out and also involves the implementation of appropriate interventions to make them stay in school" (Heppen & Bowles, 2008; Marquez-Vera, 2016, p. 107). EWS regularly observes specific indicators and the school performance of students before they drop out. Prior to the development of early warning programs, schools believed that the dropout issue was beyond their reach (Allensworth, 2013). However, schools that have systems based on early warning indicators established to monitor students closely generally experience moderately higher grades and attendance than schools serving similar students where monitoring systems have not been established (Allensworth, 2013). Fortunately, these programs enable educational leaders to move the conversation away from exclusively focusing on students with obvious challenges, who represent a very small percentage of dropouts, to examining all at-risk students. Thus, by focusing on EWS data, schools could move away from who is to blame for the problem to planning for improvement instead.

The U.S. National High School Center developed one of the first data-mining guides for an EWS (Heppen & Bowles, 2008). It was based on a template from Microsoft Excel and used course performance and attendance as indicators (Marquez-Vera, 2016). This laid the groundwork for EWS technology using a multi-variable model to determine which indicators had the strongest correlation with student dropout. These were to be implemented in Chicago, and the states of Colorado and Texas (Marquez-Vera et al., 2016). According to Wilkins and Bost (2016) all of these technology based EWS need to provide real-time data, though, so that students can be continually monitored and interventions can be adjusted as necessary.

Technology and easier access over time to student data has allowed Chicago schools to develop an EWS that identifies students for intervention and support (Allensworth, 2013). Chicago's EWS utilizes a combination of the following indicators: background characteristics (eighth grade test scores, mobility, age beyond grade level, race, economic status, and gender), on-track in ninth grade (alone), GPA, course failures, and absences (Allensworth, 2013). This EWS alerts schools to incoming ninth graders who are at-risk based on their performance in eighth grade. Subsequently, they used a lab coordinator to establish relationships with those students and to monitor their attendance and grades. The Chicago EWS, otherwise known as an on-track indicator, predicts 80% of graduates. It has proven to be a better predictor of eventual graduation, which contradicts previously held beliefs that academic skill is the best predictor for graduation (Langenkamp, 2016). Thus, while schools are not able to monitor and design specific programming for all of the aforementioned factors, they can assuredly monitor whether students are succeeding in their classes.

Similarly, Baltimore schools have put alert systems in place for their at-risk population. They utilize the acronym *ABC* (attendance, behavior, and course performance) as early warning indicators on which they can focus to develop specific interventions that target those malleable factors (Mac Iver & Messel, 2013). According to Mac Iver & Messel (2013), perhaps the most significant finding of their research on the Baltimore EWS was the importance of intervening on chronic absenteeism prior to ninth grade. The transition from middle or junior high to high school requires particular attention, since it occurs during puberty and its concomitant psychophysical changes (Longobardi et al., 2016). Of added significance, Mac Iver and Messel (2013) found that the ninth-grade transition is of particular importance for male students who continue to be markedly less likely to graduate, even when the behavioral early warning

indicators are controlled for on their behalf (Mac Iver & Messel, 2013, p. 66). Subsequently, it is imperative that schools equip these at-risk youth with the tools they need to meet the challenges they will face throughout their lives.

Recently, studies have begun to utilize statistical methods that account for context in examining disciplinary referrals as part of EWS (Martinez, McMahon, & Treger, 2015). In fact, based on the use of their multilevel analysis, Martinez et al. (2015) uncovered that in low-aggression classrooms, high-risk students were more likely to be suspended than those same students in high-aggression classrooms. This is significant in that it indicated that teacher thresholds for tolerating misbehavior may vary from classroom to classroom, and that can contribute to a differential in student disciplinary rates (Martinez et al., 2015). However, less is known about how classroom structure impacts these rates. Wilkins and Bost (2016) suggested that schools should conduct "an evaluation of killer policies that contribute to the problem of dropout, such as punitive and inflexible attendance and disciplinary procedures that exclude students from school" (p. 268).

For those students who do not have a history of especially problematic behaviors or low achievement, behaviors typically associated with being at-risk for dropout arise as reactions to new circumstances that emerge in high school. These are due to both biological and social developments, and typical early warning systems may miss the mark (Dupéré et al., 2015). Effectively, prevention efforts that do not take these students and proximal events into account miss the opportunity to return those students to a pathway of success. Furthermore, these proximal events can be triggers for students who are already contending with pre-existing biological, psychological or social vulnerabilities (Dupéré et al., 2015). According to what clinicians call the adaptive calibration model, a concept related to stress development, certain

behaviors that are considered problematic, are, in fact, adaptive responses to high-threat

proximal events (Shelton et al., 2016). This is particularly true for adolescents who are brought

up "in abusive households exhibit increased responsivity to threat-related cues such as angry

faces; one may readily conjecture that this is an adaptive response to the environment, even if it

increases the risk of the child later developing anxiety disorder" (Shelton et al., 2016, pp. 10-11).

Thus, while programs that target small groups of already identified high-risk students can

be effective, they often prove irrelevant for students who are "quiet" dropouts and embody a

substantial percentage of the dropout population (Dupéré et al., p. 616). For this fact alone, no

single intervention program seems to have surfaced as being reliably more successful than any

other. Consequently, while there is no single variable sufficiently effective enough to predict

dropout well enough on its own, identifying students at risk for dropout improves when

predictive models include a range of effectual gauges (Lovelace et al., 2017, p. 71). However,

the data from EWS can also be used to examine systemic issues that may be hindering students'

ability to graduate (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Subsequently, once risk factors have been identified

for high school dropout, malleable interventions can be designed to manipulate those factors to

impact student outcomes (Zaff et al., 2017).

Current Practices in Dropout Intervention

In examining the typologies of those who drop out of high school, the evidence is clear

that high school dropouts are not all alike, and those differences require different types of

interventions for those adolescents to succeed in school (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017). Despite a

systematic examination of the intervention research and the accepted view that it is necessary to

address multiple risk factors, neither Hahn et al. (2015) nor Freeman and Simonsen (2015) were

able to find recent studies that contributed to an understanding of the effectiveness of

multidimensional programming on high school completion despite extensive meta-analyses of the available empirical research on dropout prevention. The bulk of the available empirical research is merely focused on single component, individual, or small group interventions. Freeman et al. (2015) also suggested that, since dropping out is generally the result of a long process of disengagement, a comprehensive approach that focuses on prevention, tiered intervention, improving school climate and diminishing risk factors seems acutely relevant in addressing the dropout problem. Many of these practices and policies are intended to help at-risk youth to try to change unsuccessful behaviors. However, they usually result in disappointing outcomes, and it may be better to help youth directly to identify their assumptions and responses to make better decisions (Heller et al., 2017).

Unfortunately, practice guides for intervening on behalf of those students who are at-risk for dropping out do not address the integration of intervention practices into a comprehensive, multidimensional model, and, instead, merely offer schools and districts a menu of singular options for addressing the problem (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). They highlight severe and frequently reactive interventions, which are either "(a) school-based programs implemented at the high school just before a student leaves or (b) recovery programs implemented after a student has left the traditional high school setting" (Freeman et al., 2015, p. 293).

Schools and districts are under tremendous pressure to reduce classroom teaching to a proven program of instruction (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). However, when schools and teachers feel unprepared to handle the revolving door of new and innovative intervention programs, some of which they judge to be flawed, it results in a cycle of poor implementation and/or program fidelity, followed by the scrapping of those programs and the introduction of new ones; this is known as *repetitive change syndrome,* where few know which program they are

executing and why (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). Furthermore, new programs are less likely to be adopted by teachers when they are presented as a package that needs to be implemented precisely as it is offered (Edwards et al., 2014; Vennebo & Ottesen, 2015). Alternately, according to Holdsworth and Maynes (2017), "Innovations that are developed or adapted to a specific school context are much more likely to result in long-term and sustainable positive change" (pp. 688-689).

Overall, while researchers warn that school leaders and policy makers exercise caution when making decisions regarding intervention programs, they have acknowledged that the evidence supports the use of "multicomponent interventions, early intervention, and strategies that address the school organizational structure" (Freeman et al., 2015; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015, p. 242). They suggested that further research be conducted either to confirm or deny current best practice recommendations for these multidimensional interventions. Dougherty and Sharkey (2017) agreed that, though they also found multidimensional programs most promising, there was a lack of empirical evidence to support any one program.

The Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) publishes a practice guide for the prevention of high school dropouts that involves a systematic literature review to inform the evidence-based recommendations provided in its guide to address the challenge of dropout. The main assertion of the institute's most recent guide was that single-intervention programs cannot effectively address the dropout problem (IES, 2017). The institute made it abundantly clear throughout its review that policy makers and schools should not infer from the guide that no further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of specific strategies for dropout prevention and that, "The greatest success in reducing dropout rates will be achieved where multiple approaches are adopted as part of a comprehensive strategy to increase student engagement" (IES, pp. 1-5).

Career academies. The career academy has been identified by the What Works

Clearinghouse (WWC) as having clear implications for general use with students at risk for

dropping out of high school. Multiple studies have determined that students most likely lose

interest in school when what they are learning does not appear to be relevant to their lives

(Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Researchers have studied this model for dropout intervention by

examining career academies, which are themed, small learning communities that provide a

college prep curriculum and team with employers, the community, and institutions of higher

education (Cox et al., 2015; Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Career academies can be an effectual way

to engage students since they are established in real-world contexts that frame academic classes

and provide opportunities for field-based studies (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Moreover, students

enrolled in career academies earn higher test scores on standardized state tests. This type of

education often prepares students for direct entry into the labor force as skilled workers; thus, it

attracts students who favor non-academic learning (Andersen et al., 2018, p. 2).

Career models have characteristically been aimed toward adolescents who do not have

college ambitions; these have been implemented with a prejudice toward marginalized youth

(Zaff et al., 2017). Results of previous studies indicated that in examining populations at a high

risk for dropping out, African-American/Black students are significantly more likely to

participate in Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs, but tend to be over-represented

in such studies (Cox et al., 2015; Zaff et al., 2017). Nevertheless, while the proportion of

students of color participating in the career academy model has increased, it still falls short of the

overall population ratios (Cox et al., 2015). Furthermore, students who were described as at-risk

based on their socio-economic status enrolled in fewer numbers than their economically stable

counterparts (Cox et al., 2015). Thus, these academies are not appealing to the demographic for

which they were originally and prejudicially intended. Therefore, to some degree, this intervention is socioeconomically and culturally implicated as well. Andersen et al. (2018) estimated that in a career program aimed at intervening on behalf of students at-risk for dropout, statistically, 31 students would need to be exposed to this type of programming to prevent one student from dropping out (Andersen et al., 2018). Nonetheless, their meta-analysis did reveal that career programs have a positive impact and enhance a student's connection to school; the lack of dropout prevention might be due to program sensitivity and intensity, which might possibly develop in the long-term (Andersen et al., 2018).

Mentoring programs. When students have a relationship with a caring adult in the school community, even an informal connection, it can increase students' sense of belonging in school and the likelihood that a student will graduate (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Most researchers agree that mentors should be positive role models who can assist students in acquiring the proficiencies necessary to thrive in the face of adversity (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). They also agree that mentors play many other roles in adolescents' lives, including addressing academic needs and progress, communicating with their families, and connecting them to crucial mental and physical health services (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). When they are provided the opportunity to advise students through a scheduled course, mentors can also provide tutoring, homework assistance, study and self-advocacy skills, and can ensure any IEP or 504 accommodations are being met in students' classes (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Together, students and teachers can also role-play ways for students to handle difficult issues with their teachers and peers (Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

A mentoring program that received some level of endorsement from WWC was the Check & Connect (C&C) program. Research has demonstrated that greater school engagement

is associated with better academic achievement, and that mentoring shows promise in promoting

school engagement (Tsai & Kern, 2018). Specifically, "C&C is a research-based intervention. . .

designed for students with emotional/behavioral concerns to address their school engagement.

Program implementation involves an adult who serves as a mentor and regularly meets with the

student" (Tsai & Kern, 2018). Tsai and Kern (2018) pointed out that, despite what looked like

promising results, treatment integrity and acceptability of C&C have only rarely been reported in

previous studies. Overall, the findings showed that mentors implemented C&C with high

integrity and perceived it as an acceptable intervention, though the significance was low. These

results deviated from a similar 2003 study.

C&C has also been examined in its use with general education students who were

identified as at risk for failing to graduate (Heppen et al., 2018). However, C&C did not impact

students' engagement with school nor did it increase their likelihood of graduating. Students

remained academically at risk throughout the study. Based on their findings, Heppen et al.

(2018) suggested the following for further research: (a) consider starting intensive interventions

earlier; (b) consider types of resources and supports that are available within the school

community; (c) mentors may need an established network of supports that goes beyond those

that are currently available; (d) carefully consider case loads for one-on-one interventions, and

(e) more sufficient empirical testing (Heppen et al., 2018).

It is important to reiterate that, as opposed to their current study, previously published

studies focused on students with learning, emotional, or behavioral disabilities (Heppen et al.,

2018). This difference is important because students who receive special education supports

generally have more access to support and resources than general education students (Heppen et

al., 2018). Furthermore, this study occurred *after* ninth grade. Students need access to targeted

academic supports prior to entry into the tenth grade as suggested by previous research. However, it is also important to note that, while outside mentoring has a minimal impact on continued enrollment, when teacher mentoring is integrated into comprehensive dropout prevention programs, student participants were found to have higher graduation rates than their non-participant peers (Zaff et al., 2017).

Small learning communities. A growing trend in addressing the transition dilemma for at risk ninth grade students is the small learning community (SLC). There is longitudinal support for the school-related impact of small schools in fostering high school graduation (Zaff et al., 2017). The SLC focuses on improving student academic achievement by establishing structures that break down the large, traditional high school structure into smaller communities of students and teachers, which increases personalization (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014).

Class-size has a substantial influence on both student achievement and discipline because smaller classes foster more personal attention, clearer focus on individual needs, and a more caring environment (Zalensky, 2013). Several ways that Hazel, Pfaff, Albanes, and Gallagher (2014) suggested that schools can facilitate SLCs are by "dividing students into cross-curricular teams, providing advisory periods, physically separating freshman classrooms from other school spaces, providing a separate lunch period, and providing common planning time for teachers" (Hazel et al., 2014, p. 397). However, Hazel et al. (2014) also noted that, while the SLC method was somewhat helpful for addressing students grouped by risk level, it was not particularly successful for focusing on individual students. Though there appear to be several shortcomings, small academy classes allow teachers to provide some level of differentiated services to the students.

In several studies in New York City and Chicago, recently designed small schools that were developed by educators and other independent stakeholders, on average, have significantly increased the four-year, on-time graduation rates over those cities' historical averages (Zaff et al., 2017). What stands out about those schools is the emphasis they place on strong student-teacher relationships and autonomy in curriculum implementation (Zaff et al., 2017). It is interesting to note, however, that the previously established small schools in New York City did not share that success, which researchers attribute to the fact that they were premised on a much more traditional view of public education (Zaff et al., 2017). Data collected from other schools using SLCs has shown a positive effect on student achievement including higher test scores, fewer violent incidents, higher graduation rates, an overall decline in drug and alcohol use, and an increase in student participation in extra-curricular activities (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, p. 4). Unfortunately, in the case of SLCs, schools often fail to achieve complete implementation and have issues with program fidelity (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014).

Finally, there is an association between student-teacher ratios and disciplinary referrals (Martinez et al., 2015). Classrooms with a greater student to teacher ratio create an impersonal setting that may not take into account the developmental needs of middle-school students, who need to have positive adult relationships, particularly as they transition between classes (Martinez et al., 2015). This lack of personal interaction may result in more problematic behaviors than would have otherwise been exhibited (Martinez et al., 2015).

Targeting absenteeism. Schools already know that chronic absenteeism is a significant factor for many at-risk students. According to past research, a correlation between attendance and dropout rates indicated that a high rate of absenteeism is a substantial risk factor for dropout (Freeman et al., 2015). There is a profound difference in the likelihood of having unexcused

absences within some minority groups and amongst students who are considered to be low-income (Pyne et al., 2018). African-American and Latino students are 25% and 11%, respectively, more likely to have unexcused absences than their White counterparts, while low-income students have at least one more absence than their middle and higher income peers (Pyne et al., 2018). Furthermore, students whose parents have a college education are considerably less apt to have unexcused absences during the school year (Pyne et al., 2018).

Using an EWS, a school can identify that they have a school-wide issue with attendance, and a school-wide attendance program can be implemented (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). These programs often include tracking daily classroom attendance, assigning a specific staff member to respond to student absences, and offering weekly and monthly rewards and recognition for good attendance (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Wilkins and Bost (2016) also suggest that when students continue to miss school despite these interventions, they can be targeted for personalized interventions including attendance contracts or a family conference with the school (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). However, if students continue to have attendance problems, ideally they might be assigned to a school-based team "who will attempt to determine the source of the student's attendance problem. If the school is not equipped to deal with the problem, the team may arrange for the student and his or her family to receive appropriate social service supports outside of the school" (Wilkins & Bost, 2016, p. 268). Moreover, as noted by Pyne et al., (2018), when students have a multitude of unexcused absences, it is likely due to other challenges in their lives and the lives of their family, and these challenges affect both attendance and achievement.

Subsequently, according to Haight, Chapman, Hendron, Loftus, and Kearney (2014), programs that included a focus on absenteeism also led to improved student behavior in the

classroom. Likewise, targeted academic tutoring results in substantial decreases in unexcused absences and increases in academic achievement (Haight et al., 2014). However, more work is needed to combat chronic absenteeism in the critical period during middle and high school, which researchers call a "key gateway for more chronic absenteeism" (Haight et al., p. 780). Finally, according to Freeman et al., (2015), "Understanding how academics, attendance, and school dropout rates are related to each other and the overall school context may lead to a more constructive integration of school improvement initiatives at the school, district, state, and federal level" (p. 309). The bottom line is that students need to be in school in order to learn, and school staff, regardless of how committed they are to helping at-risk students, simply cannot do their jobs when students are not present.

Teacher impact and school engagement. Other dimensions of what researchers know keeps kids in school are effective teaching and school engagement. Researchers have determined that teachers, who engage with their students and invest themselves in their students' success, have what is known as *high human capital* (Hargreaves & Fullen, 2012). That is to say, teachers who are active participants in the process of student learning and who engage with their students emotionally run effective classrooms (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). Hatt (2005) refers to this as pedagogical love. Though, this type of engagement can create discomfort on the part of the teacher; however, students respect teachers who are risk-takers who can assert their own station as lifelong learners and who are willing to learn with their students (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). This relationship, engendered by a mutual responsibility for learning, is referred to as an "ethic of care" (Noddings, 2012, p. 235). Furthermore, connecting with teachers is crucial since teachers are capable of providing students access to the organization of schools and can pilot students through their options following high school (Langenkamp, 2016).

There is a growing body of literature which indicates that a positive teacher-student relationship plays a vital role during this particular developmental phase in an adolescent's life by encouraging social-cognitive abilities, which has been found to lead to increased academic achievement for students (Longobardi et al., 2016). Rubie-Davies and Rosenthal (2016) determined that, "Several researchers in the field [have] established that teachers did interact more positively in terms of both instructional support and affect with those for whom they had high expectations when compared with those for whom they had low expectations" (p. 84). Furthermore, these positive teacher-student relationships are particularly important for marginalized students and are linked to greater academic achievement for those students (Langenkamp, 2016). For example, for at-risk students, being able to communicate with teachers about both academic and personal issues has a statistically significant effect on whether or not those students stay enrolled (Zaff et al., 2017).

Research has demonstrated that, while academic achievement is certainly a predictor of school success, signs of engagement can be included as a powerful predictor as well. A great deal of prior research has focused on aspects of behavioral engagement and the propensity for dropout (Zaff et al., 2017). Zaff et al. (2017) identified several studies, all of which concluded that adolescent behavioral engagement fosters the successful completion of high school after one controls for individual characteristics including race/ethnicity, SES, and gender. For example, amid a sample of Black and Hispanic youth, prior research saw significant disparities in behavioral engagement when attendance was used as an indicator between those who continued to graduation and those who dropped out (Zaff et al., 2017).

Furthermore, many researchers have argued that dropping out of school is the result of accumulative risk variables over time, which are fundamentally considered to be mutable in

nature, ingrained in school and home contexts, and directly related to intervention and school success. These variables include poor academic achievement and school disengagement (Longobardi, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising that the most promising dropout prevention strategies are rooted in engagement theory (Lovelace et al., p. 71). This data could potentially be used by school teams with academic and behavioral assessments and monitoring efforts as part of a comprehensive, multidimensional approach for dropout intervention. However, researchers caution that getting at-risk youth back on track is about more than just meeting the academic and behavioral standards of schools; it also requires attention to the students' sentiment about and perception of school (Lovelace et al., 2017).

Given the clear connection between student success and classroom engagement, developing engagement instruments that can be used for data-based decision-making in schools will present the opportunity to respond to students or school issues that need intervention most. Also, students who are at risk of dropping out should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities. To appeal to students with a wide range of interests, schools could use those engagement surveys to ask students what types of extracurricular activities would interest them (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Positive interactions in extracurricular activities likely foster an adolescent's sense of agency, high aims, and social proficiency, which are all predictors of educational success (Zaff et al., 2017). These assertions were supported by several empirical studies that positively predicted students' likelihood of graduation if they participated in extracurricular activities in middle/junior or high school (Hughes, Cao, & Kwok, 2016). Furthermore, data indicates that students who participate in the arts and athletics are more likely to remain enrolled in school through the 12th grade, with participation in sports being significant for White and Latino students, while the arts are only a significant factor for White students

(Zaff et al., 2017). It is important to note that extracurricular participation in community service has also been linked to an increase in the likelihood of graduation (Zaff et al., 2017).

Personalize the school experience. Attention to students' emotional well-being is a relatively new field of study. Promoting students' emotional well-being is "based on the idea that changes in people's health and behavior are easier to achieve by focusing on the organizational culture, instead of directly on individuals" (Andersen et al., 2018, p. 2). Approaches to promoting emotional well-being in schools present an opportunity to reach students by improving their conditions and the immediate causes of dropout (Andersen et al., 2018). Consequently, considering that research has demonstrated traumatic events experienced during childhood, more often than not, have a detrimental impact on a child's ability to learn, it is important to examine this factor. Many children experience trauma, which places them at increased risk of multiple academic concerns. Traumatic events are defined as incidents that are seemingly frightening, alarming, abrupt, or that possibly pose a threat to one's existence, well-being, or personal integrity (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016).

Unfortunately, researchers have discovered that, "Children who are exposed to four or more traumas are 32 times more likely to be labeled as learning-disabled. Additionally, one in three children exposed to trauma exhibit symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)" (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016, p. 498). Trauma-informed care is defined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2015) as:

> When a human service program takes the step to become trauma-informed, every part of the organization, management, and service delivery system is assessed and potentially modified to include a basic understanding of how trauma affects the life of an individual seeking services (SAMHSA, 2015).

Nonetheless, this type of care cannot become the sole responsibility of the school's mental health professionals; it is a school-wide undertaking. While some schools have recently incorporated trauma-informed approaches into adolescent programs, there is limited research on outcomes for those schools (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). Furthermore, while encouraging research has identified promising programs for at-risk students that foster social and emotional well-being, there is little in the way of research on whether these programs are effective for minority student populations (Zaff et al., 2017).

For the teacher's part in this endeavor, researchers have also examined the use of personalized academic and social learning to improve the achievement of at-risk students (Rutledge et al., 2015; Thiers, 2018). Social-emotional learning has been defined as the process children and adults go through to acquire knowledge, attitudes, skills, and grit effectively through the lens of their experience, expression, and self-regulation of emotions. Their ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others, set and achieve constructive goals, feel and demonstrate empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make conscientious choices are also aspects of social-emotional learning (Rutledge et al., 2015, Thiers, 2018). Personalizing learning through small class sizes is another way that teachers can potentially encourage social-emotional learning and develop relationships with students to help them feel a sense of community while in school (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). This personalization can be taken to the next level by utilizing team teaching, which enables teachers to offer one-on-one attention to students and contributes to the establishment of a family atmosphere in the classroom (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Additionally, there is a great deal of research available to support training teachers to meet both the emotional needs of students and their academic success (Zaff et al., 2017). Higher-performing schools make a considerable effort to connect

with students (Rutledge et al., 2015). In fact, adults at these schools identify personalization as an explicit goal. In turn, students described teachers at the higher performing schools as responsible for having had a hand in cultivating a positive overall school culture:

> Benefits of positive student-teacher relationships accrue at both the individual and school levels. When teachers and students know each other well and adults express care and concern for students' well-being and educational success, a positive motivating school climate is created and student engagement is created and student engagement is enhanced. (Rutledge et al., 2015, p. 1064)

What is interesting to note is that all of the schools Rutledge et al. (2015) studied also maintained strong internal and external accountability systems, were all relatively equal in regard to rigor and curricular alignment, and experienced no major differences between schools in overall time on academic task. Despite the moderately positive results of their study, the authors suggested the following for further research: (a) further inquiry into the ways in which schools attend to students' social emotional needs, and (b) paying attention to both the academic and social components of schooling (Rutledge et al., 2015).

According to many researchers, while adults and students alike see benefits from a school culture that cultivates and encourages their social emotional well-being, the importance lies in the increased academic achievement and improvement in life outcomes (Thiers, 2018). However, "The importance of both the academic and social dimensions of schooling and their complementary and interdependent nature remains poorly understood, as do the conditions necessary for educators to link them effectively in schools and classrooms" (Rutledge et al., p. 1060). This important personalized environment requires that administrators and teacher discuss the challenges their students are facing (e.g. discipline issues, attendance, and academic

performance) and further "reflects what Noddings (1988) refers to as 'an ethic of caring' or a 'relational ethic'" (Rutledge et al., pp. 1082-1083). Subsequently, it is also worth noting that with respect to their resilience to unfavorable outcomes, students' reactions vary, even at elevated intensities of vulnerability (Shelton et al, 2016).

It is no shock that students who perceive their teachers as caring and helpful are more likely to be successful. However, this relationship between teachers and students is of particular importance with struggling, at-risk students. Often, though, teachers are unwilling to provide additional support to students when they perceive them as unmotivated, irresponsible, and/or not trying their best compared to their passing peers (Mac Iver, Sheldon, Naeger, and Clark, 2017). Because of those contributing factors, in studies that evaluated teacher response to failing students, teachers did not feel responsible for failure in those students, and, therefore, were not inclined to intervene on their behalf (Mac Iver et al., 2017).

However, these relationships and environments are imperative in helping to sustain student interest, increase attendance, improve classroom participation, foster social-emotional well-being, and to contribute to a student's decision to remain in school (Mac Iver et al., 2017). Students' interpersonal relationships with their teachers are crucial during transitional periods such as ninth grade, and "have shown that teachers [who] act as a 'secure base'—that is, being available, responsive and acceptingof students' needs—improve their students" (Longobardi, 2016) outcomes and encourage a low-conflict relationship with teachers. Mac Iver at al. (2017) signified that the importance of this role is "emphasized by all the major theoretical frameworks (attribution theory, expectancy-value theory, goal theory, self-determination theory, self-efficacy theory, and self-worth motivation theory)" (p. 644). In fact, an overwhelming amount of the research has shown that the following teacher attributes are most critical to student success: (a)

demonstrating authentic care for the students' well-being; (b) committing to student learning; (c) providing support and encouragement to be sure that students learn, and (d) designing classroom activities that are interesting and hold students' attention (Mac Iver et al., 2017).

Multi-tiered systems of support. Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), a broadly applied umbrella term/framework, are historically based on three tiers of support: (a) a core curriculum that is implemented with high fidelity, which is successful in addressing the needs of 85% of students; (b) a short-term, targeted, research-based intervention for the 12-15% of students who are not benefiting from or are not responsive to the core curriculum, and (c) a long-term, highly individualized intervention distinguished by smaller instructional groupings, more frequent monitoring that includes data, the most qualified instructor, and a clinical, diagnostic approach (Mellard, 2017). The interventions used in MTSS can range from community-based programming to school-based approaches (Bohanon et al, 2016).

Several characteristics that are essential for effective implementation of MTSS include: (a) support within the school community for the model; (b) robust teams to guide implementation and represent a range of talent within the school setting; (c) effectual training and coaching; (d) program alignment; (e) the utilization of data for decision making; (f) removing labels from at-risk students; (g) culturally relevant programming, and (h) changing the behavior of staff and administration (Bohanon et al., 2016). How the learner responds to intervention is observed from those characteristics and parallels a public health model whereby decisions are guided by a prediction model of how those with similar symptoms previously responded to the interventions (Mellard, 2017). Furthermore, these approaches "typically include shared, measurable, and explicitly stated goals; efficient and effective processes for identifying or referring students for

connection with evidenced-based practices (EBPs) and, system level commitments (e.g., school- and district-level administrative support)" (Bohanon et al., 2016, p. 100).

Current implementation of MTSS generally consists of the use of PBIS and Response to Intervention (RTI), which was developed to decrease referrals for special education services in schools (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). RTI enables students who might have previously been removed from the general education setting for either academic difficulties in a single subject or behavioral, social, and/or emotional challenges to remain in the general education classroom, thus reducing special education referrals for those students (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Recent research, however, has sought to examine the role of school guidance counselors as part of MTSS programs.

The American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) National Model, which provides a comprehensive framework for school counseling programs, is based on the ASCA *National Standards for School Counseling Programs* and defines student standards and competencies in terms of academic, career, personal, and social development (Belser et al., 2016; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Ziomek-Daigle et al., (2016) noted several overlapping and complementary characteristics between the ASCA National Model and MTSS (see Figure 1), and that Comprehensive School Counseling Programs (CSCP) should be included as an integral part of MTSS.
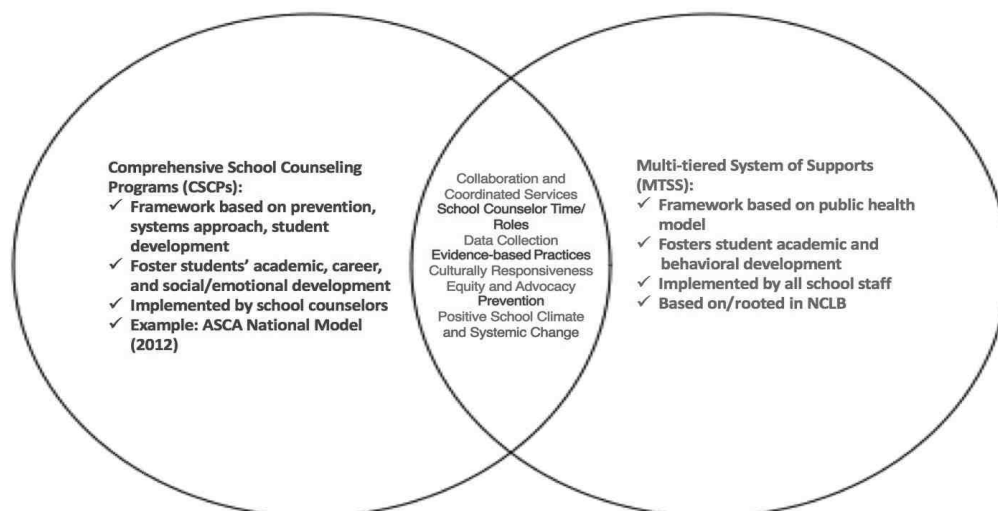
Figure 1. Overlap between CSCP and MTSS (Ziomek-Daigle et al., p. 225).

The unique position in which school counselors exist can potentially play a vital role in

implementing programs such as MTSS due to their expertise in data analysis, program

development, and direct service delivery (Belser et al., 2016). Furthermore, counselors can be

leaders in MTSS, "vacillating between the roles of supporter, intervener, and facilitator"

(Ziomek-Daigle, 2016, p. 229). These vacillating roles also provide a solid argument for

transitioning the effective features of MTSS into a multidimensional community of practice.

There is a fairly long history of school professionals using collaboration as an effective

approach to intervening on behalf of students who need additional supports (Avant & Swerdlik,

2016). However, interdisciplinary collaboration has not received much attention at all.

Specifically, the authors called for collaboration to include school social workers and school

psychologists (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). Collaborations such as this are known to make

knowledge a more deliverable resource amongst the various practitioners (Castillo et al., 2016).

Avant & Swerdlik (2016) also argued that school social workers and psychologists are capable of

providing interventions throughout the tiers of MTSS, and this would provide them the

opportunity to expand their roles and functions. Potentially, expanding their roles may allow

school social workers to provide more effectual front-line intervention programs and to be able to refer students, who need more intensive services, more quickly to local clinics or mental health providers (Castillo et al., 2016). Just as school counselors can vacillate between multiple roles, so too can school social workers and psychologists. Their roles can be expanded to include early intervention expert, referral expert, school reformer, evidence-informed practitioner, special education counselor, evaluator, administrative support, and facilitator of preventive programs including character education and life skills (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016).

While the workload of these individuals seems to increase perpetually at a rapid pace, collaboration with other qualified school professionals can ease that burden when they are all focused on implementing and evaluating school-wide prevention efforts (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). These collaborations can be used to carry research into practice through building an evidence-based community culture within the school services (Castillo et al., 2016). Furthermore, these staff members' inherent professional skills as communicators lend themselves to this type of collaboration within a community of practice (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). They also emphasized the importance of inter-professional collaboration by pointing out: "interdisciplinary knowledge is essential to address the multifaceted barriers to student learning" (Avant & Swerdlik, p. 61).

Everyone plays a role within this type of community of practice because it draws on the specific knowledge of each school professional and actively informs the understanding of each student (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). When the community of practice understands the professional role of the others in the group, the opportunity for collaboration is expanded because no one feels threatened (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). Finally, consistent with other literature, collaboration increases the use of data to make decisions and implement school-wide

behavior interventions and supports (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). However, Zaff et al. (2017) found very few studies which explored the role that school administrators play in interacting within a collaboration to intervene on behalf of at-risk students.

Implementation fidelity is of additional concern with MTSS. While schools that implement school-wide proactive systems of support with fidelity extend their capability to address the intensive needs of individual students, limitations brought about by inadequate long-term fidelity measures present an issue with consistent application of the model (Freeman et al., 2015). The implementation and sustainability of MTSS programs is heavily impacted by (a) brief, cursory periods of professional development that is led by experts outside the school community; (b) goals that do not meet the needs of the student, classroom, and/or school; (c) competing programs within the MTSS that often have differing implementation plans despite similar goals; (d) the use of ineffective practices; (e) a lack of attention to the basics of teaching and learning; (f) insufficient leadership resources, or (g) some combination thereof (Sugai et al., 2016). However, Sugai et al. (2016) asserted that "by adopting a defendable and relevant theoretical perspective" schools could use MTSS to achieve systemic results (p. 81). Using the theoretical framework of the community of practice could provide that much needed theoretical perspective.

Furthermore, Freeman et al. (2015) found that across models, risk factors such as free or reduced lunch, minority status, and student-teacher ratio had a greater impact on outcome variables than did the MTSS they examined as an intervention. The authors strongly caution that the impact of those factors on high school dropout outcomes should not be disregarded (Freeman et al., 2015). Societal and familial influences (e.g., poverty, population density, crime,

employment) have valid and substantial consequences for adolescents' capacity to be successful and complete school.

      Communities of care. The idea that it is important for schools to create a caring community has been addressed previously in scholarly literature (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Ultimately, in study after study conducted around the world, researchers have determined that to better the school community, it comes down to improving the classroom experience for students (Holdsworth & Maynes (2017). Ellerbrock et al. (2017) described adolescents using the incredibly apt comparison that they are like a box of Cracker Jacks. They explained that, much like with a box of Cracker Jacks, the prize in adolescents is rarely found in the top of the box (Ellerbrock et al., 2017). Instead, it requires a messy dive to the bottom of the box, or, in the case of adolescents, it requires seeing past the "stickiness" of the struggling student (Ellerbrock et al., 2017, p. 26). In our large secondary schools where teachers often cannot distinguish students from strangers, and security guards and rigid rules are the norm, is it any wonder that these struggling students "feel alienated from their schoolwork, separated from the adults who try to teach them, and adrift in a world they perceive as baffling and hostile" (Noddings, 2005, p. 2)?

      Like the prize one might find at the bottom of the Cracker Jacks box, even if we do not value what we ultimately find, there is still a prize to be found in each child (Ellerbrock et al., 2017). The prize in each child could be discovered even in our most difficult students "by fostering an adolescent-centered community of care that is committed to relationships *and* academics" (Ellerbrock et al., 2017, p. 26). While it takes more time and labor to develop interventions based on individual students' needs, it is more likely to be successful in mitigating dropout (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017).

A community of care may not be optional for at-risk students to be successful; it may be a prerequisite (Ellerbrock et al., 2017). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and William Glaser's Choice Theory collectively argued that in order for students to meet with cognitive success, they have to have the following needs met: physiological, safety, emotional, and belonging and connecting to other humans (Ellerbrock et al., 2017). Alternately, Noddings (2005) emphasized that, "The living other is more important than any theory" (p. xviii), and that theory is secondary to caring relationships in schools.

Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) defined a community of care as, "A place where students and teachers care about and support each other, where individual needs are satisfied within a group setting, and where members feel a sense of belonging and identification with the group" (p. 396). In this context, educators must be persistent, caring, firm, understanding, resourceful, and optimistic, yet realistic (Flennaugh et al., 2018). Schools must also recognize that sometimes the most effective educators in a community of care, whose purpose is to address at-risk youth, are those who have experience working with these students from disadvantaged or marginalized backgrounds. These professionals tend to handle more effectively the challenges disadvantaged/marginalized adolescents seem to bring (Flennaugh et al., 2018). Outside of teachers, similarly qualified case managers, special educators, paraprofessionals, social workers, and counselors are also necessary for educational settings to be effective for students who are at-risk or struggling (Morgan et al., 2013). These professionals require additional skill sets and approach working with these students with an interest in their success and a positive mindset to meet their needs effectually (Flennaugh et al., 2018).

It is critical for schools to nurture and promote care that includes cultivating a sense of belonging, empathy, social support, attachment, membership, and connectedness (Ellerbrock &

Kiefer, 2013). In a positive school community, the strengths of the adolescent are aligned with the supportive features of their environment, and they produce varying developmental results (Zaff et al., 2017). Thus, at-risk students are able to advance their individual assets such as a strong sense of self, motivation, and improved interpersonal relationships and social interactions (Zaff et al., 2017). If the community of care is successfully implemented, it will, theoretically, have a positive influence on student development and the school's educational practice, and students would develop the skills necessary to navigate both school and life successfully (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013).

However, context is important in developing communities of care that are responsive to student needs (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Family and support systems are fundamental for students, and their environment can be both a source and a focus for intervention (Aschenbrener & Johnson, 2017). Furthermore, even when a student's environment is overloaded with obstacles, the environment can be strengthened by increasing services and support opportunities (Aschenbrener & Johnson 2017). Pursuant to their previous research on freshman transition programs, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) addressed the need for additional research to answer the questions: "What does care look like in a school setting" and "How does the organization of a school affect the existence of care" (p. 321)?

There are two types of school relationships that serve to foster a community of care: teacher-to-student and program-to-student (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Teachers need to be involved in the implementation of programs and initiatives by engaging their knowledge and professional judgment, even if it is a challenge, to ensure success (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). Moreover, teachers are essential in creating a community of care by providing a bridge between the school and the students, offering the support that students need to be successful, and

advancing their sense of belonging (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). Teachers who promote a community of care work to get to know students, meet their needs, and create opportunities for students to experience care, ultimately preparing them for success in high school (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014).

Of further importance, "Academic and life skills are elements of the program-student relationship that helped to promote a positive school experience by providing the skills necessary for success in high school" (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013, p. 324). In the case of already at-risk students, particularly those who are marginalized by their peers, these "institutional gatekeepers" may be of significant help to those individuals (Langenkamp, 2016, p. 829). Prior research indicates that to create a stronger sense of community and a collective purpose within the school, leadership and responsibility need to be distributed (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). Some schools accomplish this by using PLTs that establish collaborative networks among teachers to address specific challenges (Davies, 2013; Owen, 2015). Furthermore, when teachers have the opportunity to collaborate and reflect with colleagues on the amalgamation of new approaches, it has shown to be a primary factor in whether those approaches will be integrated and sustainable (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017).

At the conclusion of their follow-up study, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) made some significant recommendations for further research on communities of care. First, they admitted that since their study focused exclusively on freshmen, additional research would be necessary to determine if the facets of a community of care would extend to the greater school community. Second, the authors suggested that additional research may be necessary to determine if providing additional support structures would enrich the community of care. There was some concern that students may feel as though those supports might infringe upon their sense of

autonomy, and that teachers may perceive those supports as inhibiting students from becoming self-regulated learners (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). However, the authors believed it was worth examining to determine if a balance could be struck. Finally, they encouraged further study of communities of care that have persisted over time.

Summary

Not only is the ninth-grade year one of the most difficult developmental periods for students, it is also one of the most academically challenging (Zalensky, 2013). Many ninth-grade transition and intervention programs are not structured to ensure that students receive additional support and personalized care. When students participate in a positive intervention program, they form connections with their teachers, peers, and the school culture, thus increasing the probability that they will successfully graduate from high school. Schools have implemented many programs to facilitate a better transition for students into high school. Although all of these programs are implemented with good intentions, there are several characteristics they must embody. The transition program must be comprehensive and rooted within the curriculum and school culture, be ongoing, and its purpose must be to create a successful environment that concentrates on the special transitional issues of the at-risk ninth grade student (Freeman & Simonsen, 2013).

In light of these characteristics and the ever-increasing demands and challenges that schools and students face, secondary institutions need to examine current practices in dropout intervention to determine how best to meet the diverse needs of incoming and current students. Graduation rates are stagnant for many school districts throughout the United States despite putting in place expensive prepackaged intervention programs (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; IES, 2017). Dougherty and Sharkey (2017) recommend that, instead of schools seeking a one-size-fits-all approach to dropout prevention, they should focus their attention on targeting

interventions that address each student's individual risk factors. For example, while some students may benefit most from mentoring, other students may instead benefit from more clinical interventions (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017).

While there are no studies which examine multidimensional programs that intervene on behalf of students at risk for dropout, a review of the literature reveals the following:

1. Early warning programs enable educational leaders to intervene on behalf of students with obvious challenges and on behalf of students who do not have a history of especially low achievement or problematic behaviors yet are experiencing precipitating factors that might lead them to dropping out (Allensworth, 2013; Dupèrè et al., 2015).

2. Although students enrolled in career academies demonstrate higher academic achievement, students who are considered at risk enroll to a lesser degree than their counterparts (Cox, Hernández-Gantes, & Fletcher, 2015).

3. Mentoring programs show promise in promoting school engagement for at-risk students (Tsai & Kern, 2018). However, in examining their use with general education students, who have been identified as at-risk for failing to graduate, researchers found that mentoring programs alone did not have an impact on students' engagement with school, nor did they increase their likelihood of graduating from high school (Heppen et al., 2018).

4. Through SLCs, teachers are able to provide differentiated services to students (Hazel et al., 2014). Class-size has a substantial influence on both student achievement and discipline. Smaller classes foster more personal attention, clearer focus on individual needs, and a more caring environment (Zalensky, 2013). Nevertheless, researchers have

concerns about the precision with which those class sizes alone can address student needs (Hazel et al., 2014).

5. Addressing chronic absenteeism improves students' perceived self-efficacy for handling school-related stress and leads to improved behavior in the classroom (Haight et al., 2014). Subsequently, intervention programs to address at-risk students should include a focus on absenteeism (Haight et al., 2014).

6. Positive teacher-student relationships lead to increased academic achievement for students and an enhanced classroom climate (Rubie-Davies & Rosenthal, 2016). However, academic achievement is also impacted by other engagement variables including home, overall school climate, and peers (Lovelace et al., 2017).

7. Recent research has demonstrated that traumatic events experienced during childhood have been associated with having a detrimental impact on an adolescent's ability to learn, placing them at increased risk of multiple academic concerns (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). However, all too often the responsibility for addressing these issues is relegated to the school's mental health professionals.

8. Although recent research demonstrates some success with the implementation of MTSS, there is a lack of research to examine its use in collaboration with available professional resources in schools (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). Moreover, many researchers are concerned about program fidelity in implementation (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016).

9. Despite the fact that communities of care have the potential to bring all of the best features of a multitude of interventions together for schools, there is extremely limited available literature about their implementation and effectiveness (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013).

There is a need to understand the LCMT's experiences. Freeman and Simonsen (2013), along with many other researchers, bring attention to this need by calling on future research to include more studies that investigate and address multidimensional approaches to dropout intervention. IES (2017) noted the absence of any literature or research surrounding effective single intervention approaches to dropout intervention. This study examined the experiences of LCMTs, which are intervening on behalf of students at-risk for dropping out using the constructs of a multidimensional approach. This addressed the literature gap and added the description of a multidimensional intervention model to the body of literature.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Instead of being proactive, too many schools react after students have already failed and ultimately disengaged from school (Alliance, 2009). Educational leaders and researchers are effective in realizing that a problem exists; however, failing to create a new way of addressing at-risk students that is adapted to contemporaneous circumstances could potentially become a nationwide crisis (Allensworth, 2013; Freeman & Simonsen, 2013). Furthermore, research has indicated that schools and districts that have strategies and interventions in place have a lower dropout rate and higher academic performance and attendance (Freeman & Simonsen, 2013). Nevertheless, no single intervention has proven to be effective in impacting the outcomes for students who are considered at-risk for dropping out of high school, specifically during the ninth grade year (Zalensky, 2013, p. 30). The problem that necessitated the research for this study is that the phenomenon of multidimensional approaches to intervening on behalf of ninth grade students has yet to be explored and understood.

The purpose of this single case study was to describe the critical case of LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah. LCMT was generally defined as a bounded group of administrators, guidance counselors, school psychologist, special educators, and teacher(s), who utilize their individual expertise successfully (multidimensional approach) to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. Some district teams include school resource officers and/or the school social worker; however, the team studied in this case did not. The theory that guided this study was Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory of communities of practice as it pertains to the social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time. This chapter summarizes the

important features of the method for this study including design, research questions, procedures, researcher's role, data collection, and data analysis. Credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and the ethical considerations were also considered.

Design

The method of research selected as the approach for this study was qualitative because qualitative techniques allow for a unique depth of understanding, which is difficult to quantify with numbers. Participants are able divulge their experiences without reservation or restraint. Qualitative studies are also an effective choice when the researcher wants to research problems that address the meaning individuals or groups of individuals assign to a social or human condition or situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study sought to examine a specific intervention team and how it operated as a community of practice.

A case study was utilized to provide an extensive, in-depth description of a critical case, bounded by time and activity, using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period (Yin, 2018). The researcher who conducts a case study does so to gain a deep understanding of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Case study is an empirical research method that is most appropriate for applied problems that need to be understood in context. The contemporary phenomenon of LCMTs is one that cannot be disconnected from and needs to be investigated within its real-life context, especially since the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). According to Yazan (2015), Yin's definition of case study design "reflects his advocacy for the case study as a legitimate method of research. . . . underlying the definition is that other research strategies such as history, experiment, and surveys are not capable of inquiring into the case that interests the researcher" (p. 138). This design is most suitable when (a) how and why questions need to be addressed; (b) the objective of the

investigation is to explore, characterize, and validate; (c) involves a setting where the researcher will have little, if any, control over the variables, and (d) the subject of the investigation is either an intervention, organizational structure, or an existing thing or process (Yin, 2018).

The case study was the most appropriate methodology because the research questions seek to explain a contemporary circumstance using "how" and "why" research questions (Yin, 2018). While a single LCMT was studied, there were multiple embedded cases within the single case study (Yin, 2018). The case study as the design of choice permitted the researcher to conduct an exploratory examination of the problem to gain an in-depth understanding of why the social phenomenon of an LCMT is a successful approach to ninth grade intervention (Yin, 2018). The case study design enabled the researcher to construct in-depth, meaningful and context-constituted knowledge and understanding of real life events that accurately represented the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Ultimately, the case study design benefits from the previous development of theoretical propositions, in this case Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory of communities of practice, to guide data collection and analysis.

Furthermore, because case studies do not require control or comparison groups, they can simply be amalgamated into a school's routine without disturbing the normal stride of the educational setting. Thus, case studies are a useful research tool and are a source of data that is directly germane to educational practice. Case studies are also invaluable in studying unusual phenomena due to the dearth of methodological restrictions, which provides the researcher the chance to observe the phenomena as they naturally occur. Rich information was gleaned from this qualitative research design, which allowed the researcher to gather an in-depth description and understanding of a multidimensional ninth-grade intervention program (Yin, 2009). Subsequently, this research may lead to hypotheses that can later be tested using quantitative

methodology. While the case study method is not aimed at analyzing cases, it is a good way to define cases and to explore a setting in order to understand it (Cousin, 2005). When the case study methodology is applied appropriately, it is advantageous for the researcher in evaluating programs and/or developing theories and involvements (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The specific study design was a single, embedded case study. The rationale for selecting this design was that it shows real-life events through the utilization of numerous sources of evidence in a single critical case. Because the purpose of this study was to describe the critical case of an LCMT utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah, engaging in a single, embedded case study allowed the participants to explain their perceptions of this approach, told in a chronologically structured and detailed manner (Yin, 2018). The use of direct interpretation of convergent evidence, establishing patterns related to the "how" and "why" of the study, and expanding and generalizing theories allowed the researcher to focus specifically on the case itself, while merging the embedded cases analytically at the end (Yin, 2018).

When the researcher only wants to study a single group (for example an LCMT), a single case study is the best choice (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), findings from single critical case studies may "present a significant contribution to knowledge and theory building by confirming, challenging, or extending the theory" (p. 49). By focusing the case through the theoretical proposition of interest, communities of practice, the critical case design could potentially refocus future investigations into dropout intervention (Yin, 2018). Ultimately, single case study design represents a natural method of bridging the gap between efficacy and instruments of change in education.

The most frequent criticism of single case study analysis is the issue of external validity

or generalizability. However, Eckstein (1975) noted that any criticism of the single case study method is "mitigated by the fact that its capability to do so [is] never claimed by its exponents; in fact it is often repudiated" (p. 134). Generalizability was of little relevance since the intention in studying the LCMTs was one of particularization.

An embedded case study is a case study case that contains more than one sub-unit of analysis (Yin, 2018). Identifying sub-units allows for a more exhaustive level of inquiry, which is appropriate for descriptive studies, where the objective is to describe the features, context, and process of a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) also clarified that a single case study with embedded units is appropriate if the researcher wishes to have the capacity to study the case by utilizing data analysis within case analyses, between case analyses and cross-case analyses. Since each individual member of the LCMT performs a different function within the community of practice, using an embedded case study design is not only appropriate, it is essential.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study and served to remind the researcher that these questions give structure and direction to a study in ways that are often underestimated. These questions helped to narrow the focus of the study while acting as a reflective and interrogative springboard for the specific interview questions posed to participants.

Central Question

How do local case management teams describe their experiences in ninth grade intervention/dropout prevention?

Sub-Questions

1. What factors influence LCMT's perceptions of the strategies involved in a multidimensional intervention approach for at-risk students?

2. How did these factors influence the degree to which they used these strategies effectively to target and personalize care in their work with at-risk students?

Setting

The setting for this single case study was a suburban school district located in the northern part of the State of Utah. For the purpose of confidentiality and identity protection, the pseudonym, Mooseland County Public Schools (MCPS), was utilized. This setting was purposefully chosen due to the high percentage of high school graduates the district boasts compared to both Utah as a whole and the United States. According to the most recent data available, the high school graduation rate for MCPS in Utah was 95.5% in 2016 compared to 85% in the state of Utah and 84% across the United States (NCES). There were 105 public schools in MCPS serving 80,255 students in 2018; 59 elementary schools, 16 junior high schools, eight high schools, and three alternative schools (MCPS, 2018). Minority enrollment is 16% (the majority of whom are Hispanic) compared with 15.6% across the United States (MCPS, NCES, 2018). More than 2,700 full-time teachers educate students of varying ethnicities to include 84.1% White, 1.4% African-American, 1.2% Asian, 9.5% Hispanic, 1.2% Pacific Islander, .5% Native American, and 2.2% Multi-racial (MCPS, 2018). Of the student population, 22.1% are eligible to receive free and reduced lunch prices (MCPS, 2018). With regard to leadership and organizational structure, MCPS is governed by the Utah Department of Education. At the local level a school board, a superintendent, district-level supervisors, and building-level principals and assistant principals govern the school system (MCPS, 2018). Interviews with participants were conducted at a mutually agreed-upon time of their choosing by phone due to geographical limitations, taking their privacy into account. The observation(s) took place during a mutually agreed-upon time of the school and district's choosing.

Participants

Due to the design of the single case study, which is analogous to a single experiment, the participants were chosen using purposeful sampling based on the criterion that the participants were active members of the LCMT being studied (Yin, 2018). This type of selection allowed the researcher carefully to choose the specific participants who experienced the LCMT, therefore facilitating an information-rich case to form a working understanding of how the LCMT worked to impact successful ninth grade intervention (Yin, 2018). The study utilized a single bounded case of an LCMT from a junior high school site in a suburban school in Utah that has worked to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. Despite the fact that the case study is about a single program, the exploration included embedded sub-units, which represented the staff who performed roles on the LCMT (Yin, 2018). The essential nature of the criteria for selecting research participants was to ensure that I presented an in-depth picture of the critical case (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Maximum variation was achieved by the participation of the building administrators, guidance counselors, school psychologist, special educators and teacher(s) from the LCMT (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Therefore, the sample size included 11 embedded participants, not atypical to a single-embedded case study design (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identities of the district, the school, the LCMTs and its participants. The choice of LCMT participants was bounded by those who have worked a minimum of one school semester on an LCMT and participated on the same LCMT during that time period. Since the school principal ultimately determines the specific composition of the school's LCMT, there is some level of variation between schools in the overall composition of the team.

For example, a school resource officer (SRO) is included on some LCMTs. The SRO responds to incidents of school violence and other safe school violations to help address safety concerns among students and staff. The SRO's role on the LCMT would be to bridge the gap between the school and law enforcement. SROs can gather knowledge of issues occurring in the community that can impact school safety, which gives them insight into campus threats, community problems, and safety concerns (Raymond, 2010). As members of the LCMT, SROs can interpret the policies and practices of the law enforcement agency, clarify the links between school and community crime, and help to develop effectual prevention strategies and interventions (Teske, 2011).

School social workers are included on some LCMTs as well. MCPS labels school social workers as related-service providers in schools and are provided by the district per the Utah Special Education Rules published in 2016. (I.E.38.). Their role on the LCMT would be to connect the school and its students to available community resources that support student progress and growth. As members of the LCMT, school social workers can be utilized as intervention and referral experts who support the administration and the team with preventive programming, parental engagement, individual and joint counseling, and family-based matters (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). They also facilitate sessions between students and teachers.

However, the first embedded case on this particular LCMT was that of the school administration, including the school principal. Although school principals are generally responsible for providing strategic direction for the school, the principals' role within the LCMT is more closely related to their expertise in monitoring student achievement and behavior. The two assistant principals who served on the LCMT were included as part of this embedded case as well. Each of these administrators generally assists the principal by providing support wherever

needed. Although these assistant principals are assigned managerial and organizational tasks, they also share duties and responsibilities with the principal. Their roles within the LCMT are more closely related to their areas of expertise and assigned organizational task, e.g., special education, behavioral intervention, etc.

The next embedded case included the junior high's three guidance counselors who served on the LCMT. Each of these counselors maintain a caseload equivalent to roughly one third of the school's population, helping those students in the areas of academic achievement, career, and social/emotional development. Their roles within the LCMT are closely aligned with their day-to-day roles. These counselors are considered experts on the portion of the population they serve, and therefore their expertise is in the holistic view they hold of the students.

The special educators who served on the LCMT were also included as embedded cases. The special education teachers serve as educators and as advocates for students with special needs, managing their individualized education programs (IEPs). Their role within the LCMT is to utilize their expertise in special education to help identify students who have a disability that is impeding their success in school.

The next embedded case was that of the school psychologist. The school psychologist provides expertise in mental health to help individual students succeed academically, socially, behaviorally, and emotionally. The psychologist's role within the LCMT includes utilizing his/her knowledge and experience to be involved integrally in the screening process, teacher and team consultation to support intervention development, intervention implementation, and monitoring student progress.

The last embedded case was that of three of the school's teachers. The teachers attend to the social, personal and academic needs of students who have been identified as at-risk for

failing. The teachers' role on the LCMT is to provide comprehensive documentation of student progress and to develop supplementary education that addresses the specific needs of at-risk students. Furthermore, these teachers facilitate interactions between students and their other teachers while monitoring and supporting the academic progress of those students. These teachers use their expertise to assist in assessing student potential and, subsequently, make recommendations for further services.

Procedures

School district pre-approval for this study was sought based on the Liberty University policy (Liberty University School of Education, 2018) for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to grant approval. This step was completed through MCPS. Once Liberty University IRB approval was received, I began working with the Data, Research, and Service Request Department (DRSRD) at MCPS to ascertain a list of possible LCMTs that met the above-mentioned criteria. In conjunction with the DRSRD at MCPS, emails, along with the proper consent form, were sent to junior high schools in the district, which were implementing the LCMT with a high level of fidelity, inviting them to participate in the study. Once the LCMT was selected, I began to make contact with each individual participant to collect the consent forms and schedule the interviews. Once participants were secured, data collection began with the acquisition and analysis of documentary information, participant interviews, and observations. Because record-keeping is an integral part of society today, relevant document analysis of LCMT archival records allowed me to gather information relevant to the study (Yin, 2018).

All one-on-one interviews were recorded using two devices and later transcribed by the researcher. Next, observations of the LCMT occurred. Any thoughts or questions that came to mind throughout the research process were recorded as field notes. The data were then

methodically organized to maintain a chain of evidence to increase the construct validity and were stored electronically. Member checks and peer reviews were performed, and safety procedures such as password-protected storage were utilized throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Preliminary analysis, which was undertaken by "playing" with the data, occurred by putting the information into different arrays that reflected various themes and sub-themes (Yin, 2018, p. 164). Although primarily associated with grounded theory, memos were utilized to track what was observed in the data; these were later attached to computer codes that contained hints about how to interpret some of the data (Yin, 2018). To guide the analysis, I relied on theoretical propositions suggested by the theory of communities of practice because they pointed to significant contextual conditions that were described and explanations that were examined (Yin, 2018).

Pattern matching logic was applied to compare empirically based patterns with the findings from the study (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), pattern matching is one of the most desirable techniques to use in case-study analysis and is of particular importance when a case study is explanatory by nature. Pattern matching was used to aggregate and categorize the data into themes and to examine within-case patterns across the embedded cases (Stake, 1995). Finally, the information from the individually embedded cases and themes was interpreted and used to construct naturalistic generalizations. This includes insights gained by reflecting on the descriptions that are presented in the case studies and which resonate sufficiently with the researcher's own experiences to warrant generalizations (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Once data analysis was complete, Chapters Four and Five of the dissertation were

realized. The manuscript was then submitted for review and edits were made based on the committee chair and the other committee member's feedback. After the dissertation received approval from the committee, the manuscript was sent to a professional editor. The dissertation defense was scheduled as the final step. The electronic data collected throughout the process is stored in a password-protected environment for three years after the final dissertation document is published. At that time it will be destroyed by the deletion of all electronic files.

The Researcher's Role

I was the human research instrument as the principal data collector who reported the meaning of the case and the lessons learned (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the lived experience of LCMTs in successfully addressing at-risk ninth grade students. As a secondary teacher for public school districts across the country, I saw many different programs, which came and went, programs that were designed to prevent students from dropping out. Often the students who struggled most were the ones for whom a single intervention was wholly inadequate. Typically, these students lacked sufficient supports at home and at school, along with the personal skills that might have helped them become successful learners.

Traditional single intervention programs in the school districts are aimed at students who are easily identified as at-risk. However, many students who ultimately drop out are not easily identified through standard early warning indicators. Single intervention programs can be tweaked for those who suddenly find themselves at-risk through multidimensional intervention programming, therefore offering more support to address the broad and varied issues that might prevent students from successfully finishing high school. This model could be effectively utilized in locations outside of this school district to initiate an increase in the graduation rate nationwide.

As a former teacher and member of an LCMT for this school district, I saw many successful interventions occur for at-risk ninth grade students. I still have access to this same school district, although I no longer work there due to geographic constraints. I maintain a good relationship with the district, administration, and the teachers I encountered during my three-year tenure there. I left my position with MCPS in June of 2018, and I did not work with nor did I have a professional relationship with any of the participants. The school district where I worked at the time the study was conducted was located in a different state, and thus operates within a different district. Furthermore, I did not have a personal relationship with any of the participants.

This study was based upon the need for improvement and enhancement of intervention programs for at-risk ninth grade students (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the human instrument for this study, my fundamental role was to conduct research in an ethical and thorough manner to describe the critical case of LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). This study stemmed from a relativist/constructivist perspective, acknowledging that multiple realities will exist within the cases. Also, additional multiple meanings which emerged were dependent on me as the observer (Yin, 2018). This approach was utilized in an attempt to capture the different perspectives of the participants to focus on how their personally constructed meanings explained the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). By utilizing a single embedded case study design, I was able to minimize biases by engaging in rigorous data protocols such as member checks, peer reviews, and verbatim interview transcripts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The issue of bias and the crisis of representation is addressed in more detail under "Ethical Considerations."

Data Collection

This study utilized an instrumental single case study approach to qualitative research.

The critical feature of interest was that multidimensional local-case management intervention for at-risk ninth grade students is successful. Rigorous and multiple data collection techniques are critical to a successful and acceptable qualitative study, regardless of which method has been selected (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) indicated that in case study design there are four principles of data collection: multiple sources of evidence; a case study database; a chain of evidence, and care regarding the use of social media. As such, I collected data from the participants using participant interviews, observation, and documentary information. It was also extremely important to utilize triangulation in that data collection in order to ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995).

Interviews

Once the overall concept of the LCMT was explored and understood, interviews of the individual participants began. Individual, open-ended interviews are the most common means of data collection in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) suggested that interviews are one of the most important sources of evidence in a case study and are particularly helpful in suggesting the 'how' and 'why' of significant events as well as insight into the participants' relative perspectives. Since research interviews must have some structure, most qualitative interviews are semi-structured, lightly structured, or in-depth (Yin, 2018). For the purposes of this study, in-depth interviews were the most suitable structure.

To achieve optimum use of interview time, the questions in the interview must be comprised of the core questions and many associated questions related to the central question, which should be tested using a piloting process (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018). Ergo, the process consisted of thematically designing and planning the interviews, conducting the interviews, and making sense of the data the interviews provided after they were completed (Creswell, 2013).

Specific focus was placed on the proposed interview questions to ensure they were appropriate for the LCMT. Merriam (1998), who presented an alternative perspective on case study design, goes into greater depth on the techniques and procedures researchers need in order to become effective users of the interview as a tool for collection. Merriam (1998) provided a significant and beneficial framework for data collection that included asking good questions, questions to avoid, probes, the interview guide, beginning the interview, the interaction between interviewer and respondent, recording, and valuating interview data (Merriam, 1998).

Once the design of the interview questions was finalized, the open-ended interviews with the LCMT participants were conducted using the interview protocol (Appendix A). Utilizing open-ended, fluid rather than rigid, questions allowed the interview to resemble a guided conversation rather than a structured query, therefore yielding more rich descriptive data as well (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Every effort was made to protect the integrity of the interviews by minimizing the methodological hazard created by the conversational nature of the interview, which could have led to my perspective subtly influencing the interviewees' responses (previously known as *reflexivity*) (Yin, 2018).

Specifically, these interviewees included administrator(s), guidance counselor(s), special educator(s), a school psychologist, and teacher(s), from a single junior high school in MCPS; they were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). School personnel enter their professions with varying skill-sets, and they are often unaware of how their contributions as part of a community of practice can help shape children through this knowledge-oriented structure (Wenger et al., 2002). At the start, such individuals are little more than a group of professionals who share a "set of problems" and who develop their knowledge and expertise through their regular interaction (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). As they continue to spend

time together, these professionals develop a common sense of identity and find great value in their interactions as they share information and insight into each at-risk student (Wenger et al., 2002).

For the interviews, questions were presented that allowed the interviewees to describe their participation in an LCMT. Questions were carefully designed to include only non-threatening, relevant questions throughout the open-ended interviews (Yin, 2018). Difficult questions were generally posed as "how" questions to refrain from creating defensiveness on the part of the interviewees, thus fulfilling what Yin (2018) refers to as the two jobs of the interviewer in a case study interview: (a) using the case study protocol to follow the line of inquiry focused through the research questions, and (b) serving the needs of the inquiry by verbalizing those questions in a non-confrontational, unbiased manner. Questions regarding what the participants perceived as the benefits and challenges of engaging in an LCMT were included as well. After the interviews, the researcher was able to understand fully and to explain the LCMT in a holistic and ethical fashion, while describing the reasons for its success in a detailed structure.

There were 11 open-ended interviews, one per participant, lasting approximately a half hour to 50 minutes. No additional follow-up interviews were conducted because participants were given the opportunity to check for accuracy. Thoughtful and purposeful member checking was used to ensure the transcriptions were accurate and consistent with the participants' experience within an LCMT (Moustakas, 1994). This occurred after I completed the transcriptions and data analysis. The interviews were conducted via phone at convenient locations for the participants and were based on their schedules. The participants, as previously stated, were all members of an LCMT. Each interview was recorded electronically and then

transcribed by the researcher. The standardized open-ended interview questions were as follows:

Background Questions

1. Tell me a little about your background.

2. How long have you been with Mooseland County public school system?

3. What is your position with the district?

4. What prompted you to want to be a _____?

5. What does your own education look like thus far in your life?

6. Tell me a little about your favorite teachers growing up.

7. Why were they your favorites?

8. What about the teachers you learned a lot from, but who were not necessarily your favorites? (What did they do that helped you learn?)

Questions one through eight are knowledge questions (Patton, 2015). They were designed to be relatively straightforward, non-threatening, and ideally served to help develop interviewer/interviewee rapport (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, these interview questions helped determine how the participants came to be where they are now, as well as to get a sense of how their careers began. The questions were adjusted as necessary for each participant.

LCMT Underlying Characteristics

9. Describe for me, in your own words, what Local Case Management Team is to you?

10. Why do you think a team like this was developed?

11. Describe a typical Local Case Management Team Meeting.

12. What kinds of issues can you expect to see during a Local Case Management Team meeting?

13. Define accountability within the Local Case Management Team?

14. What is the balance between giving and taking among members?

Questions 9-14 built a framework of the defining features of an LCMT as a community of practice (MCPS, 2018; Wegner, 1991). According to Wegner (1991), to be an effective community of practice, members must establish a relationship with one another in order to establish the sense of belonging and identity that membership in the community provides. This definition is premised on their focus, how they function, and what capabilities they produce (Serrat, 2010).

LCMT Membership

15. What are the areas of common interest you share with the other team members on the LCMT?

16. Describe the social environment of the LCMT.

17. Describe the relationship(s) you share with the other LCMT members?

18. How does being on the LCMT benefit or impair your daily work in addressing at-risk students?

19. To what degree are you a willing participant in the LCMT?

20. Describe how you share your work-related knowledge to build up the LCMT.

21. Describe the communication among staff members on the LCMT?

22. How would you describe the role and qualities the facilitator of the LCMT brings to the team?

Questions 14-22 were designed to find out what types of underlying characteristics the LCMT possesses that make the LCMT a strong community of practice. Sometimes participants have their own agendas that can seriously inhibit the success of the community of practice if they are not focused on successful intervention for at-risk ninth grade students, but rather on accomplishing their own personal goals. Furthermore, these questions addressed the social and

relational functions of a community of practice as they pertain to the shared practice of the

LCMT (Wegner, 1991).

LCMT Domain

23. What are the issues that the LCMT generally encounters with the school's at-risk

population?

24. What are some of the strategies the LCMT uses to address its at-risk ninth grade

population?

25. What function does the LCMT perform in implementing those strategies?

26. In your opinion, how does the LCMT express its interest in the success of the school's at-

risk ninth grade students? To each other? To the rest of the school community?

27. In your opinion, please describe how the team either does or does not possess the relevant

experience to intervene on behalf of the school's at-risk population?

28. How diverse in character or content are the members of the LCMT? Can you please

explain your response?

Questions 23-28 specifically allowed the participant to pinpoint the strategic relevance of the

domain of LCMTs.   Furthermore, the participants had the opportunity, through these questions,

to describe their membership in this community of practice. These questions allowed the

members of the LCMT to detail the value of their contributions to the community.

Actions

29. How effective or ineffective do you believe the LCMT is at solving problems?

30. Describe how the LCMT members share information with one another.

31. What does the LCMT do if there is a need for additional expertise in addressing the

problems they encounter with the at-risk ninth grade students they encounter?

Questions 29-31 addressed the actions the LCMT as a community of practice takes in order to utilize its knowledge, implement it, leverage it, and spread it throughout the school community (Wegner, 2002). These questions speak to how the LCMT manages its knowledge as an asset, cultivating it and disaggregating it (Wegner, 2002). Finally, these questions addressed how the LCMT focuses the community of practice around core knowledge requirements (Wegner, 2002).

Each of these questions allowed the participants to share their thoughts, which translated into a full, rich, detailed understanding pertaining to the successful use of LCMTs to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students. Explaining in detail the purpose of each question established the validity of those questions and the basis for the discussion of findings in relation to the literature in Chapter Five.

Observations

Once the interviews of the individual participants were completed, I observed LCMT meeting(s) including those staff members who were previously interviewed. Observations were conducted during the weekly LCMT meeting, which generally lasts for one hour. Qualitative research often recommends collecting enough information to achieve theoretical saturation of the themes that may have emerged from the participant interviews, meaning nothing new is revealed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, observations continued until this saturation was achieved. According to Yazan (2015), "Observational data can be integrated as auxiliary or confirmatory research" (p. 87). Yin (2018) expressed that case study research assumes the phenomenon of interest will have some relevant social or environmental conditions that may be observed either formally or informally and may suggest things about the culture or participants' status in relation to the phenomenon. In case study design there are two different types of observation that researchers generally engage in: direct and participant (Yin, 2018). The

opportunities for direct observation were abundant in a case study of LCMTs because of the real-world setting; thus, it was the type of observation utilized for this study (Yin, 2018).

The purpose of observation in this case study was to corroborate findings that may already have been established from both the document analysis and LCMT participant interviews. Both interviews and observations provide qualitative data, which should be recorded, transcribed and analyzed, usually by searching for themes that occur between the participant interviews and the researcher's observations. Observational evidence can yield invaluable corroboration about the role LCMTs play in successful intervention on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students. Observations of the LCMTs were useful in adding a dimension of understanding in order that strategies relating to the successful implementation of LCMT at other sites can be confirmed by robust evidence (Fuller et al., 2003; Yin, 2018).

Specific focus was placed on the observation protocol (Appendix A). Rogers (2003) indicated that researchers can learn a tremendous amount from real-time studies that observe communities of practice and from watching their activities. This is important because the observation protocol allows the qualitative researcher both to observe activities and reflect on the themes that emerge (Creswell, 2015). Furthermore, since observations are contextual, I was engaged in the observations as a complete spectator who did not participate (Creswell & Poth, 2018). During observations, I took field notes about the activities during the meeting, using an observation protocol developed through literature on communities of practice (Appendix A). Through the use of an observational instrument, I was able to assess the occurrence of the characteristics of a community of practice during the meeting(s) I attended in the field.

Furthermore, during the analysis stage, I maintained an awareness of the issue of reflexivity that may have occurred during the observation(s) because the members of the LCMT

knew they were being observed (Yin, 2018). Every effort was made to protect the integrity of

the LCMT by making my role as a researcher and "outsider" abundantly clear (Creswell, 2015,

p. 213). It was also necessary to remain critically aware of the fact that my observations might

be less concrete than if I had participated in the meeting as a participant observer (Creswell,

2015). I maintained reflective notes on my experiences observing the LCMT in order to capture

my own insights and themes that may have emerged during the observation, particularly since it

was not be possible to utilize a second observer to compare notes for validity (Creswell, 2015;

Yin, 2018).

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a source of evidence that allows the researcher to increase

understanding of the impact of the phenomenon on the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin,

2018). Document analysis was the final of three complimentary sources of evidence. These

documents, which are considered a relevant case study tool in the data collection process,

allowed me to utilize triangulation of data in my collection methods to enhance trustworthiness

as well as to increase understanding of the impact on the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018;

Yin, 2018). Document analysis of items, such as the LCMTs' agendas, minutes of meetings, and

other internal records were completed.

Specifically, these documents included information related to plans for intervention and

designated who on the LCMT was directly responsible for the intervention. The documents

available through individual LCMTs and the internal documents available on the district web site

were used to validate and strengthen the other sources of data collection. It was understood that

documents must be used with care and not accepted as literal recordings of events that have

taken place (Yin, 2018). This is an important step in the data collection process, as the

researcher needs to be able to corroborate information from other sources through the specific details the documents can provide. If the evidence found in these documents is contradictory rather than corroboratory to the evidence from the other sources, the researcher would need to pursue those contradictions by further investigating the topic (Yin, 2018).

Document analysis occurred throughout the study with the explicit understanding that documents are written with a specific purpose and for a specific audience, sometimes exclusive of those who are participants in the case study (Yin, 2018). Therefore, in examining these documents throughout the study in an effort to identify the objectives these documents are attempting to communicate, I was less likely to be misled by the evidence and more likely to be appropriately critical in interpreting the evidence (Yin, 2018).

The types of records sought are viewable by all of the members on an LCMT. They are sent weekly to each member and are stored on a shared drive, which is a managed, shared server that provides electronic storage space for authorized users. The records are used to track the progress of each student intervention. Very limited student data were secured from the school system since the purpose of the study did not require access to data that is not already accessible within the LCMT's meeting minutes and other LCMT internal documents.

Data Analysis

Once the data collection took place, the analysis stage occurred. For this single embedded case study, the Yin (2018) *Case Study Research: Design and Method* (6th ed.) (2018) was utilized as the primary source of information. Creswell & Poth (2018) was also referred to as a supplemental secondary text. Data analysis included the use of preliminary analysis, pattern matching, embedded-case synthesis, and thematic generalizations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). In fact, according to Patton and Applebaum (2003), the fundamental goal of a case study is to use the analysis to "determine meanings, construct conclusions and build theory" (p. 67).

Once a pattern was identified, it was interpreted in terms of the theoretical framework of communities of practice. Ultimately, the qualitative researcher moved from the description of the intrinsic feature of the case to a more general interpretation of its meaning.

Preliminary Analysis

I transcribed the data from the participant interviews into a written format as the first step in the data analysis process. These transcriptions, along with the observations and collected documents, were organized methodically and stored systematically. Data were stored in one place, allowing it to be searched for promising patterns, insights, and concepts (Yin, 2018).

Yin (2018) suggested that the starting point for any data analysis is to "play" with the data (Yin, p. 167). One way in which Yin (2018) suggested to play with the data is by putting it into different groupings that reflect different themes and subthemes. Furthermore, he suggested continuing the process of memoing what is observed in the data as these memos may contain suggestions about how some of the data may later be interpreted and developed into themes (Yin, 2018).

Pattern Matching

All data collected was examined and re-examined for patterns related to the "how" and "why" of the study (Yin, p. 175). Since there were large amounts of data in the form of narrative texts, a method for strategically analyzing that data was carefully considered to begin the process of logically narrowing down the data to make it more easily classifiable (Yin, 2018). Pattern matching allows the researcher to take an empirically based pattern evident in findings within the data and to compare those to predicted patterns determined prior to data collection (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), ultimately, if the patterns appear to be similar, the results will help the study strengthen its internal validity. The patterns were narrowed into common themes that

described the participants' experience with the LCMT (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2009). These themes allowed a full description to evolve from the data collected during the participant interviews and observations (Creswell, 2013).

From these patterns, themes were identified to assist in organizing the data into stronger and more concise sections (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These themes became the foundation of the participants' descriptions, consequently outlining the researcher's findings in the final dissertation. It was imperative to avoid suggesting very subtle patterns from the data to avoid the scrutiny of those who would argue that pattern matching is not as precise as statistical testing that can be done with quantitative data (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the interpretations will be less likely to be challenged if there is not the appearance of gross matches or mismatches of the data (Yin, 2018).

Detailed descriptions of each embedded case and the themes within each case (within-case analysis), followed by thematic analysis across the cases (cross-case analysis), allowed the data to be interpreted to understand the participants' descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The principal concept is to take substantial amounts of data and continuously to group and match common pieces of information together ultimately to reduce potential analytic difficulties associated with case-study design (Yin, 2018). It may also be helpful to represent and see the data by creating a visual display to make the data more meaningful and appealing to the proposed audience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Utilizing such visuals allows the reader to see the written information in a succinct and attractive optical presentation.

Figure 2. Logic Model for Analyzing Data.

Embedded-Case Synthesis

Embedded-case synthesis is specific to the analysis of multiple and embedded case study research and allows the researcher to look at patterns across cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). A "case based" approach to embedded-case synthesis was used, rather than an approach that merely aggregated the data and disregarded the wholeness of any single case (Yin, 2018, p. 196). Each of the individual cases was analyzed to retain the integrity of the entire case, while synthesizing the similarities and differences between them, because utilizing embedded multiple cases strengthened the research and provided an all-inclusive explanation of the phenomenon (Yin, 2018). In the LCMT model, this embedded-case synthesis was paramount. This data analysis technique relies strongly on argumentative interpretation rather than numeric tallies. Thus, it is important to note that the procedure, in that regard, is similar to making analytic generalizations, which in turn should evolve into themes to be explored throughout the research phase (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Thematic Generalizations

Finally, the thematic generalizations that were formed by the researcher will allow the audience for the research to learn from the cases and ultimately to see the potential for the use of LCMTs (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). These generalizations will include the insight gained by reflecting on the descriptions that are presented in the case study (Creswell & Poth,

2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This emerged when the researcher felt as though the key research questions were exhaustively covered, the analysis had investigated all rival interpretations, the most significant aspect of the case was addressed, and the researcher demonstrated an understanding of the current thinking and discourse about the study focus (Yin, 2018). These thematic generalizations lent themselves to implications of the study for future research possibilities (Yin, 2018). However, according to Yin (2018), the most careful and complete case-studies are a reflection of the presentation of the cases themselves, not the existence of a strict methodology section whose precepts may or may not have been wholly followed throughout the study (Yin, 2018).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is one of the most significant outcomes of quality research. Trustworthiness is ensured when qualitative research, including case studies, can be judged as representative of a logical set of statements (Yin, 2018). Without it, the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability can be questioned, and the quality of the research is undermined. If the quality of the research does not withstand certain tests of logic, it is unlikely that the intended audience will be interested and the tremendous efforts involved in this type of research would simply be wasted. The researcher must establish a trusting relationship with the reader, thereby establishing the importance of the study.

Credibility

Credibility depends on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Creswell, 2015). Since qualitative research is interpretive, the accuracy of the findings is imperative (Creswell, 2015). This is because credibility fundamentally asks the researcher clearly to link the findings with reality in order to demonstrate the truth of those findings. The information gathered during data collection should become a

congruence of evidence that breeds credibility and formulates a compelling "whole" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 246). For this study, utilizing triangulation of three data collection methods was the foundation for achieving this condition. Peer review provided an external check to ensure accuracy and credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed an outside "Devil's Advocate" to take an impartial look at the research, provide honest feedback, and ask hard questions about methods and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 251).

Furthermore, to increase credibility, reflexivity was utilized by the researcher to demonstrate cognizance of the biases, values, and experiences that I brought to my research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, this involved addressing what Schwandt (2007) called the crisis of representation within the human sciences. This crisis of whether or not the researcher can adequately describe social representation requires that researchers scrutinize how they produce and represent empirical material to others (Mura & Sharif, 2018). Schwandt (2007) asserted that the most radical of skeptics believe that, "All attempts to describe and explain are . . . incomplete, reductive, and insufficient and, at worst, misleading, perverse, fraudulent, and deceptive" (p. 49). Notwithstanding, those who are more optimistic believe that while it is the responsibility of the researcher to acknowledge and examine the "rhetoric of representation," it does not mean that the researcher is entirely unable to describe and explain the social world (Schwandt, p. 49). Inevitably, the written report of my research will contain hints of philosophical paradigm(s) within which I operate. However, it was ultimately my obligation to minimalize any suggestion of personal bias in order not to distort the presentation and analysis of data. This means that I utilized the research methodology as a process where I stripped away as many influential factors as possible in order to report findings that adequately described the social representation and the truth of the LCMTs. This was accomplished by using field notes to

capture personal thoughts in an effort to ensure that I did not become a "reflexive threat" (Yin, 2018, p. 120).

Dependability and Confirmability

Likewise, dependability is important, as it relates correspondingly to reliability in quantitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consistency was addressed through the use of rich, thick descriptions of the participants' experiences and relayed to the intended audience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, using member checking and having the participants read over the data to ascertain the accuracy of the account ensured it was interpreted correctly (Creswell, 2015). This study adapted the Debriefing Statement for member checking developed by Yocum, Silvey, Milacci, and Garzon (2015). The purpose of the Debriefing Statement is to achieve credibility, offer participants the chance to examine the conclusions reached by researchers, and to provide comments on those conclusions (Yocum, Silvey, Milacci & Garzon, 2015). The Debriefing Statement was only slightly modified to fit the context of this study. All factors were identical to the original except for the title of the document and the themes the statement addressed. Yocum, Silvey, Milacci & Garzon (2015) identified themes related to a "phenomenological understanding of pre-service school counselors' knowledge and integration of spirituality in counseling practice" while this research is related to multidimensional approaches to intervening on behalf of ninth-grade students (Yocum, Silvey, Milacci & Garzon, 2015, p. 1).

Confirmability stems from the research being grounded in the literature. Yin recognized the importance of incorporating the appropriate operational measures for the concepts being examined; thus, the procedures employed should be derived, where possible, from those that have been successfully utilized in previous analogous studies (Yin, 2018). Since all components of the research were grounded this way, they provided the foundation for a successful

dissertation. Utilizing proper citations and references ensured confirmability of the literature that supported the research and framed the purpose, research questions, and finally, the entire design (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the possibility that what is found will be applicable to another study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Stake (1995) suggested that, although each case may be unique, it is also an example within a larger group and, as a result, the possibility of transferability should not be immediately rejected. Saturation of the evidence will ensure transferability through fully exploring each theme so that further research will no longer yield the same or similar results (Creswell, 2015). This saturation is also useful in indicating to the researcher when the collected observations and documents have yielded enough data to move on to the analysis stage (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, using rich, thick description throughout the research will offer other researchers the opportunity to replicate the study with ease (Stake, 1995). Being specific, using direct quotes from the participants, and carefully organizing the details of LCMTs will serve as an impetus for transferability (Yin, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

There are many ethical concerns to consider when conducting this type of research. The first step in ensuring that the research was conducted ethically was to seek both IRB and district approval. The IRB process ensures that all procedures meet with the ethical guidelines established by Liberty University when they are followed faithfully throughout the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Obtaining the consent of the LCMT participants and district-level participants was also an important ethical consideration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These consent forms were written in accessible language on a sixth-grade reading level (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using pseudonyms was imperative to respect the rights and privacy of the

participants through anonymity, and it is a vital ethical consideration (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher disguised the data before it was dispersed to protect against any kind of identity

theft. Examining the research for researcher bias and attempting to eliminate it as often as

possible was also important so that information was not altered based on those biases (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). I provided the dissertation chair with the completed, self-edited first draft of the

dissertation for formal review to solicit feedback so that I could make corrections, etc. Data

were password protected in electronic form (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher always

upheld the strictest confidentiality. Researcher-influence was not a problem, as the researcher

was no longer employed by the district being examined at the time of the study and did not have

any connection to the participants.

Summary

Chapter Three provided an aggregate overview of the design of the critical case study of

LCMTs. It reviewed the research questions, which served to highlight the LCMTs interventions

with at-risk ninth grade students, the suburban school district setting, and the overall list of

procedures that were utilized in this study. There is also an itemization of the data collection

process through document analysis, participant interviews, and observation, as well as the range

of data analysis techniques that were employed. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the

trustworthiness and ethical considerations for this single embedded case study regarding the

understanding of the impact of LCMT interventions with at-risk ninth grade students. The goal

of the relationship between trustworthiness and ethical considerations was to be able to listen to

the participants' experiences, which in turn provided an understanding of LCMTs, all the while

protecting them through strict confidentiality measures.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to describe the critical case of

LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade

students in a large suburban school district in Utah. The data collection methods used for this

study were individual interviews, observations, and documents. The documents consisted of

meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and other information on LCMTs available from the site and

from the MCPS district. Codes, themes, and patterns were developed to describe the utilization

of this multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students.

A central research question and two sub-questions explored the LCMT and its impact on

intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. The central research question delved into

how LCMTs describe their experiences in ninth-grade intervention/ dropout prevention to elicit a

broad overview of the LCMTs in which MCPS staff members participated. The first sub-

question examined which factors influence LCMT's perceptions of the strategies involved in a

multidimensional intervention approach for at-risk students by narrowing the inquiry to only

relevant information about the LCMT being studied and exploring the definition(s) of the case.

The second sub-question explored how those factors influenced the degree to which the LCMT

used these strategies effectively to target and personalize care in their work with at-risk students,

highlighting any possible impact of the LCMT on at-risk students and emphasizing elements that

might be helpful to school administrators when amending future programming to meet this goal.

Participants

The participants in this study represent a variety of stakeholders involved in intervening

on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. In order to understand the role of the stakeholders,

administrators, guidance counselors, a school psychologist, special educators, and teachers were interviewed one-on-one via telephone. Each of the participants contributes a unique perspective to the practice of utilizing their individual expertise (multidimensional approach) to intervene successfully on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. Individual interviews were conducted with 11 people including administrators, guidance counselors, school psychologists, special educators, and general education teachers. Eleven individuals were observed in two team meetings. The original intent was to fly to observe the LCMT in Utah; however, geographical distance and scheduling issues resulted in the observations being conducted through tele-conferencing. I assigned each participant a pseudonym to protect his or her identity.

Roger

Roger is a 62-year-old Caucasian administrator at Elan Junior High. Roger is completing his fifth year at Elan Junior High and will be moving on to another junior high in MCPS from which he plans ultimately to retire in a few years. The interview took place via telephone, and his theatrical background was evident in his strong, dynamic voice. Roger holds multiple degrees and certifications: a Bachelor's degree in music from the University of Utah; a performing arts MFA. in directing musical theater also from the University of Utah; a degree from California State University at Northridge that resulted in a single subject credential in English, and a second Master's degree from Brigham Young University that resulted in an administrator's endorsement.

Roger spoke passionately about knowing from a young age that he, like his father, would be an educator of some kind in the future. His extensive knowledge in his current role as principal is supplemented by his 33 years of experience working with students in Title I schools in Los Angeles, immigrant families, first-generation immigrant students, ESL students, students

from military families, and with some of the most diverse student populations in MCPS.

Furthermore, Roger brings the community connections he has made during his tenure in the

district. Those organizations include the city food pantry, the United Way, Mooseland

Behavioral Health, the local criminal justice system, and the Department of Child and Family

Services (DCFS). Roger has a personal interest in the success of the students the LCMT helps

since he also had many influential educators who impacted his own life. In addition to the fact

that Roger believed they took a special interest in him and his growth as a person, some of the

qualities they shared were fairness, encouragement, attentiveness, kindness, compassion,

humaneness, graciousness, and generosity. Each also had high expectations for all of their

students.

Veronica

Veronica is a 43-year-old Caucasian administrator at Elan Junior High. Veronica is

completing her third year as an assistant principal at Elan Junior High and will be moving on to

another junior high in MCPS where she will continue to perform as an assistant principal.

Veronica was friendly and soft-spoken throughout the interview, which took place via telephone.

Veronica began a bachelor's degree in Arizona as a pre-med student; however, she finished her

degree in Utah as an education major with an emphasis in English and Spanish. Veronica then

earned her master's in teaching through a district sponsored online program with National

University. After being urged by a fellow teacher to pursue a master's and licensure program in

administration, Veronica earned that degree and endorsement from Western Governor's

University after 18 years of teaching English and Spanish courses in an MCPS high school.

Veronica believes that because she came from a family full of educators, it was inevitable

that she would be one also. It was Veronica's hope that when she became a school

administrator, she would be able to use her expertise as a teacher to help teachers become better educators. Veronica is somewhat wistful, because during her tenure as a school administrator, she has been unable to pursue that goal. However, Veronica is hopeful that she will be able to do more with teacher training in the future.

Furthermore, based on Veronica's positive memories of her own primary and secondary education, she has a foundation upon which to build success for the at-risk students the LCMT aims to help. In particular, Veronica recalls her fourth grade teacher, whom she believes to be ahead of his time in the creative way he taught. While Veronica indicated that growing up, she enjoyed all of her teachers, her fourth grade teacher was particularly effective because of his ability to encourage his student's creativity, ahead-of-his time lessons on prejudice and race relations, walking field trips around the rural Arizona neighborhood, and his use of flexible classroom seating, which is now the norm in most classrooms.

Anthony

Anthony is a 67-year-old Caucasian guidance counselor at Elan Junior High. He is completing his 16th year at Elan Junior High and 19th in MCPS. The interview took place via telephone, and there were moments when Anthony's caring and compassion for both the team and the students they serve overwhelmed him with emotion as he spoke. Anthony did not start out in education; instead, he started out in a career in business. However, after doing that for a while, Anthony decided it was not what he wanted to with his life, and he returned to college to complete a degree in social work. After working for several years for Utah's DCFS, Anthony decided that the job was too heartbreaking and believed that he could better serve children by working in prevention as a school counselor. Consequently, Anthony returned to school and earned his master's in educational counseling from the University of Phoenix.

Anthony spoke easily of the love and friendship he shares with his fellow counselors on the team. In fact, Anthony mentioned that they even do things socially and are very close. Anthony indicated that he and his colleagues are having a difficult time with Roger and Veronica transitioning to other schools because he believes a bond also exists between the counseling department and the current administration. Anthony believes this to be a by-product of the communal experiences of the team and the mutual appreciation they share. Anthony's friends in the building are incredibly important to him; he has enjoyed working with people whom he dearly loves.

Anthony has fond memories of his own education, which also happened to occur in MPCS.   He had a few key teachers who influenced both his life and view of education. Anthony described a beloved high school English teacher who took him and a group of his friends under her wing. Anthony described her as an amazing teacher: friendly, visible, approachable, helpful, engaging and always encouraging to both his classmates and him personally. Although this teacher encouraged the entire class to be successful, Anthony took that encouragement personally and saw her as a good friend. Anthony also described a current events teacher who left the military to teach; he, too, was influential in Anthony's education. Anthony enjoyed that he was extremely informative, relevant, entertaining, encouraging, knowledgeable, and personable. Anthony felt that he received recognition in the class.

Harris

Harris is a 32-year-old Caucasian math teacher at Elan Junior High. Harris is completing his fourth year at Elan Junior High and in teaching. The interview took place via telephone, and Harris' earnest and serious nature was evident throughout the interview. After receiving a bachelor's degree in mathematics, Harris spent some time tutoring for a technical college. Harris

had also studied for certification in land surveying before he decided that he wanted to be a teacher. While tutoring, his students told him repeatedly that they liked the way he explained math to them. Harris realized that many people he encountered lacked a working understanding of mathematics, and he believed he had the capacity to do something about that. This insight tipped the scales for him and made him decide it was time to become a teacher. As a math teacher, Harris believed that he could help people make more informed decisions in their daily lives. Thus, Harris joined a program called Math for America and was able to earn a Master's degree in both mathematics and education.

Harris' passion for math appears to have begun during his own years in secondary school. His favorite teacher was a math teacher who had taught Harris in the private school he attended for six years from seventh grade to 12th grade. Although it certainly did not hurt that Harris found math incredibly interesting because of the critical thinking it requires, he believes that the knowledge this instructor brought to the classroom, along with the extensive preparation she did for every class, were the reasons he found her to be so compelling. In fact, because of the incredibly high standard to which Harris and his classmates were held, he believed he and his peers went to college far better prepared than the other students in his college courses.

Sheila

Sheila is a Caucasian guidance counselor in her 50s at Elan Junior High. She is completing her eighth year at Elan Junior High and 11th in MCPS. The interview took place via telephone, and as Sheila spoke, she revealed a deep passion for her profession. Sheila did not begin her career in education until much later in life. Sheila first worked for a large retailer, ultimately finding herself in a management position. While Sheila loved her job and the people with whom she worked, she felt as though something was missing. Once Sheila's children were

old enough for her to return to school, she decided it was time to pay forward the care and compassion she had experienced as a child.

Sheila refined her passion for working with young people. First, she began a career with the health department working as an auditor. Next, Sheila became a case manager with children in elementary, junior high and high schools. Ultimately, Sheila found her way to school counseling. Sheila views the people with whom she works as family, particularly her fellow counselors and the administration. Sheila expressed her love for the great work that the team does on behalf of children every day, work that is nurtured by the love and care the team members have for one another as well.

Sheila has fond memories of her own education, despite a difficult childhood. When Sheila was 10, her parents divorced, which translated into anger and rebellion for Sheila. Sheila confessed that she did not really do very well in school until the latter half of high school when a counselor, several teachers, and administrators helped her to pull through. At the time, Sheila was not living with her family, so the counselor, teachers and administrators cheered her on and provided the support that her family did not, support that Sheila needed to finish school successfully.

The individual who had the greatest impact on Sheila taught debate. Sheila was extremely shy and anxious as an adolescent. However, after a bit of tug-of-war with each other, this teacher helped Sheila to get past her intense anxiety and showed her that she could get up in front of people, speak, and even to do it well. Sheila believed this was a great gift. She also recalled other teachers, who may not have projected the same warmth as the debate teacher, yet were straightforward, encouraging, and supportive to their students. This enabled Sheila to blossom as a human being.

Michelle

Michelle is a 35-year-old Caucasian school psychologist at Elan Junior High. After a hiatus to raise her children, Michelle is completing her second year at Elan Junior High and sixth in MCPS. The interview took place via telephone, and Michelle's overwhelming desire to help children was apparent. Beginning at age eight, Michelle believed that she wanted to be a teacher because her mother was one, and the role seemed to fit seamlessly with her own personality. However, when Michelle reached her junior year of high school she did an internship in a school, and although she enjoyed working with the children, she no longer wanted to teach. Thus, when Michelle started college, she was without a major and lacked a clear path for her future.

After taking a class in psychology and enjoying it, Michelle went to the professor and asked him, "What do people actually *do* with a major in psychology?" Michelle also revealed to him how much she enjoyed the school setting; he suggested that Michelle consider school psychology. Since Michelle's mom worked in a school and by this time was a principal, Michelle was able to talk to her mother about her school psychologist. Subsequently, Michelle shadowed that school psychologist and realized that this profession would be a perfect fit. Consequently, Michelle completed a Master's degree and licensure for school psychology and ultimately fell in love with her choice of career. Regardless of whether or not Michelle ended up pursuing psychology as a career, she believed her choice made her a better mom and person because of the knowledge she had gained about human behavior, the brain, and psychology in general.

Michelle has fond memories of her own education, particularly her fifth-grade teacher, whom she adored. Reflecting on this experience, Michelle recalled one characteristic that stood out about this teacher: He knew how to pick his battles with students. While Michelle was never

a behavior problem for teachers, she could see this attitude in how he interacted with other students, and it made the classroom feel comfortable. As a result, Michelle was unaware that some of her peers did actually have behavioral challenges. Michelle ascribed that to the teacher having created a classroom culture that was friendly for everyone; there were no issues with bullying, power struggles, or fighting. Michelle further attributed that to the teacher having created a classroom vibe that made students believe they were going to school to be with people they liked, and learning was incidental. Everyone felt successful, valued, and cared about.

Rebecca

Rebecca is a Caucasian special education resource teacher in her 20s, whose emphasis is math at Elan Junior High. She is completing her second year both at Elan Junior High and in MCPS. Rebecca is currently the co-chair of the Special Education Department at the school. The interview took place via telephone, and her high energy in the classroom was apparent even in the interview. Rebecca was motivated to become a special education teacher because of her mother, who is a para-educator, also for MCPS. After spending some time working with her mother as a para-educator herself, Rebecca changed her college major to special education. After graduating from Weber State University in 2017, Rebecca took the position at Elan Junior High when a friend of hers left the job.

Although Rebecca recalls being a pretty good student, she struggled with spelling and memorizing math facts in elementary school. Rebecca also recalled struggling during the latter half of high school because her family moved from California to Utah. That was a significant change. Once Rebecca entered college, she moved out of her family's home and, although she struggled with balancing her social life along with her studies, she expressed that education has always been something she really loves. During Rebecca's time as a para-educator and

throughout her studies, she realized that she enjoyed working with special education students because she believes they are interesting and challenging. Rebecca's focus on math grew out of seeing some of her peers in college contend with math. They ended up lost when they could not return to a comfortable place where they had been when they started to struggle.

In looking back on her own education, Rebecca recalled a fifth-grade teacher whose classroom felt comfortable and like home, which led to a good classroom experience. Rebecca also recalled a history teacher she had in seventh grade, one who taught history through debate. Rebecca believes this style of teaching forced her to delve more deeply into the curriculum than she would have had the teacher merely lectured. Regardless of who they were, the teachers Rebecca remembers most were committed to sharing their love and passion for what they taught with their students. Rebecca says those teachers were also consistent, engaging, had high expectations and standards for their students, shared their own humanity and treated students as human beings rather than grades.

Patricia

Patricia is a 62-year-old Caucasian choral music and computer keyboarding teacher at Elan Junior High. She is completing her 10th year at Elan Junior High and 26th in MCPS. The interview took place via telephone and Patricia made her love and support for children quite clear. Patricia is the eldest of four girls and recalled that her mother, who was an actress, always had the girls taking private lessons and singing in front of people. However, Patricia revealed that she suffers from high anxiety, and because in those days one did not tell adults no, she performed with her sisters. Patricia also played piano from the time she was little, which led her to accompanying her elementary school choir. This, Patricia believes, was life-changing. Patricia also remembers her elementary school principal, who brought instruments into the

school for the students to play. Patricia was grateful that this principal, who was such a powerful influence, became her mentor during her student teaching after he had retired from the school system and moved on to the university level.

Patricia's path to the classroom was not easy. She began college directly after high school. Nevertheless, Patricia only attended about a year and a half before she quit so that her husband could attend while Patricia stayed home to raise their six children. Fifteen years later, when Patricia's youngest was three, she returned just in time to recover the credits she had earned all those years ago. Patricia was also fortunate enough to recover the scholarship she earned when she began attending college in the 90s, which paid for the tuition she needed to finish her degree.

Recalling some of the teachers who had a significant impact on her as a child, Patricia brought up her seventh-and eighth-grade choir teacher, whom she described as "a grandpa kind of guy." Out of seven students who auditioned to accompany the school's choirs, he chose Patricia along with one of her peers to play together. He later gave Patricia and her peer their own respective choirs to accompany, which she remembers as a powerful moment in her educational journey. Patricia also recalled that in ninth grade a new choir teacher was hired. This teacher focused more on the technical aspects of singing. Patricia went to the school counselors in an effort to transfer out of the choir because the class had become stressful for her. Patricia is happy that they declined her request and told her to give the class some time. Patricia did, and she grew to love the teacher, whose motto was, "I won't tell you it's good unless it's good."

Louis

Louis is a 58-year-old Caucasian administrator at Elan Junior High. He is completing his

first year as an assistant principal at Elan Junior High and his 22nd year in MCPS. Louis was

gracious throughout the interview, which took place via telephone, particularly since it was

testing season, and the administration of those tests fall under his supervision. Louis did not set

out to have a career in education. Louis thought about becoming a teacher when he was young,

but was always troubled by how little money his mother made as a teacher. Louis believed that

if he were the breadwinner for his family, he would be able to do little else other than working to

try to make ends meet.

During our time together, Louis recalled enjoying his elementary school years,

particularly learning how to read and going to the school library to find books. Being able to

check the books out and knowing that he could take them home to read them was a thrilling

experience. Unfortunately, by the time Louis reached the fifth grade, he began to feel lost in the

math curriculum. By junior high school Louis determined that since math was not going to be a

place where he excelled, he shifted his interest away from math and science to social studies and

enhanced his love of history.

Louis recalls that while he received a first-year scholarship to the University of Utah, his

GPA that first year came in a hair too low, and he lost his scholarship. As a result, shortly after

that event, Louis left school and joined his brother to manage a small business that involved

arcade video games. Louis worked in the business for about seven years before he found himself

growing bored of the routine nature of the business. He returned to finish a bachelor's degree in

teaching at Weber State with an emphasis on social studies. After teaching for seven years,

Louis re-enrolled in the university to earn a master's degree in educational counseling, which he

utilized for a couple of years before finally moving on to administration during his second year as a counselor.

Louis credits his social studies teachers from junior high and high school for inspiring his path. In particular, Louis recalled his senior-year current events teacher, whom he described as "the kind of teacher those of us who teach aspire to be like some day." In large part, Louis attributes that description to this teacher's demeanor in the classroom, and the fact that he was so good at what he did that he and his peers were attentive, and there were few, if any, discipline issues. Louis also recalled that not only was this gentleman knowledgeable, he was able to transfer that knowledge to his students.

Melody

Melody is a Caucasian English teacher in her 60s at Elan Junior High. She is completing her 18th year at Elan Junior High and in MCPS. The interview took place via telephone, and Melody's desire to help each child who comes through her door shone throughout the interview. Melody attended Catholic school for most of her early years. Melody's parents were disappointed in the public school she had attended for having failed to teach Melody's brother to read. When Melody's family moved to Utah, she went back to public school. Melody described the shock she experienced returning to the public school where there were no uniforms and no severe punishments when students did not complete their homework. Melody went to college for about a year and a half right after high school; however, she had to drop out when she got the flu and did not return until her late 30s.

Melody earned a bachelor's degree from Weber State and realized that if she were to stop attending school after earning that degree, she would not return to school again. Therefore, Melody went directly into a master's program in counseling. Since Melody was teaching while

she attended school, she was able to utilize many of the skills she was learning in counseling in her junior high classroom. Melody did not stop there and continued on to earn a doctoral degree in administration from Liberty University.

Recalling her educational experiences growing up, Melody remembered her second-grade teacher, whom she felt she was fortunate enough to have a second time for fourth grade as well. Melody has fond memories of this teacher who encouraged Melody and her peers to develop a love for reading and learning. In high school Melody's favorite teacher earned that title in a similar manner. Melody's favorite teacher taught English, and despite the fact that she was displeased with Melody's terrible handwriting and facetious nature, she encouraged her each day always to be better in class on than she had been the day before.

Ellen

Ellen is a Caucasian special education learning center teacher in her 50s, at Elan Junior High. She is completing her fifth year both at Elan Junior High and in MCPS. Ellen is currently the co-chair of the Special Education Department at the school. The interview took place via telephone, and Ellen's soothing demeanor set the tone for the interview. Although initially Ellen earned her bachelor's degree in elementary education, she was later motivated to become a special education teacher because of her own children, whom she identified as having special needs. After becoming more familiar with special education students through her children, Ellen realized that she really enjoyed the special education kids, describing them as quirky, fun, and different.

Throughout her elementary and junior high years, Ellen's family moved all over the nation due to her father's career in the Marine Corps, and her education was so very irregular. Despite moving every 18 months and attending three different junior highs and two different

high schools, Ellen was able to recall one particular teacher who impacted her more than any other, Mrs. Grey. Ellen came to Mrs. Grey's classroom in the middle of the third grade. The class had been engaged in a big year-long project. Mrs. Grey patiently dug out all of her materials and art supplies and helped Ellen to do everything everybody else in the class had done so that her project could be on the bulletin board with the ones all the other third graders had completed. Ellen remembered that Mrs. Grey, along with several other great teachers she had experienced, all sincerely cared and showed concern for their students, while maintaining a good sense of humor and effective classroom management skills.

Results

The results for this qualitative single embedded-case study were developed by careful analysis of data collected through participant interviews, observations, and documents. This single case study uses an embedded-case synthesis to explain the findings. After preliminary analysis, an exhaustive examination of the interview transcripts was used to develop codes. The codes were then organized using pattern matching into themes that surfaced throughout the cases. Participant responses were then employed to answer the central research question and the two sub-questions. Pattern matching via codes was used and applied to the interview transcripts, the field notes from the observations, and the documents, and interpreted through the theoretical framework of communities of practice. A total of 68 codes were compared across the different participants and the observation field notes. The codes were then compared with select documents to determine similarities. Five themes were developed from the codes.

Case Synthesis

It is 7:12 a.m. at Elan Junior High as a group of administrators, school counselors, a school psychologist, and educators enter the building and make their way to the school's

conference room. As they enter, someone asks Melody, "How's it going at your house?" They are referring to a recent flood that she experienced, the second one in just three weeks.

Someone else chimes in, "I think I missed something? What happened?"

Melody replies referencing the flood, "They built a road behind our house and tore down the houses. They built it up six feet, and then they just put a, uh, slope, and all that water comes toward the house, so I have to contact the state about that!" By 7:15 all of the members have arrived, except for Ellen, who enters a few minutes late because she has to get her special needs son on the school bus each morning.

Louis has turned on the screen, and Veronica begins to pull up the data on the computer as the members pass around hard copies of the agenda. The team moves quickly through any schedule changes that appear on the day's agenda before they move onto their first case of the day. The first student on the agenda has significant attendance issues. Veronica brings up the 504 plan the elementary school has sent. In addition to the school having previously mailed a certified letter regarding the attendance problem and inviting the parents to come to an LCMT meeting to discuss their child, the school has also issued 18 truancies, which amount to more than $400 in fines.

The LCMT in this study is located in a district in Northern Utah. MCPS is rather large, with eight high schools, 16 junior highs, 59 elementary schools, and four special schools. Although Utah as a whole is not ethnically diverse, the city in which Elan Junior High School is located is diverse by comparison. Economically, the small suburban community which Elan Jr. High serves is comprised of primarily middle-class professionals, and working class tradesmen and service workers. Elan Junior High School's mission focuses on putting students first, which is a reflection of the school district's vision; the school believes that through collaboration with

parents, school, and the community, students can grow into active citizens who are well-rounded and career-ready.

MCPS recognized about nine years ago that sometimes when there is a concern about a child, the process can be overwhelming and ambiguous. Therefore, the district advocates for having a clear model not only for staff within the building, but also for parents out in the community as well, so that all stakeholders know to whom to talk and who is part of the process if there is a concern, how long the process takes, and what exactly the process entails. Consequently, MCPS has a system in place where teachers, staff members, administration, parents and any other concerned stakeholders can refer students directly to a school's LCMT.

According to the principal at Elan Junior High, everyone in the school building is aware of the procedure for referring students to LCMT. However, before the principal engages the LCMT, the staff tries to make several determinations. Often, that begins with the principal finding out who is involved in the student's life, including which teachers are on their schedule and whether those teachers are experiencing challenges or problems with the student. Then the principal is able to get critical staff members involved as quickly as possible, whether those are counselors, teachers, psychologists, or any member of the school community. Referring to this preliminary work, principals in the district express through the district's web page for parents, that they want parents and students to know there are real people involved in the process of developing a plan for the student or to connect them with resources, either in or outside of the school. Thus parents are able to communicate with staff rather than just with the principal.

"Therefore, through this process," Elan Junior High's principal said, "We can identify students who are struggling, who are food-insecure, who don't have clothing, who need medical or dental care, and we have access to community resources to get students to those kinds of

things that they need" (Principal, MCPS). Ultimately, the district believes that parents can walk away from their experience with the LCMT process knowing that the school has done everything in its power to connect their students to someone who really knows them. In other words, "At the end of the day they need a person. They need someone at the school that they can speak to, talk to contact, and feel like this person knows their student" (MCPS).

The district employs two Tiered Supports Coordinators who oversee LCMT. The coordinators believe that,

> Schools that do a good job at having a sustained impact on academics, behaviors, and mental health tend to have a strong process in place that includes evidence-based practices and procedures that are easy to understand for parents and staff within the building. (MCPS)

Ultimately, for schools in MCPS, one goal is to get to a point where the staff is always proactively looking for students to provide help before a challenge becomes a crisis that prevents the students from moving forward in their education. Another goal is to have students and families know that there is a collaborative and supportive environment at their school.

LCMT is in place to identify at-risk students earlier and to examine school wide areas of concern. The principal at Elan Junior High recalled:

> When I got here five years ago, one of the things that we noticed is a variety of behaviors. We got everything from students being sent to the office for needing a pencil and paper to violent episodes in the hallway with students, and we thought the first step in improving our culture would be to make sure that our students understand everything that's expected of them.

He believes that approaching not just individual at-risk students, but also school-wide areas of concern, through initiatives from the LCMT have been successful. The school has reduced its number of one-time referrals by 50%. Furthermore, teachers in the school take care of about 90% of all discipline issues because the principal feels that teachers are now much more consistent about applying those interventions, and they

> Know when the time is appropriate to send students to the office for additional discipline. Everything in education is about early intervention. We want to help students be successful in school. The earlier we're able to identify the struggles that they have, then the better we are at finding solutions for those students (Principal, MCPS).

If the litmus test of school leadership is not just the principal's individual commitment, it is also whether the leadership rallies the staff's commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to improve matters. The collective mobilization of the LCMT is indicative of the effective leadership in place at Elan Junior High (Fullan, 2007).

That day's meeting continued with a discussion about another student who had long-term tenancy on the agenda. Louis said, "All right, let's talk about Gino."

Sheila responded, "He's an interesting young man there."

Rebecca asked, "So, he's on a shortened schedule?

Veronica responded, "Yep."

"So, it's just four classes?" Rebecca followed up.

Sheila described an encounter she had had with that student the previous day. "I ran into him yesterday and asked about his classes. Well, he was failing everything, and when I asked him about it, he just smiled."

Veronica asked, "Is he just not doing his work, or…"

"I don't know," Sheila responded.

Harris chimed in, "When I get out the book and start work he does fine, but the follow-through isn't there. When I call Mom she doesn't answer; when I call Dad, he doesn't answer." The group examined the extensive supports they have put in place for this student. It is evident that the group was extremely frustrated with its failed efforts.

"We've tried everything to give support. I like Gino," Sheila said sadly. "They don't seem to understand the repercussions."

Veronica declared, "There was a fight yesterday. Guess who was standing right there with a big ol' grin on his face?

Sheila asked, "Gino?"

Veronica responded shaking her head, "Yeah."

MCPS schools take LCMT very seriously. The teams represent all of the critical aspects of education. The team at Elan Junior High includes administrators, counselors, special education teachers, a school psychologist, and general education teachers. The principal of Elan Junior High selected teachers to work on the team who have expertise in literacy and math. One of those general educators is also an expert in behavior and behavioral intervention and knows how to implement strategies successfully. The team comes together with the collective goal of being able to have rich conversations that really get to the heart of what is happening with their at-risk students. According to the Tiered Support Coordinators,

> LCMT meetings include practices such as well-defined roles and responsibilities as well
> as consistent and ongoing use of data to identify problems and evaluating the impact of
> their interventions and solutions and also to define clearly who is going to carry out the
> actions and provide follow-up support to teachers as those interventions. (MCPS)

The LCMT is a team of experts who convene for the purpose of helping students who are experiencing particularly challenging problems. According to the school district's web page for parents, the LCMT can be compared to a multidisciplinary critical care team in the medical profession where doctors, nurses, therapists, and social workers all work together on especially challenging cases. They assemble to ask questions, solicit suggestions, and look for alternative solutions. Elan's LCMT has tried to build a school-wide capacity so that teachers can have these conversations with their teams as well as in LCMT.

MCPS asserts that it takes student concerns just as seriously. School administrators want to be able to connect parents and families with the most impactful person in the building for their student. Whether that is a teacher, counselor, or support staff, administrators want to engage the person who can best help that student to be successful and safe in the school environment. Michelle pointed out, "And as professionals, no matter what area we're in, educators or the medical field, it should always be that the first rule is do no harm."

Based on MCPS' guidelines for staff representation on the team, the LCMT can, and likely should, include representation from various grade levels, departments, and types of expertise. MCPS also sets guidelines for the frequency of and schedule for meetings. Meetings must be student-focused. Teams must meet two to four times each month. At least one meeting during that month must include a school-wide focus.

A critical aspect of MCPS' LCMTs is the tandem implementation of a school-wide intervention plan that includes a written plan for the school's LCMT. The district requires schools, including Elan Junior High School, to work toward having a written plan to ensure the effectiveness of the school's LCMT. The plan should include:

- Specific roles and responsibilities for team members

- o Administrator and/or facilitator, note taker, time keeper, data analyst, assigned follow-up coach to support intervention implementation

- Expectations for interventions and data collection

- Step by step process for referral

  - o Whom to contact for each step of the process

  - o Expected timelines for the majority of referral (e.g. Try multiple interventions for _ weeks)

  - o Required pre-referral actions for...

    - Teacher

    - Administrator

    - Other staff members (MCPS)

A sample intervention process is included in appendix G.

MCPS' LCMTs are asked by the district to focus on the process of problem-solving as they meet and design interventions for students. Despite their continued failed efforts with students like Gino, the team continues to problem-solve ways in which they can intervene on those students' behalf. The LCMTs operate on the premise that in order for any evidence-based practice to have its desired effect on students, it must be implemented effectively with fidelity, appropriately, and it also must be sustainable over time. The district's web site cites Fixsen et al.'s (2009) Scaling Up Brief that was utilized in the development of LCMTs: "Students cannot benefit from [interventions] they do not experience" (Fixsen, Blase, Horner & Sugai, 2009, pg. 1).

At Elan Junior High, the LCMT's utilization of data is also essential to sustain effective implementation practices and to ensure the fidelity of implementation and outcome data, which

are used to make adaptations to practices. Components of effective use of data include: Regular and systematic review; use of systems and procedures to change practices based on data, and frequent reports to staff and stakeholders (McIntosh, et al., 2009). This use of data begins when a parent or teacher refers a student to LCMT. They are asked to gather data and information to support the team's decision making. Appendix H and I include MCPS' LCMT Referral Form and At-Risk Documentation Form respectively. Having data is essential to what LCMTs work to accomplish. Otherwise it would be difficult to pinpoint where a student is struggling or what next steps to take. These data include reading and math lexiles, SAGE scores and evidence of what is happening in the classroom behaviorally. MCPS provides a wide range of data collection opportunities for schools that are widely accessible on their web site in addition to more technologically advanced means of data collection.

The educational science behind MCPS' LCMTs relies heavily on ongoing research from the National Implementation Research Network, and specifically on the key drivers to the sustained implementation they have identified. One critical practice of this implementation is having teams that use data to ask the following questions:

- What is the Problem - Identify a problem

- Why is it happening - Use data to analyze the problem

- What should be done - Identify and select appropriate interventions

- Did it work - Review and measure the implementation and effects of those interventions (MCPS)

The problem-solving chart utilized by MCPS' LCMTs is included as Appendix F.

Furthermore, MCPS recognizes that although data collection and documentation is necessary, by themselves they are insufficient; the collected information should be purposefully escalated to the right people. As such, they utilize a tiered system of support to:

- Maximize student achievement

- Deliver effective interventions earlier and more efficiently, and

- Focus on student outcomes and progress

For Elan Junior High's LCMT, MTSS provides the framework for supplying appropriate instruction and intervention for all students in the school. The team utilizes the afore-mentioned problem-solving process to address problems at various levels within the building "including whole-school, grade- or department-level, classroom, or individual student problems" (MCPS, 2019). Elan Junior High's tiers represent increasing intensity and individualization in the instruction and intervention the school offers. It applies to both academics and behavior. When these tiers of intervention are applied to behavior, it is through the framework of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is supported by four pillars:

1. **Establish** expectations (school-wide as well as classroom level expectations)

2. Explicitly **teach** expectations to all students and staff

3. **Reinforce** students for following expectations

4. **Correct** (including reteaching) students for misbehaviors

The implementation of PBIS is not exclusively an Elan Junior High or MCPS initiative. Beginning March 1, 2019, all Utah schools or Local Education Agencies (LEA) are mandated by Law Rule R277-609: Standards for LEA Discipline Plans and Emergency Safety Interventions to have a plan in place to implement practices in line with these pillars in an effort to foster good behavior and provide appropriate supports for students who misbehave. To comply, MCPS

provides schools with a "Tiered Supports-Intervention Finder" and an MCPS "Behavior APP," which capitalizes on technology to benefit schools.

Luckily, today the team is able to conclude its meeting on a high note. Louis brought up the last name on the agenda for the day, Andy.

Harris said happily, "He's doing a lot better in my class…" Several of the members expressed their joy at this news. Harris continued, "He's very motivated by track."

Anthony provided a little family history, "His referral history is matched by only by that of his father. Brent would rarely do work, so…"

Veronica jumped in, "He's failing now with just one 'F.' Do we want to explain it to him or do we want him to see it on the report card?" She clarified for the group that she was referring to, "I mean… the track coach."

Anthony responded, "We can explain it to the coach so he can continue to run and then add a higher standard for future terms."

Embedded Case Synthesis

This research explored how LCMTs describe their experiences in ninth grade intervention/ dropout prevention. Yin (2013) asserted that the identification of sub-units in an embedded case study methodology allows for a more detailed level of inquiry appropriate for descriptive studies, such as this one, where the goal is to describe the features, context, and process of a phenomenon. Accordingly, this section presents each embedded case analysis derived from the whole LCMT including administration, counselors, school psychologist, special educators, and general educators. The researcher presents each embedded case's facet as part of the whole of the LCMT.

Administration. Today's administrators find it almost impossible to meet the growing demands of modern schools. In today's schools, "Principals today are expected to be visionaries (instilling a sense of purpose in their staff) and competent managers (maintaining the physical plant, submitting budgets on time), as well as instructional leaders (coaching teachers in the nuances of classroom practice)" (Danielson, 2007, p. 14). Roger recognizes those expectations and discussed his role in relation to the other members on the LCMT:

> My goal is to develop teacher-leaders. I may be the boss in terms of being their supervisor, but my goal is to have them develop in such a way, if I were out at any moment, that this organization, this committee would function in just as good a way if I were present in the room. So, my goal is to help each of them to develop their skills as teachers and as members of that community so that they can contribute.

He also sees the duality in his roles as both a provider/member of the team and as the boss of the individuals with whom he collaborates on the team. He continued:

> My goal, I believe, in my relationship with them, is that they know that they can come to me whenever they have a need. . . . I believe that I have the respect of some of the members on the committee but probably be not everybody because as their supervisor I've had occasion where I've had to take disciplinary action with teachers because there's other policy violations, and you know that's never an easy thing to do. But, I think that they know that I'm fair and equitable and I think for the most part, the relationship is one of mutual respect as well.

Under pressure from a range of sources at the state and federal levels and being accountable to multiple stakeholders, it is impossible for administrators to devote enough time to

comprehensive school improvement. Thus, in MCPS, the LCMT represents an invaluable resource for administrators.

Danielson (2007) astutely observed that teaching is a flat profession. When following most other career paths, as professionals become more experienced, they have the opportunity to assume more responsibility; however, this does not hold true of teaching. In most cases, the only way for a teacher to make a move up the career ladder is to become an administrator. All three administrators taught prior to making that move. In fact, Veronica believes that her background in teaching and best practices contribute to making her a better contributor to the team. For Louis, he was not only a teacher prior to becoming an administrator. He also worked for the district as a school counselor, and he brings his knowledge from both career paths to the LCMT table. In discussing why the district developed such a team, Louis was able to articulate the importance of the collaborative aspect of LCMT:

> Without [LCMT], I think that responsibility would fall into somebody's lap, could be administration, or it could be counseling. But, what I've found over the years is that I work with the smartest people I've ever met; and, some of them are teachers, some of them are counselors, some of them are administrators; but, if we didn't have that team it would be hit and miss for sure coming up with good interventions to try and help kids. So, I think it's genius to have that committee. And, I like the composition here at Elan where we have representatives from the different departments.

Louis recognizes that like all educators, administrators have limited expertise. An administrator, like Louis, who was formerly a social studies teacher and then a counselor, may know a lot about history and counseling students, yet he is not likely to know enough about math instruction to be considered an expert.

A group which includes teacher leaders can supply the diversity of specialized knowledge needed to sustain school improvement plans that involve increasing the likelihood of success for at-risk students. Roger was keenly aware of this benefit in describing what LCMT is to him:

> To me it is a group of people that represent the major departments in our school, that know the students, and that have an expertise where they can identify appropriate interventions for kids who are struggling, who are professional enough to keep it confidential, who can remain focused on the task at-hand, and to find ways to assist students to be more successful in school, and to provide them the additional support that they need when they're struggling beyond just academics. . . . The makeup of our particular Local Case Management Team represents special ed, school psych, regular ed teachers, counselors, [and] administrators. And between that group, we know the students pretty well, at least one member of that group will know the students well enough to articulate the needs of the students, the struggles that they're having.

Intervention on behalf of at-risk students depends more than ever on the active involvement of leadership from across the school community.

The administrators at MCPS attend monthly, hour-long meetings with the district during the last three full months of the school year. For the 2018-2019 school year the meetings have covered the following topics:

- February: Effective team meetings
    - logistics and practices for effective meetings
    - discussion of various models for having teachers get support from LCMT (sign up directly, bringing whole grade/department, using PLTs first).

- March: Data-based decision-making (sources of data for school-wide and individual student problems)

  o how to use Encore to access data

  o forms for tracking interventions and student response to interventions

  o transition of students of concern from one school to another (making sure they don't slip through the cracks)

- April: The problem-solving process

  o effectively defining problems

  o selecting appropriate interventions

  o ensuring follow-up to review intervention fidelity and effectiveness (MCPS)

Veronica sees all of this behind the scenes work as an opportunity to take a hard look locally at students case-by-case to see what needs to be done to help them be successful. She said,

I think students often get lost in the shuffle and maybe have one teacher here or there that cares and reaches out. But if you have a, a school-wide team that's looking at these individual students and looking at the various teachers and asking what things they've tried and how they've been successful in helping out students, those techniques or ideas can be shared throughout that student's schedule or throughout the school faculty and we can replicate some of those positive interventions.

Roger sees LCMT in light of the MTSS, as another step in the process of keeping students in the classroom. He explained, "A lot of these kids were just getting referred out to a district level for offenses that were probably things that are Tier One that could have been dealt with at the school level. And I think that this is another due-process step for students and schools to put into place

to make sure that our students are staying in the classroom that they're staying in school, and that they don't just jump to another level in terms of disciplinary action when it's unnecessary."

Although all of the administrators pointed to areas that could use improvement on the team, they all agree that the LCMT and its multidimensional approach to intervention is valuable. Louis reflected:

It's been mostly good, and I think it's been positive for kids. I think we found a lot of help for students, and we moved them through due process in terms of Tier One and Tier Two interventions. Some of them getting to Tier Three interventions and moving on to district interventions and/or being removed from school for disciplinary action sometimes, but in terms of the focus on how to academically help students more, I think it's been successful in providing that additional intervention for kids.

Above all else, the administration believes that the team is replete with staff who want to do what is best for kids, and who put the students' best interest ahead of anything else. Roger said, "I think their hearts are all in a good place." Louis agreed, "I really feel like that's the thing that ties us all together. That to me is the main ingredient for this group."

School counselors. At-risk students also need help from counselors, social workers, and school psychologists (Rosch & Owen, 2015). The overlap between CSCP and MTSS includes the following features that are exemplified in the Elan LCMT: Collaboration and coordinated services; school counselor time/roles; data collection; evidence-based practices; prevention; and positive school climate and systematic change (Ziomek-Daigle et al, 2016).

Above all, the counseling team at Elan Jr. High sees the current collaborative nature of the LCMT as a plus. Anthony pointed that out before saying, "Anything that was brought to the committee was automatically given to us. It was like, okay, we need to do this, Counselors, you

take care of it." Since he has been with the district for 16 years, Anthony has seen a lot of change in the way MCPS has handled at-risk students over the years. Accordingly, he was confident in his assessment when he said, "I think the case management team right now is identifying at risk kids and giving them resources to be successful, whether it be moving them on to special ed resources or resources that are already in place." He sees the relationships that he has developed over the years with the members on the team as key to its success. Anthony does not consider his fellow counselors to be merely colleagues; they have become close friends. Although he said there had been some interesting interactions in the meetings over the years, he said, "Right now I think we're working as well as I have ever seen; and when I say that, I mean that the kids are being, their needs are being addressed." He feels similarly about his relationship with the administration. In fact, he spoke sadly about the fact that the school and the team are losing Roger and Veronica. He said, "It's kind of like when you're thrown into the fire, you bond. And I think we have all bonded. . . . they have been a rock, and they're just fun to be around. So, we're going to be feeling some loss."

Sheila also sees the team's development as an evolution of sorts. She indicated that this was dictated by the tone set by the administrators, who, she says, have set clear and concise expectations for the LCMT. However, her perception of the teacher members is not as positive. She commented, "The choice of people who are involved, they're good, they care, but there are people on the team that pretty much do nothing. They just show up, but they're very supportive and they care." Consequently, she sees her role on the team as that of an educator. She recalled putting together the pyramid of intervention the team uses as a guide for the tiered intervention process. She cites a lack of involvement in the intervention process on the part of the teachers as her motivation for organizing the guide. Sheila said she is motivated,

Because I'm trying to educate [teachers]. So we still use that list and still give it to

teachers. We put it on our shared drive so that when they have an issue with a student,

they can have access to it. That's my little contribution, and it's also been a huge part.

That's what we're here for. And we are providers of the [students'] education.

Sheila does acknowledge that sometimes her expectations for the teacher members of the team

are high, and that, "It's asking a great deal of people who are already so overwhelmed, so

overwhelmed. They're asked to do so much with very little pay, but they do care. But it's hard

when you have 40 kids in your classes." The district supports interdisciplinary collaboration as

an effective means to provide additional supports to students who need them. (Avant &

Swerdlik, 2016). In the Guidance Program Characteristics available on the MCPS web site,

MCPS details the following characteristics to ensure that the district helps all students learn more

efficiently and effectively:

- Reaches 100% of students

- Guidance Curriculum (Pro-Active and Preventative)

- Involves ALL Students, Parents, Teachers, Counselors, and Community Partners

- Facilitates the SEOP Process

- Developmental and Sequential

- Unique and Responsive Services

- Focuses Upon Needs and Goals

- Measures Program Effectiveness

- Helps Facilitate School Improvement for Student Learning

The LCMT appears to fit these characteristics as well, which is likely no coincidence, since the

district indicates that the purpose of its comprehensive guidance program "has characteristics

similar to other educational programs, including scope and sequence, student competencies, activities and processes to assist students in achieving these outcomes, professionally licensed personnel, materials and resources, and accountability methods" (MCPS).

Anthony believes that the LCMT evolved because the needs of the students were not being met. He explained,

> If they were being met, they were being met in numerous groups and committees that were meeting throughout the school, but not in one central location. . . . I think the district just needed to have someone in a central location addressing the needs of students instead of a fractured group here and there, mainly [built] around the counseling department.

He also sees that this evolution did not occur without his role also evolving to that of an educator to some degree. He said,

> Sometimes, teachers aren't aware of some of the obstacles that we face, some of the FERPA issues and some things that we are held to that they may not know. So when that comes up in a situation, then we'll educate. So, as it comes up in discussion, and if it applies, one of us will step forward and educate everyone.

He recalled that when he first started at Elan, no one really understood how LCMT worked, nor did they understand how to utilize it to meet the needs of the students, and they learned together. He appreciates that over the years, the district provided training and encouragement. Furthermore, he said that the current administration has "refine[d] LCMT to the point that everyone on the committee in one form or another is expected to be accountable and expected to, to help these kids as, as assigned. So that's been good."

Psychologist. MCPS cites the National Association of School Psychology in the opening of its online section on its school psychology program:

School psychologists are uniquely qualified members of school teams that support

students' ability to learn and teachers' ability to teach. They apply expertise in mental

health, learning, and behavior, to help children and youth succeed academically, socially,

behaviorally, and emotionally. (MCPS)

MCPS has a psychologist assigned to each school. Generally, the psychologist is a participating

member of the school's LCMT. Michelle is assigned to both Elan Junior High and a high school

in the district. She leverages her expertise as a school psychologist and in her dual placement to

contribute to Elan's LCMT. Michelle explained:

I approach [LCMT] as an interventionist and behaviorist. So, if there's an idea that I've

seen either through another school or another classroom or just through job experience,

then I can share that with the team and then offer my support. Sometimes that's through

helping either train on that intervention, even if it's just a matter of going to the teacher

and saying we're using this kind of tracker, this is the expectation, and if you have

questions then let me know.

Furthermore, Michelle's inclusion on the LCMT enables the team to refer students who need

more intensive services more quickly to local clinics or mental health providers.

Michelle's role reaches beyond that of merely school psychologist and has been

expanded to include early intervention expert, referral expert, school reformer, evidence-

informed practitioner, evaluator, and administrative support (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016).

She described the LCMT as a group of professionals who bring their own perspectives and roles

to assist administration at the Tier Two and Tier Three levels. She explained further,

It's that perspective, sharing, and bringing whatever our role is to develop an intervention

and help kids. Sometimes that's groups of kids because either they've not succeeded

together, they've been in trouble together, or they have the same or similar problems.

And so it's a definitely a team approach to helping kids succeed.

She believes the team acts under the premise that it gives every single student that comes through its doors the best shot at success no matter where they may have started and regardless of the experiences they bring to the table.

Michelle's collaboration with the team helps to spread evidence-based practice through building a community culture among the school service professionals (Castillo et al., 2016). She spoke about her experience watching the other members of the LCMT jot down notes during the meetings, then to take the notes with them and pass along that information so that the whole school is involved in local case management. She explained further how this spreads effective practices throughout the school. Michelle said, "We are an MTSS school. And so we always ask, 'How can we use the support systems we already have in place to help with this particular need?' Then it gives us an opportunity to say, 'Hey, how effective are we being?'"

Furthermore, Michelle's inherent professional skills as an expert in communication come across and lend themselves to this type of collaboration (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). She recalled a particular incident that occurred during a team meeting held about a year prior where communication was breaking down. There were numerous conversations, and while Michelle did not remember the specific topic they were discussing, she does remember being frustrated by the roadblock to effective communication it had created. She offered a further explanation saying, "There were lots of side conversations and crosstalk, and our principal just interjected, 'Hey guys, let's have one meeting.' And that was very telling of what the expectation were. . . that everyone should be heard, but everyone should be listening as well. And so it kind of redirected us back to the concept of, 'What are we here to accomplish?'" This experience

emphasized for Michelle the importance of inter-professional collaboration. She continued, "I appreciated that as a member because I thought, hey, in that one sentence, 'Let's have one meeting,' it kind of brought together what our purpose is, reduced the crosstalk or the side conversations, and helped redefine what we're doing there in the first place."

Special education. This was Rebecca's first year on the LCMT, so to her LCMT is a lot of paying attention. What she has learned already is that she appreciates how it highlights those students who are struggling academically, socially, and behaviorally, and what she and the other members can do to support them. She explained, "It makes sense to me to have some kind of team like this because teachers miss things. We have lots of kids in our classrooms every day and so having the whole school focused on a smaller amount of kids, I think that's the goal." Although Rebecca is not yet sure that the team always meets that goal, it does not take away from the fact that she stays "focused on those individuals who might get lost or who are particularly difficult in some classes." Her commitment to those students is a direct reflection of the district's mission to, "Work cooperatively with special needs students, families, communities, colleagues, and other professionals in order to promote each student's success and well-being as they prepare for future endeavors" (MCPS). This mission could easily be mistaken for that of the LCMT, which also appears to be a good reason why Rebecca and her co-department chair fit in so well.

Although not as verbal as her co-chair, Ellen also shared that she has a positive view of LCMT. She sees it as, "An opportunity for different members of the school community,-- counselors, teachers, admin, psychologist-- to come together and discuss ways of helping different students." Since research has shown that students who receive special education supports, (generally) have more access to support and resources than general education students,

it stands to reason that they see their participation on the team as beneficial (Heppen et al., 2018).

Michelle echoed that sentiment during our conversation. She said, "I'm always letting, the general education teachers or the counselors know that I'm available to help out with any student whether they're SPED or not." In fact, she believes that this is the reason the district may have developed such a team, to give the different departments an opportunity to confer because, "It's easy, especially in the junior high setting, to kind of be with your department and not really get out of that area."

Rebecca was far more vocal about what she has seen so far as the team's shortcomings. One strategy in particular frustrates her, so she said that she has tried to be more vocal about its use. She explained,

> I think shortening schedules, specifically, is just not helpful because I have yet to see
> students, that's very biased, because I haven't seen many, but I don't feel like I've seen a
> student yet who we shortened their schedule and then all of a sudden eventually things
> got better. It just seemed like the same problems happen, just in a shorter period of time
> at the school.

Her criticism does not come without a suggested solution. She thinks that instead of strategies like shortened schedules that,

> It would be nice if each student on our list had a person that they knew was on their side
> that touched base with them fairly frequently to address these issues that wasn't
> necessarily just the counselor or the teachers they're having a problem with.

This type of intervention is one of the school-based protocols detailed on the district's web site. It suggests that for struggling students,

> A trusted adult in the building is assigned to a student in order to provide regular

coaching and displays examples of character and role modeling as well as potentially life-skill coaching. It may include contacting parents and coordinating with outside contacts.

 (MCPS)

Rebecca thinks this strategy would help the LCMT to understand completely what is going on with those students versus simply utilizing observations recorded in Encore.

Both women felt as though they experienced close relationships with the other members of the team, and, in particular, with each other. Rebecca also reported having a strong relationship with Harris because they co-teach a math class outside of the LCMT. She said, "Socially, in general, we all like each other and get along pretty well. We get stuff done in case management. It's very satisfying to get through our list of names, but there is some fun joking every once in a while." Ellen reported the same experience with the other team members. She said, "I feel like we're all pretty good colleagues. There are several of us who are friends outside of LCMT. I see respect for everybody."

However, Rebecca believes that as a group the team had been struggling of late, particularly with behavior and attendance issues. She explained,

We've had trouble knowing what steps to take next to help our students. It feels like sometimes we reach a certain point and then the only option is to write a shortened schedule or suspend people. And they feel very extreme and not helpful for them and not effective really. And, I think we could find better ways to address the problems they're having.

She did say that there are definitely people on the team who are more apt than others to volunteer to try new strategies or take students into the classroom if they are struggling in other places.

Also, the counselors are highly involved with a lot of the students. "But," she also added, "There are definitely people who just sit and observe for the most part."

General education. According to Danielson (2007), "In every good school, there are teachers whose vision extends beyond their own classrooms—even beyond their own teams or departments. Such teachers recognize that students' school experiences depend not only on interaction with individual teachers, but also on the complex systems in place throughout the school and district. This encourages these teachers to want to effect change. Teachers like Melody, Harris, and Patricia have found a way to exercise teacher leadership on the LCMT.

Teachers' tenure in today's schools is generally far longer than that of school administrators since administrators continue at a particular school site for only three to four years, while teachers are typically there for a greater period of time. Louis reiterated this point when talking about the membership on the LCMT: "I think that it's important to refresh it with teachers. Counseling really, they seem to seem to stay pretty stable in most of our Mooseland schools, they don't change them too much. . . .Administration, we get moved around quite a bit." This is just one of a multitude of interrelated factors arguing that schools need teacher leadership.

The general educators on the LCMT appreciate their position on the team and each other. Patricia gushed,

These people are so skilled. The ladies that are on the special ed committee are completely in tune with what the kids need and are so patient, they amaze me every day. These administrators have all of the school to know and they know who these kids are. Mrs. Williams, Dr. Williams, she doesn't ever use her title, but she has a doctorate in education; she is incredible. She's like the assistant administrator when administrators are off somewhere else. She's the one they call to be in charge. I admire her.

There were almost no members of the team that did not echo Patricia's admiration for Melody. In fact, Rebecca said, "Melody is like the heart of our LCMT, and I say that because you can tell she just would die for any one of these students, and she will do anything to help them learn."

Melody's assessment of her own contributions was far more pragmatic. She discussed the significance of the diversity she believes they each bring to the team:

> I think the importance of the team is we all bring a different little piece to it. I'm more likely to say, 'What's their reading level, what's their math level, what are their grades, what's their attendance like?' And some others are more likely to say, 'Well, okay, but they're having this situation in their life.' You know, we're all focused on different areas, and that helps us in some cases help kids more.

She also willingly takes on the role of mentor when a student needs someone like her. She said, "Instead of being in a great big huge study hall where they're totally ignored, I can at least every couple of weeks or so look at their grades and say, 'Okay, why aren't you doing this? What's going on here?' That kind of thing. . . . I end up with more students, but that's because that's where my heart is."

As a novice teacher, Harris' experience is more directly related to his expertise in math. He uses this expertise to help the team understand how students are doing in the math classes and what the scores really mean. Harris explained,

> So if a student is struggling in a particular teacher's math class, I can sort of be like, well, it might be related to this particular way they're doing their grading or it might be that they haven't put in the homework grade or things like that. That's the more common contribution I have to make.

He also indicated that he sometimes contributes strategies to the LCMT, initially developed for his own benefit as a teacher, and the team adopts them.

Harris is under the impression that many of the interventions end up assigned to the administrators, and he believes that only occasionally are tasks assigned to teachers. He said, "As a math person, a lot of times when students are struggling in math I am given the responsibility to go find out what we can about how they're performing in math and why. So I'll go ask the math teachers about that if we don't have that information. And that's similar for other departments as well." Regardless of his capacity, Harris believes that his contributions and those of his teammates, "Really help to look out for the interests of kids and trying to find out what we can do to benefit them. Not just the individuals involved, but also students as a school. Look at what's going to be best for everyone in the student population."

At one of the meetings observed, Louis read off the next name as the team travelled through the list from the bottom up. They had started at the top of the alphabet the previous week and wanted to ensure that those students at he bottom of the list would receive equal time. Veronica brought up this child's information on the screen, "Struggling in math. I've got his math level here. The math is…very low."

Melody quickly chimed in, "He's struggling because he's not doing his work. He's doing the same thing in other classes."

Veronica, indicating the boy's transcript on the screen, "This is his first term, second term. So, we don't know whether he's doing his work?"

Melody quickly responded, "My guess is he's making it look like he's doing his work…only because I have him in my class." She pointed to his reading level on the screen, "So his reading level, it was, at the beginning of the year, low, which does impact math, especially if

it's the word problems." The team determined which teacher the student had had during the first term and what supports were put in place at that time; the notes indicated that the supports involved tutoring and support. They continued to look at his scores in other areas to see if there was a correlation. Melody pointed out some of the data from the state scores that demonstrated a history of math concerns, "SAGE…That's English. It looks like he's been struggling with math. He did better in fourth grade… I'm just trying to think of all the different things that could…"

Harris jumped in, "To me it looks like… he has problems understanding Algebra."

Louis asked, "Okay, so what's the action for him? I don't see a referral for special ed."

Harris responded, "We can do Math 180 and see what he struggles with." Several other members joined the conversation asking about his math inventory, who was going to review the math this child has missed, whom he currently has for math, and whom he has for advisory.

Harris responded to the question regarding his advisory, "Well, he could be with a math teacher. I would also like to ask Larry if he's working in his class." The conversation on this student concluded with a new plan in place to address his continuing struggles in math.

On the other hand, Patricia sees her relationships with the students as her most significant contribution to the team. This was not always the case. She recalled, "When I first started teaching, I was slammed in the face with how ineffective I felt at getting kids to become better because [sometimes] we can see the possibilities in them, and they just choose not to. Things are different now." Patricia continued, **"**I have these kids in my classes sometimes. And the way I see them in a choir class is different than the way they see them in math classes. . . . Where they choose to come to is a lot different than in classes where they're required to be there. And so I think my perspective is valid and encouraging to them. It gives a different perspective. I think it's a great thing they me ask me to be there." In her experience, having teachers on the team is essential. She continued, "When everybody has a student, everybody can say something about

them, but it's a little harder sometimes when you don't have a student to sometimes give feedback." While she admits that some of the kids have things to deal with that are so severe they seem unsolvable, but, "It always comes back to we've got to do something. What can we do? Let's find a new solution."

Sometimes those relationships are hard. Patricia spoke about a student who was on the LCMT agenda who also happened to be in her choir class. She said,

> I had a boy who was couch-surfing, living in his truck with his dad. I was more sensitive
> to when he was high because I knew what was happening. He would sleep in class
> consistently. . . . I kept contacting dad and sometimes I could get through when others
> couldn't because administrators calling a parent, they're suspicious, but I could get
> through to him sometimes to visit, you know, talk to them. And that student loved to
> sing. He was just strung out, tired from being up, and high.

Regarding accountability, though, Patricia does not acknowledge her contributions. She said, "There's always someone who's in charge of doing this or doing that or notifying teachers or talking to parents. And sometimes two or three people assigned to do things to try to help, not me so much because I'm not the counselor or the administrator, so I rarely have something to do to help." However, like Melody, there have been times when Patricia has been assigned to use her relationship skills to help kids. She spoke of this arrangement, declaring,

> They would put them in when they needed one of these students to come in and have an
> extra period. They would put them in as a TA for my classroom, which really just meant
> they were doing homework in my room while I had class. So I was monitoring them and
> kind of tracking them. And, the period they came in, they did better, they accomplished
> more, you know, it was productive for that term when they were there."

Theme Development

Themes were developed from one-on-one interviews, observations, and document review. After an intensive analysis of all interview transcripts and observation protocol, 68 codes were generated which appeared amid a numerical majority of the embedded participant groups – administrators, counselors, school psychologist, special educators, and teachers. The coding began with aggregating the text into small categories of information and then assigning a label to each code. The numerical majority was used as an emergent defining boundary for the selected codes, while the theoretical framework was a prefigured defining boundary for the selected codes. Codes were developed into themes; they provided an interpretation through detailed description of the participant interviews and observations. The codes were then compared with the collected documents for parallels. The codes were recorded to show similarities across different sources of data (Appendix K). Many codes were reduced and combined to become part of the thematic analysis, while some codes were ultimately discarded because they did not represent the five overarching themes discovered in the study and used to write the narrative. The codes were then reduced to major themes – time, knowledge, accountability, escalating intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to success, and multidimensional programming (Appendix L). Finally, the results of this thematic development were recorded in an enumeration table (Appendix M).

Time

Time management can be a challenge for the entire school community. For school administrators, time management is problematic because as the demands on schools, and on teachers in particular, increase, finding time to address those demands multiplies exponentially. As volunteer members, teachers on the LCMT do not receive a stipend for the time they spend in

these meetings and are faced with putting something else on the back burner each time they attend. Roger has instituted flipped faculty meetings to ease some of the burden on his staff. Roger explained:

> I do what I call a 'flipped' faculty meeting where I record a short video and create a link in Microsoft teams and send out the link either through email or via teams for teachers to watch at their convenience. That way they can get the information that I want to disseminate to staff members without us having to hold an additional meeting.

Teachers Harris and Melody report that the time they spend in LCMT meetings each Thursday takes away from the time they would otherwise be spending with students or on planning. Melody explained,

> I'm not always in my classroom, so like every Thursday I have to be at the meeting. So, I have kids that come all the time to my class both before and after school. And so I just have to tell them before school on Thursday, it's just not an option. And, occasionally it impacts my first class; occasionally I'll come in and I'm not quite 100 percent prepared to teach my first class.

Harris' experience is similar. He said, "A lot of students try and come in early on Thursday mornings, and I can't be there on Thursday mornings; it would be the same any other day of the week. So it wouldn't really make a difference to move it."

However, regardless of the time that it takes away, both teachers report that the time is spent well. Melody explained, "That is because it just gives me ideas. Sometimes, somebody in case management will have a problem that I'm having with one of my students in my class and I'll [think], oh, I can try that with them!" Harris feels an even greater positive impact from the time he spends in the meeting, particularly since he is a less experienced teacher,

It's a cost that's definitely made up for by my ability to sort of gain knowledge about the issues going on with students. It's really one of the places where I learn a lot about what's going on in the school and start to understand why students are struggling so I can approach them in different ways to try and reach them. You learn a lot of good practice to see all the ways other teachers are intervening to help students.

Furthermore, for all of the volunteer members of the LCMT, the weekly meetings are time spent outside of their contract hours. All of the team members agreed that it is a commitment they make because they are all dedicated to working toward bettering the outcomes for their at-risk students.

During the LCMT meetings, time is also a commodity. The team only has approximately 45 minutes each week to get through its agenda, which often includes a lengthy list of students. A recent agenda included 20 students. At Elan Junior High the allotted time is five minutes per student, but sometimes that's just really not enough time; consequently, the team might spend 20 minutes on a child. This may have something to do with Roger's concern that if people get off track, the team will waste valuable time that would otherwise be spent finding solutions to student concerns. Roger added, "Oftentimes, we'll spend time talking about policy and making sure we're clear on what that is before we move ahead with an action on somebody." Time is of particular importance to Roger since the team barely finishes on time each week. Veronica discussed how the team switches back and forth every other week,

We start at the bottom to go to the top or from the top to the bottom so that we don't always kind of get to the same spot and not get to talk about certain kids or that it's rushed at the end and kids don't get the same time. We do have a timekeeper who tries to help us stay on track as we're discussing each student so that we're not belaboring a point

and getting stuck on one student when we need to move through and make some

decisions for other students as well.

Louis participated in several other LCMTs both as a counselor and an administrator before

becoming an assistant principal at Elan Junior High. He appreciates the fact that this is the first

team of which he has been a member of that assigns the role of timekeeper to someone. For

members like Melody, the time crunch impacts how she interacts during the meeting. She feels

as though she sometimes dominates the conversations. She said, "I always want to check the

facts out, and I don't always let other people ask first because I don't want to waste time."

Teachers outside of the LCMT also have issues with the demands made on their time.

Harris observed that with all of the classroom duties and the roles that teachers are now required

to take on along with all of the legislative demands, teachers are just overloaded. He said,

"Teachers really are overwhelmed. When you ask them to do one more thing and one more thing

and one more thing, it seems like a lot." Unfortunately, this sometimes has the unintended

consequence of teacher burnout, which generally involves physical and emotional exhaustion,

detachment, and feelings of ineptitude and underachieving. Good teachers are always looking

for ways to improve, but that, combined with being overtasked, can mean that educators do not

leave enough time for taking care of themselves. Onstad (2013) argued that we live in a cult of

overwork, and that, for teachers especially, being a workhorse is regularly celebrated as an asset

when it should not be (Onstad, 2013).

Accountability

The additional work that comes with interventions does not fall solely on the shoulders of

the teachers. The other LCMT members share that burden as well. Anthony recalled a time

when the responsibility for a student or concern brought to the committee was automatically the

responsibility of the counselors to resolve. He is grateful that Elan's current administration has spread out the responsibility. Although the responsibility is distributed more, Roger believes that to some degree, it should be lopsided,

> I think that often that the counselors take on a larger role following through with students. I think in one sense that makes perfect sense to me because, while teachers are teaching all day long, counselors have that additional time where they can offer direct services to students and bring students in for those kinds of discussions. I think that's true of the social worker. I think that's true of the school psychologist. . . . I think some take on less of a role. Teachers may take on an equal role in terms of expressing opinions and things like that during the Local Case Management meeting, but they take on less of a role in terms of actions. The one area that that's not true is when we're asking for at-risk paperwork from teachers, not necessarily the teachers in the meeting, but the teachers throughout the school [who] have accountability for returning at-risk paperwork by deadlines that we impose as a committee.

Not everyone on the team agrees. Sheila stated, with frustration, "When you're in LCMT, the responsibility [for interventions] goes to administration, counselors, and sometimes Special Ed. And, very few times does it involve the other representatives; that's rare." Veronica echoed this sentiment and believes that the majority of the responsibility falls to the counselors and administrators, but she does acknowledge that,

> We do have a reading specialist at our school, so she'll often take on a role, a task. And, where a lot of students in our school struggle in math, we do have someone from the math department and sometimes he will take on a responsibility, but probably 90% of the responsibilities are assigned to administration or to counselors.

However, they were the only members who reported this level of frustration with the distribution of responsibility.

Each LCMT divides the responsibility differently, and for Elan's team the teacher's role seems more elusive to some members. Anthony thinks that having teachers on the LCMT gives them a sense of ownership of the process. He believes that their contribution lies more in the day-to-day contact they have with the students. Anthony said,

I think by having the cross section of teachers, there are not many students that those teachers on the committee don't have contact with at least one of. We have across the board, seventh-, eighth- and ninth-grade teachers. So, we pretty well can get information or an observation from everyone on the committee.

Additionally, when the team is discussing students they look to the various teachers for their professional expertise. Michelle pointed out,

That person from whatever department is kind of then considered an expert. If we have a student being referred because of a math concern, we look to the math teacher to say, hey, what does their math inventory look like? What do you think about that? What does that score mean to you? And, how can we help support this request?

One of the significant evolutions that Anthony has experienced with the team is that, in the past, they would discuss the kids and what needed to be done; however, there was not much follow-through. He feels that everyone on the team is being held accountable.

The foundation of the team is built on being accountable for showing up, participating, keeping matters confidential, knowing policy, understanding FERPA, taking on the intervention strategy, seeing it through, completing it, and reporting back to the team. However, of the team's core, Michelle said, "We each have a role to play and most of that role is sharing our

perspective so that we can problem-solve and help make kids be more successful." In addition

to the confusion surrounding the teachers' roles on the team, the LCMT experiences some

difficulty with maintaining its accountability to the rest of the school community. Ellen and

several other members pointed out that the team needed to work on communicating more

effectively with teachers. Harris said,

> I think our local case team has issues with communicating expectations, the expectations
>
> that it has for teachers to the teachers. Like, what do we need the teachers to do? And so
>
> I think if we had a more consistent structure that sort of defines things better, I think
>
> that would definitely improve our effectiveness as a team not only acting within the team,
>
> but communicating those outcomes and goals to teachers as well.

Administration is not blind to this shortcoming in accountability. Although teachers have access

to the information generated at LCMT through a shared drive, Veronica stated,

> I think that we could do better to communicate better to our school, to the faculty, to all
>
> the staff and let them know what decisions were made. Putting it passively into a shared
>
> drive does not mean anybody goes and looks at it. And so to try to get that information
>
> out, and to ask teachers to try certain things, or to implement certain behaviors or
>
> interventions and we do that, but I think we could do better at it.

> On the other hand, as Anthony so astutely pointed out, it is impossible for the LCMT to

let everyone in the building know what is going on with every student. In addition to the issue of

practicality, there are FERPA laws that would prevent them from doing so. However, overall,

Roger believes, "Local Case Management Team has been instrumental in communicating with

the teachers about the [issues] that some of our students have, and I think that makes my job a lot

easier when I have more people working for the benefit of students who they know are struggling through these adverse childhood situations."

Knowledge

Early in the conversation, Louis shared,

What I've found over the years is that I work with the smartest people I've ever met, and some of them are teachers, some of them are counselors, some of them are administrators; but, if we didn't have that team, it would be hit and miss for sure on coming up with good interventions to try and help kids. So, I think it's genius to have that committee.

Not only does each of the members have the requisite bachelor's degrees required for their respective positions in the school district, but among the members interviewed, they share the collective knowledge of 11 master's degrees and one Ed.D. Furthermore, Louis believes that the team's contributions go beyond their educational backgrounds. He followed up by saying,

Knowledge and experience, those are important. Having people on there who know kids Personally [is important]. So, if teachers have them in their classes, those kinds of ingredients for the committee, I think, are really important. It's a pretty professional collegial experience on a regular basis.

All of the members of the team, regardless of how long they have been in education, clearly have expertise to contribute to the LCMT.

Roger and Anthony have been in education the longest and their experience is immense and incalculable. Roger said that his knowledge is best contributed through the use of oral history, which he explained:

I think that with 33 years of experience as an educator: having worked in Title I schools in Los Angeles, having worked with immigrant families and first generation immigrant students, having taught English as a second language, having been working in the north end of Mooseland County, military families . . . I think there are experiences that I had where I have seen what worked for students and what hasn't worked. I have an understanding of the needs. I have direct contact with community resources. . . . I'm able to bring that there in that committee meeting and to help demonstrate to its members that we don't have to solve all of these problems on our own. That we have other people that we can use. And, so I think that the experience I have as a principal, being able to communicate and bring to bear those outside resources helps also for that community to recognize that they're not responsible for solving every single problem that a student has.

Since Veronica had a lengthy career in teaching before becoming an administrator, she believes that her extensive background in teaching and knowledge of best practice are assets she contributes to the team along with her organizational skills.

Nevertheless, other members see their contributions differently. Since Anthony believes that many teachers are unaware of the obstacles that schools face in helping the at-risk population, he believes it is his duty to share his knowledge of FERPA and other laws under which they are required to operate. Michelle sees her contribution to the knowledge pool in the roles of interventionist and behaviorist." She explained,

So if there's an idea that I have that I've seen either through another school or another classroom or just through job experience, then I can share that with the team and then offer my support sometimes through helping either to train on that intervention, even if it's just a matter of going to the teacher and saying we're using this kind of tracker and

this is the expectation, and if you have questions, then let me know so that they have a

reference about something that maybe they're not as familiar with.

Rebecca and Ellen also see themselves as strong contributors to the team since they work with

behavior issues daily as special educators. Therefore, they often suggest interventions for

students that they know have worked in the past, or they help the rest of the team figure out how

accommodations can be implemented more effectively in the classroom.

Several members described Melody as the heart of the team. According to Rebecca,

"You can tell she just would die for any one of these students, and she will do anything to help

them learn. Even the students who might struggle." She describes herself as the reading expert

and very data driven. She said,

I always make sure we check their reading and now that we've added math inventory, I

make sure they check that. I think I'm always the one, at least I feel like I'm always the

one saying what's their lexile? I want to know where they are grade wise. Now, I want

to know where they are grade-wise. What were their test scores? I want to know all that

kind of data to help make decisions.

Melody's propensity for both reading and data may be supported by the fact that she received her

doctoral degree addressing how learning styles affect reading ability through a mixed methods

approach.

Some of the newer teachers see their creativity in the classroom as their greatest

contribution to the team. Although he developed it for his classroom, the school adopted Harris'

"Stop, Think, and Do" document. The team thought it was a good idea and added it to the

discipline referral form. Alternately, some teachers see their relationship with students as their

qualification for being on the team. For example, the choir teacher sees many of the at-risk students throughout the day in her elective courses. As she explained,

> The way I see them in a choir class is different than the way they see them in math classes, you know. In a class where they want to be there, where they choose to come to is a lot different than in classes where they're required to be there as core subjects. And so I think my perspective is valid and encouraging to them. You know, it gives a different perspective. I think it's a great thing they me ask me to be there.

Escalating Intrinsic and Extrinsic Barriers to Success

One thing upon which everyone can agree is that we have more children struggling in school now than at any other time in history. The district, along with every member of the LCMT, is concerned with helping kids. Melody added,

> Kids who are sometimes slipping through the cracks, either through their own choices or through circumstances like their reading level being low, you know, those kinds of things. One or the other is causing them to fail in either coming to school or in their grade.

Many members of the team see LCMT as their opportunity to give those students their best chance to succeed. Michelle elaborated, "Because there are too often the sad stories that kids either fly under the radar or we missed the boat."

Some of the intrinsic issues the team sees involve important points related to special education or mental health. Students on the LCMT agenda who have been referred for special education testing are discussed in light of available data from a variety of sources and teacher input. Once students have been moved into special education, they are removed from the LCMT agenda. The resource team takes over their care, including monitoring, trackers, and sharing

information with either the LCMT or other professionals who need to be involved in that child's education. According to Ellen, a special education student does not return to the LCMT agenda, "Unless the student is… causing major problems that we're not handling in SPED."

The LCMT has seen an increase in cases of students whose academic difficulties appear to stem from mental health concerns. Their experience parallels 2018 studies that reported nearly 70% of teens aged 13- 17 who said that anxiety and depression were top concerns for them and their peers. This number has been on the rise for several years (Horowitz & Graf 2019). During the LCMT meeting on April 18th the team discussed a student who, due to her anxiety, is missing classes and shutting down. The team was concerned about how successful she will be in the coming years. This student has been on the minds of several of the LCMT members. Patricia explained,

> She is almost completely nonfunctional; in the most calm, the most, controlled situation, [she] can't finish a test and can't do it in writing because it has to be perfect or she melts down and will walk out of the room. That's a very difficult one.

> Nonetheless, the number of extrinsic barriers to learning also continues to mount.

According to Roger, extrinsically the team deals with,

> Lack of attendance, multiple failing grades. We've got, sometimes we come to know of students because we have found that they are bringing drugs or prescription drugs or alcohol to school. That's not a frequent thing, but it does happen.

Roger continued,

> We see issues of homelessness through Local Case Management where we've become aware of a student being an unaccompanied minor. We had a student last year that was actually living in a van with his mom and dad and moving around. We've had issues

involving suspected drug use, suspected abuse, suspected neglect. We've had issues with

medical care, dental care, clothing, food, you name it, we've pretty much covered it.

Some of the most difficult issues to address are attendance, discipline, and safe-school violations.

In the case of at-risk students, sometimes the team even sees instances of personality conflicts

between students and teachers. Melody reported that in the past the team has dealt with issues of

sexting among students. Also, there are the students who seem to be inexplicably struggling and

failing all of their classes. According to Michelle,

> Mostly we deal with attendance issues and behavioral concerns that have reached a level
>
> of teachers generally feeling like they've tried interventions, that they know what to do,
>
> but the behaviors haven't mended; and, if anything, have gotten worse, and so they
>
> need additional support on how to help a student.

Students' financial situations at home also come up in LCMT.   Melody declared that

sometimes the team finds out that students are failing classes because they do not have supplies.

Their parents do not have the money for supplies and are not willing to go to the school for help.

Thus, sometimes teachers do not know that student is in trouble until it is potentially too late.

Melody mentioned,

> That's a huge one. We try, we've tried in the last couple of years when we notice a student
>
> is failing a class like art to contact that student to say, do you have your supplies? And if
>
> you don't have supplies, you're not going to pass art. You have to have what you need. I
>
> always start my classes by telling my kids, don't fail any classes if you don't have
>
> supplies. Come and talk to me, even if it's not my class, but not every teacher does that.
>
> Sometimes, teachers are unaware that a child does not have the materials they need; they
>
> just know that the pupil is not working.

The State of Utah has a policy in place to govern how school districts keep their districts safe, Policy 53A-11-904 G. This brief details safe school violations for which a student can be suspended or expelled. Consequently, MCPS' Student Services Office utilized this policy when writing the districts Safe School's Policy: Student Conduct and Discipline. According to the policy, violations include, "Harm to others or self, weapons, fire setting, harassment, sexual misconduct, drug/alcohol use, threats, theft, etc." (MCPS). At the April 18th meeting, there were six cases of safe school violations on the agenda ranging from assault cases to students who were already on drug contracts. Patricia expressed frustration in dealing with some of these cases declaring,

> We've had a kid on the agenda for years, who finally... who's been living out of the truck with his dad, who's been on drugs. He's been high. And finally they got him into a group home or somewhere else where he could, I don't know where he's at. I'm not privy to that information, but he's out of the school, finally. And finally getting help from a facility because he had to be, we finally had enough, [and] could get him away from dad in the truck so that he could get into a facility to get clean.

Many of the students who are involved in drug use also have problems with attendance and/or behavioral issues that impede their academic progress.

Regardless of the mitigating circumstances, Anthony reported that the main issue the team deals with currently is truancy. He said the members struggle with, "How to get kids to school, and once they're here, how to help them improve their school work." The truancy issue exacerbates many aspects of the team's work with interventions on behalf of students. For example, Roger relayed,

> If discussing a student that we're trying to get tested for Special Ed and they're non-

attenders, we find out two, three weeks in a row that we can't get the student into the

building to do the testing that's required. It can be a frustrating experience to try to get

parents and kids into the building and to try to get students help because of attendance

issues.

Of the 19 students on the team's agenda, eight exhibited issues with attendance and truancy.

Harris asked, "What do we do with students who just aren't showing up? So, that's really been a

hard one for us to deal with because there's really not a lot we can do when we're having trouble

getting parents to be the responsible members."

Most of the team members were in agreement that a lot of the issues boil down to

parental involvement and/or apathy. Anthony said with great frustration,

If parents aren't really going to say [students] need to show up to school, then as a school

we sort of run into problems; I mean, if they get here we can kind of keep track of them

and make sure they get where they need to go. But, a lot of our attendance problems are

students who just aren't getting here, that we're trying to get here, and home visits

aren't working. Truancy fines aren't working. Nothing we've tried is working. As far as

things go, we're kind of out of ideas.

Regarding attendance, schools' hands are tied. In the State of Utah, if a parent clears an absence

there is nothing the school can really do about it. With their non-attenders, frequently the parents

will excuse the absences regardless of whether they meet the criteria for an excused school

absence or not.

Some of the most frustrating issues with which the LCMT deals relate to apathy from the

parent, student, or both, which often results in truancy and/or behavioral concerns. Sheila

expressed,

You're working against sometimes not just the student, but the parents. You can look at two kids that look completely the same, but because of their backgrounds, because of their home life, they don't have anything alike between the two. They could live next door to each other, but in that one home, the parents lack skill, and that student therefore lacks skills. But in the home next to them, the parents go all out to make sure that they're exposed to things, that they have the support they have. Huge difference. . . . And, when you understand that the parents don't have any coping skills, you understand why the student doesn't have any coping skills. So it's hard. That's hard.

Members of the team frequently cited a lack of parent involvement. Some common examples include parents not returning phone calls or parents not returning emails. Frequently team members reported that these are the parents of students who, apparently, just do not seem to care about their education. Ellen said,

Some of the problems we encounter, as far as some of the at risk, it's different, I don't want to say values because that's not really a good word for it . . . different priorities. I know we had one student, bless her heart, we're trying to get her in school, trying to get her in school, trying to get her in school, but she's still not attending.

Ultimately, these challenges are not going away any time soon, which necessitates constant work for the team to design different strategies and interventions to deal with those challenges. While most of the team members know that many of their students face traumas at home and have had adverse childhood experiences which impact school learning, sometimes, as Melody so aptly put it, "It's junior high, and there are some kids who just for whatever reason, can't behave and it takes a special ability to be able to handle that kind of kid."

Multidimensional Programming

Fortunately for Elan's at-risk population, the LCMT has almost as many interventions at its fingertips as there are issues to which to apply them. Some interventions are easier than others. Michelle said that in some cases,

> It's, what's your perspective of this student? Do you know this student? I had her last semester. I, you know, you have her this semester. So do you see her more often? Because maybe we could give a heads up to next year's teachers that hey, she, she does better if all of her classes are on the first level and she never has to go upstairs because then she gets lost and hides in the bathroom or something.

In this era of technology, the team members have a fair amount of electronic information at their disposal to help with tracking students and determining interventions. They use this technology at each meeting to project the information for individual students on the screen. Members utilize a shared drive where teachers, administrators, and counselors can add students to the agenda. Shared information includes the name of the student, their grade level, their lexile, quantile, SAGE, and math inventory scores, the number of classes they are currently failing, their Citizenship grade, previous actions taken, and interventions. The electronic file also references the person who referred that student, as well as the person responsible for taking additional action, along with a deadline for that action to be completed. Elan also employs technology to remediate credit-deficient ninth grade students. Roger communicated that, "For failing classes we have a 'Base-Camp' program, a credit recovery program where students give up an elective and they can be assigned to a computer lab in the counseling office to make up credit using Grad-Point or Ingenuity."

Access to interventions has made its way into the age of technology with an application the district has designed and provides for its schools. According to Louis,

> We can search topics, different behavior or attendance or academic related issues, and it will direct us to some resources or techniques that we can implement. And so, we've been using that. We have one teacher who's on the team who is assigned to remember to check the APP because it's new enough that we forget that it's there as a resource.

The members of the team were quick to relay the diverse programs the school can use to intervene on behalf of its at-risk population. Roger added,

> We have several programs. We can assign students to 'Lunch and Learn.' We have the opportunity for students who struggle in math to have a math study hall. And, we've got double-blocking of classes for students who struggle in English. For all seventh graders, we've been double-blocking that. We've been double-blocking some of the math classes where we see a low success rate among students.

Furthermore, the school has had success with this menu of programming: "We did have, when I got here, about 85 ninth-graders out of 300 who were going on deficient of core credit. Last year that number was 21." Elan has also put together, in conjunction with the district and with the school's behavior team, a hierarchy of interventions to which teachers have access digitally and in hard copy. Anthony indicated that,

> The hierarchy lists things that are very simple to things that eventually could be a case management issue, and if case management can't handle it, then it gets moved on. We kind of hold the teachers to that and say, you know, we'll talk about in at case management, but have you done this? Have you done A, B, C, D, documented it, and then we'll act on it.

For at-risk ninth grade students, Veronica said the team's primary focus is on them being in line for graduation. Hence, a lot of the team's focus is on how it can help the students recover any credits they might be lacking, thus ensuring that pupils continue to earn credit and move forward. Since the ninth graders are getting ready to move into the high school the following year, Veronica added,

> And then obviously if they are in need of an IEP, we want to get that done as soon as possible. We want to make sure that we identify those kids and get them tested if that's what they need, make sure that they have that solidly in place before they head out.

The team is cognizant that it is the school's responsibility as a junior high, which has middle and high school students attending together, to help parents and students understand this transitioning to the high school actually happens to ninth-graders despite the fact that they are physically in the junior high school building.

Early intervention programs have the potential to mitigate the factors that place students at risk for poor outcomes. It is widely accepted that early intervention can possibly yield benefits to academic success, improved behavior, and a reduction in absenteeism among other things over the long haul. Regardless of whether the student is a seventh-grader or a ninth-grader, the interventions begin with phone calls and emails to parents. Sometimes the school sends the student resource officer or administrator to conduct a home visit, or they invite the parent and the student to come to LCMT. According to Sheila, "Sometimes just coming to LCMT and seeing everybody concerned makes a difference. We're all there and we care and we're concerned." In some cases, all it takes for a student to be successful is a schedule adjustment. Michelle said, "We've had to redo schedules or find an alternative placement

sometimes if the behaviors are severe. But still it all boils down just to helping each student be successful."

Sometimes the team gets creative with the issues with which they are confronted. Sheila said, "If it's an issue of getting up in time, we'll shorten the schedule. . . . I motivate with an, 'I'll buy you lunch; If you come for two weeks straight, I'll get you lunch or get you your favorite soda or your favorite candy.' I'll do anything." Or, sometimes the intervention simply amounts to someone taking the time to build a relationship with the student who is struggling. The LCMT places a special focus on monitoring from teachers. For instance, when a student is struggling in math, the team has math teachers monitoring that student's progress. For students whose behavior problems are getting in the way of their academic progress, the team assigns the use of academic trackers. Harris pointed out, "Each teacher will fill out did they come on time? Did they come prepared? Did they behave in class? And if they're getting all yesses on those, they get a reward. If they're getting all nos then they are subject to consequences." Melody spoke about a new program the school is piloting with their at-risk seventh grade students called "Check in, Check Out." Melody explained:

> We picked six [students]. They check in with a person at the beginning of the day and get some encouragement and 'Let's do this, LET'S DO THIS!' It gives [students] some ideas of stuff to work on. And then at the end of each class period, they come over and we mark how well they did, and we try to give them at least one positive encouragement, things that they did in class, and then they check out at the end of the day [with the] same person that they went to the beginning and discuss what they did, how they did, and what they should do tomorrow. And so it's supposed to be a positive relationship with school, but also a way to help them keep track and learn to change their behaviors and change

whatever it is we referred them for. I think that it will be huge for ninth-grade next year.

Some of the ninth-graders, they need that; they just need a person to be their cheerleader

their, 'you can do this,' their little bit of a push that's at school.

The school also has access to extra counseling. If the team notices a ninth-grader slipping

through the cracks, it has the option to refer that student to the school social worker, who might

meet with that student once a week to discuss the child's status. Patricia said with pride, "She's

kind of their school parent."

For the financial issues students face, the school has a food pantry that sometimes also

includes donations of school supplies. However, it all comes down to having the leverage to

match students to the best intervention for the best possible outcome. Michelle explained, "I

think the local case management team is a place to come together and give those students who

are not successful in some way their best shot at being successful in the education system."

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Research Question Responses

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The research questions were developed from the literature review, which examined the

various approaches schools use to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students.

The central question was designed to highlight the overall impact the LCMTs had on the

participants and how these qualities impacted their success intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth-

grade students. The sub-questions were designed to narrow the inquiry to only relevant

information about the case(s) being studied and to explore the definition(s) of the case, which

allowed the information collected from participants to highlight any possible impact of the

LCMT on at-risk students. The sub-questions were answered by using the five themes that

emerged from an analysis of the codes, which were identified while analyzing participant

responses, observations, and documents. By combining the answers to the sub-questions, a detailed response to the central questions was developed.

Central Question

The central question for my study was: How do local case management teams describe their experiences in ninth-grade intervention/ dropout prevention? Every school district has struggling students for whom graduation may seem unreachable. However, all schools have compassionate adults who can help those students. Any intervention effort or program is most successful when implemented by a team of skilled individuals who are engrained into the community and culture of the school and supported by the school district. Each of the five themes was used to answer this research question.

When asked about their willingness to participate on the LCMT, most members responded either 100% or that they were completely willing. All of the teacher members of the team are there on a voluntary basis. Patricia explained, "We got paid the first year. That was an incentive. After that we didn't, so I am willing. The people who are there are willing. There's no reason to come every single week. There are some weeks that I really don't want to go, but I have a responsibility, and I know the kids need me there, so I do it." Although Sheila described her experience on the team as subjective to various circumstances, she and all of the other members were overwhelmingly positive in their responses. Louis said of the experience, "You know, it's early in the morning, and there isn't really a perk other than that we're just trying to do what's best for kids. So that, that's my main motivation."

Their willingness does not come without frustration. Although Rebecca expressed her complete willingness, she also said there were things she would like to change. She explained,

I think we could do more. That's something I've been thinking about. The hardest part for

me is I don't see a lot of this except for the special education students, so those students

that I already have contact with.   It's really easy for me to touch base with them, or put in

place interventions, or give people calls about things. The students I don't see ever

because they're just not in any of my classes are a little bit harder. I'm willing to do that,

but it's just a little bit more of a struggle.

On the other hand, some of the members expressed the frustration they experience when

interventions just do not work. In describing her willingness to be on the team, Melody said,

Hundred percent, okay, well 98 percent. Every once in a while I get frustrated that there's

not a lot we can do for some kids; like the one that I told you [about] earlier that I put on

last year for attendance. It gets better; it gets worse; it gets better, it gets worse. I mean,

ultimately we can't say you have to be in school, which we should be able to say. You

know, when I went to school, if you missed 20 days in a year, you failed the grade. But

that doesn't happen now. And, so there is maybe that two percent that gets frustrated

with the process, that there's not enough that we can do. But most of the time I want to

help these kids. I want to do what I can. So, most of the time I would say it was more

like the hundred, but every once in a while I leave going, that was a waste of time. So,

then I'm not quite 100 percent on board until next week.

This experience is congruent with the type of discomfort on the part of the teacher Hatt (2005)

referred to as pedagogical love.

The Elan LCMT members do not feel as though they are going it alone. Referencing his

participation on the LCMT, Roger said, "It benefits me greatly. Having more people in the

building aware of the struggles with students. It makes my job as a principal much easier to have

the Local Case Management Team working on interventions to help these students."   Even when

the team cites detriments to their participation on the LCMT, they follow up with an overwhelmingly positive endorsement of the team. Veronica said,

> The only impairment I can think of is that we're locked into a meeting while students are arriving at the school and we need to probably be out and receiving them. The difficulty is when to have a meeting like this where student won't be neglected, where teachers can actually be in attendance. But, the positive to my day is that I'm not going it alone. I have this team of other people who can help me brainstorm ways to help these students. I get to address their behaviors and deal with problems and try to support them in making better decisions. So, it's nice to not feel like I'm an island or alone with the student behaviors, but that I have a team of people who can help me come up with creative solutions.

These experiences reinforce Heppen et al.'s (2018) that interventionists need an established network of supports and that schools carefully consider caseloads for interventions so the staff involved does not become overwhelmed by either the process or the outcome (Heppen et al., 2018). In describing his experience, Louis said,

> I think it keeps me aware and helps me know... It's sort of like a finger on the pulse. I deal with a certain group of kids on a regular basis and there could be kids I don't really see very often who are on LCMT, on the agenda. So it allows me a broader glimpse of what's going on in the school with different kids and faculty too.

> For the school guidance counselors, they reported that it helps them to know what is being done to help students in other areas of the building. Anthony expressed that

> In the counseling department, we deal a lot with these kids because these are at-risk kids and, whether it be behavioral or academic, we kind of have, we know them. We know

them better than we know the average student. And I think that's pretty important as we

try to do our job and making a safe place for them to be in a place of encouragement.

This position in which the school counselors are is vital in implementing MTSS programs due to

their direct service delivery (Belser et al., 2016). Michelle's experience as a direct service

provider serving on the team is also positive:

It benefits me a great deal because I'm not at my school every single day and I'm not a

classroom teacher. And, so when I hear of a student that is having emotional concerns or

struggling with truancies or anything that I can help address, I like hearing from the

perspective of people that maybe do see them on a daily basis or at least should see them

on a daily basis if they were attending class. That gives me insight that I wouldn't

otherwise have in order to meet with a student or especially as we have special education

referrals that come from either our counseling department or through a teacher. Knowing

what their concerns are can help me better approach a student that I may not even know

until it's time for me to test them.

These experiences make leaders of both the counselors and the school psychologist in MTSS,

who move fluidly between the roles of supporter, intervener, and facilitator (Ziomek-Daigle,

2016).

MCPS' implementation of MTSS using PBIS decreases referrals for special education

services in their schools with LCMT (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Interventions from LCMT

allow students who might otherwise be moved to a special education setting for either academic

difficulties in a single subject or behavioral, social, and/or emotional challenges to remain in the

general education classroom (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). Ellen described how this benefits her:

I think it helps. This year we're kind of a special situation. We have two co-department

heads for special education, so there are actually two of us on the team. I thought that

kind of balanced [things] out when some of the gen-ed teachers are screaming, that kid's

special ed! We can actually stop and be able to say, you know, no, this one isn't, or this

is what we need to do. So I feel like it helps my job in not being bombarded with a whole

bunch of testing that we don't really have data or documentation saying that they need it.

These teachers are enabled by MCPS to act as the most effectual instrument of change for the

school's at-risk population (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). Rebecca enjoys watching the change

take place, the interactions between the various members of the team, and how the entire process

informs her practice. She explained,

Being a special educator I definitely do a lot of intervention and pay attention to kid's

behavior frequently with almost all my students. It's interesting to see who's struggling

outside of that and to see what other teachers are dealing with or how they're intervening

with those students. And that's been helpful. It's nice to see teachers and talk to the

counselors, and watching them work with a lot of these students has been really

interesting. I just enjoy it personally, having a better understanding of how the school

functions, and I know what's being done for these students who are struggling.

This experience in fostering an adolescent-centered community of care has been a prize for both

the at-risk students and the teachers trying to intervene on their behalf.

Melody also experiences an impact on the number of students she has in her classroom.

She explained,

I end up with more students in a study hall with me. So they sit over at the side and do

their study hall work. Instead of being in a great big huge study hall where they're totally

ignored, I can at least every couple of weeks or so look at their grades and say, okay, why

aren't you doing this? What's going on here? So in a way, it impacts me that I end up

with more students, but that's because that's where my heart is.

This relationship Melody has developed with students increases their sense of belonging to the

school community at Elan Junior High, ultimately boosting the probability these children will

graduate (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Harris believes that despite any detriment he experiences

participating on the LCMT, as a new teacher, the experience has been invaluable:

It's a cost that's definitely made up for by my ability to gain knowledge about the issues

going on with students. It's really one of the places where I learn a lot about what's going

on in the school and start to understand why students are struggling so I can approach

them in different ways, to try and reach them. You learn a lot of good practice to see all

the ways other teachers are intervening to help students.

Sub-Question One

The first sub-question was: What factors influence LCMT's perceptions of the strategies

involved in a multidimensional intervention approach for at-risk students? All of the themes

were used to answer this question. Vested interest plays a large role in the team's perception of

the strategies they have at their disposal. Anthony discussed this interest:

Everyone on the team has vested interest. We meet every week, we talk about those kids

in the counseling department, with administration and with teachers. These kids are

actively in our heads all the time. We know the kids on the agenda.

The LCMT makes it a priority to retain individuals who share that level of interest in the success

of the students and have purged members who have hindered the process. Louis likes the current

composition of the team at Elan, yet brought up a teacher whom he requested be replaced shortly

after he joined the school's LCMT. This individual had a significant impact on the group. Veronica spoke plainly:

> He is retiring. And prior to that he was on the team forever, at least well before I came. And he was a more negative voice among the team, not just a critical thinker, and not just the devil's advocate, but sometimes just negative.

Despite the fact that the most of the team agreed with Anthony's assessment of the current vested interest, there were a few who did not. Sheila said,

> Compared to what it used to be, it's awesome. I think some of these people are passive because they don't get assignments because they're teachers. So, the choir teacher, she has a hard time figuring out where she fits in and what she can do, but if she had some buy-in… for instance, if it's a student that she has, maybe it would be a really good thing for her to be responsible for contacting all the teachers. I feel like you see a difference because nothing's ever assigned to them except to record interventions as they happen.

Knowledge of the interventions and how to administer the interventions influences their perception. Regarding the interventions, Sheila said,

> We are starting to create a more positive environment. That's the new philosophy. Positive reinforcement has a greater impact than the negative, and that's research driven. It's changing a culture. We're working on the culture. It's not an easy thing to change that approach.

Not all of the perception regarding knowledge is positive. Anthony discussed frustrations the team has in getting school staff to follow through with the strategies the LCMT has prescribed. He explained,

> One of one of our bones of contention, that sounded maybe a little strong; we have

processes that we as counselors need to address for that intervention piece. There's documentation that needs to be followed up by the faculty, and we have asked administration as long as I remember to kind of back us up a little bit as far as getting documentation back in. And, educating the faculty on what Case Management Team really does, I think in some cases there are teachers in the building that don't have a clue what we do. I think that is our, if we have a weak spot right now, [it] is that not everybody is educated to the point that they know what case management is or what it could do. Once we get it together, and we get kids on the agenda, I think we do pretty well with what we have.

Most of the individuals on the LCMT rated their efficacy at around 80% or moderate. That perception comes from the fact that they have students who have been on their agenda the entire school year. This perception is also due to the frustrations they share about getting information to the teachers outside of the LCMT. Veronica explained that when,

We haven't either moved them off or made headway [it] is frustrating. And I think that we could do better to communicate better to our school, to the faculty, to all the staff and let them know what decisions were made. Putting it passively into a shared drive does not mean anybody goes and looks at it.

Rebecca also perceived their efforts to intervene as relatively ineffective. She voiced her exasperation:

We've been talking about a certain group of students for most of the whole year with very little, in my opinion, success. So we're good at acknowledging the students and keeping tabs on them, but when it comes to actually intervening and making positive change, I think we're less effective.

Ellen's perception fell somewhere in between those of Veronica and Rebecca. She said,

> I think with some of the students we're very effective. We were just talking about this at the last local case management, how a lot of the gen-ed teachers don't understand or don't know that we're talking about certain students. I don't feel like our communication with the school as a whole is as well done as it could be.

The factor that weighs most heavily on the team members' perspective of the strategies they use in their approach is the apathy they encounter from some students. Anthony said sadly, "We still have those kids that won't do anything no matter what you do, but it's not from lack of interventions or lack of trying." This level of anti-intellectualism reflects what Stratford (2018), called the *zombification* of education (Stratford, 2018). While we know that for some students, lack of relevance or support, a disrespectful climate, and fear of failure cause these students to disengage from the classroom, with some kids it is more difficult to pinpoint the source of their apathy, and, subsequently, to treat it. Michelle agreed with Anthony's assessment:

> There are always those few cases where you just feel like you're on repeat and you do the best you can and keep going and, and listen for new ideas and hope for a fresh start with the term or semester or even a school year to help these kids be successful and then remain successful because something might work for two weeks and then it doesn't anymore.

Sub-Question Two

The second sub-question was: How did these factors influence the degree to which team members used these strategies effectively to target and personalize care in their work with at-risk students? The themes of time, knowledge, and escalating intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to success were used to answer this question. Vested interest, knowledge, and efficacy all

positively impact the degree to which the LCMT used the strategies available to them to effectively target and personalize care in their work with at-risk students. However, apathy had a significant detrimental impact.

Given that MTSS, when implemented with high fidelity, is successful in addressing the needs of 85% of the general student population and short-term, targeted, research-based interventions reach the 12-15% of students who are not benefiting from or are not responsive to its core components, Elan Junior High is performing better than average when one takes into consideration that currently 93% of their ninth-grade students move onto high school without credit deficiencies (Mellard, 2017). The other 7% require the tier that necessitates long-term care (Mellard, 2017). Therefore, the team is, as evidenced by these numbers, a bit more than "moderately effective." If one were to translate their self-ratings into a grade, they would earn a solid 'B,' however. Melody looks at their efficacy rather practically:

> If it's something that is solvable like supplies, or a student just needs a study hall or some extra encouragement at school, if it's something that we can physically do something about, we can do it completely. If it's something like attendance issues, we're not quite so good at that because that is a matter of not just getting the kids involved in coming to school, but also getting the parents to enforce that the student needs to come to school. Because a lot of times the parents are either on purpose allowing it or without realizing, allowing it.

The LCMT collectively agrees that there is currently no intervention in their grasp that effectively tackles the issue of truancy.

All of the members had anecdotes to share about this issue that seems to afflict a large proportion of its at-risk population. In rare instances, the attendance issue is relatively easy to

resolve. Harris talked about a student on their agenda who was not making it to his first class on time. The team determined that they should talk to the student's parents to find out if the child had an alarm clock. Fortunately, this simple intervention did the trick. Similarly, Melody recalled:

> I had a student a couple of years ago whose grandfather would let her stay home; her mom would say, no, you have to go to school. And then she'd go ask the grandfather, who would say, of course you can stay, darling. So, then she'd stay home. And the mom had no idea that she was missing as much school as she was. It took phone calls home and things like that. So I have to get her, the mom didn't realize that she needed to tell the grandfather back off and to let her kid to come to school. Sometimes we can have success with things like attendance.

However, many of the attendance interventions are ultimately unsuccessful.

The weekly agenda is a perpetual who's who of non-attenders. One of the students has been on the agenda virtually the entire school year for issues that stem from multiple absences. Initially, these were reported to be health-related, but the child did not have a health plan on file with the school. The absences continued, and the team reduced her schedule and put her in the school's study skills course. Unfortunately, these interventions did not resolve the attendance issues. The student expressed an interest in becoming a teaching assistant (TA) for one of her teachers, but was not willing to meet the requirements to be in the position. The team followed up with counseling visits and mentorship. The student began showing up to school only to leave at lunchtime. By December, she was deficient in core credits, so the LCMT assigned her to the Base Camp program to make up that credit and removed first and sixth periods from her schedule. By the time the April meetings rolled around, the student had stopped working and

was not progressing in credit recovery. In this case, this student's attendance is likely to prompt her education to stagnate, which, statistically is likely to lead to dropout (Vanneste et al., 2016). According to several of the team members, the district is rolling out new guidance for attendance and truancy for the 2019-2020 school year to address the chronic issues district schools are facing.

Summary

This chapter shared the results of the experiences of 11 participants from a single LCMT in MCPS in Utah. It included data that described the experiences of LCMT in ninth-grade intervention/ dropout prevention. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to describe the critical case of LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah. Face-to-face interviews, observations, an analysis of documents including publicly available information, and case and embedded-case analysis described the experiences of the LCMT in utilizing MTSS, PBIS, and multidimensional approaches to lessen the risk of dropout for their ninth-grade population. A synthesis of the information obtained from all data sources led to the development of five themes-- time, knowledge, accountability, escalating intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to success, and multidimensional intervention, which helped answer the central questions and five sub-questions of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to describe the critical case of LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah. This LCMT assisted at-risk students in their transition from junior high (ninth grade) to high school by utilizing a community of practice designed to maximize student achievement and deliver effective interventions earlier, with the goal of improved student outcomes and progress. This study provides a significant contribution to the literature on intervention programs for students considered at-risk for dropping out of high school. It includes, but is not limited to, the contribution to intervention programming that includes a multidimensional approach. This chapter includes a summary of the findings, a discussion of those findings and their implications as they relate to the relevant literature and theory, the methodological and practical implications of this study, an explanation of the study's delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

Data for this study were collected from individual interviews with 11 participants and observations of 12 participants. Participants were administrators, guidance counselors, a school psychologist, special educators, and general educators who took part in an LCMT in a suburban school district in Utah. Documents specific to the LCMT and generalized to the district, along with the school and the district websites were also reviewed to understand and enrich the description of the critical case of the Elan Junior High LCMT. Data were amassed, coded, pattern-matched and further analyzed to develop themes. The themes that were directly related to the research were time, knowledge, accountability, escalating intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to

success, and multidimensional programming. A case and embedded-case synthesis, along with an exhaustive analysis of the findings in this study, suggest implications for future research and questions that should be addressed regarding the impact of LCMTs and for utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students.

The central research question for this study asked: "How do local case management teams describe their experiences in ninth-grade intervention/dropout prevention?" After reviewing the transcripts of the individual interviews, it was evident that the participants were completely willing to take part in the LCMT, which is of particular importance since all of the teacher members of the team are there on a voluntary basis. Overall, the other members spoke positively about their experience on the LCMT. They all agreed that they are there to do what is best for kids, despite the inevitable frustrations.

Several of the members expressed their belief that there were aspects they would like to change about the LCMT. Some of the members expressed an interest in having more contact with the students for whom the team designs interventions. All of the members expressed an overwhelming desire to change how the team approaches students with attendance and/or truancy issues, and they were acutely aware that their hands are tied by what the Utah legislature dictates.

All members of the LCMT reported that one of the best parts of the experience is that they do not feel as though they are going it alone. Members of the LCMT believe that it is beneficial to their practice when there is a team of people who are aware of the struggles many students are experiencing and who are working on interventions to help those students. They also believe that the team is able to brainstorm effectively to come up with creative interventions

and solutions. Almost all of the members cite the inclusion of teacher participants as a positive part of the experience as well.

The members of the LCMT report that they feel as though they are part of an established network of supports. With the exception of the guidance counselors, they feel like their case-loads for interventions are eased by the inclusion of a cross-section of staff. For the LCMT participants who are not active in the classroom, they stated that their time on the team helped to keep them aware of students with whom they would otherwise not have a regular opportunity to interact. Those same individuals also reported that the experience provided them a wider perspective of what goes on in the school with different kids and other faculty.

The school guidance counselors and psychologist are generally pleased with the benefits of their participation on the LCMT. The school guidance counselors specifically commented that LCMT helps them to be aware of what is being done to help students in other areas of the building, which they feel is important, as they are direct service providers to a large number of the school's at-risk population. This positive view is also reflected in the school psychologist's experience on the LCMT since she is able to hear the perspectives of people who see the students with whom she interacts on a daily basis. The counselors and school psychologist experience access to insight they would not otherwise have; this helps them more to approach their work with students as supporters, interveners, and facilitators.

The special education teachers also feel the benefits of their participation in the LCMT. They believe their participation gives them the opportunity to mitigate their case-loads by educating the other members on the team about alternatives to special education when data and documentation do not warrant special education testing. The special education teachers also reported that they appreciate the knowledge they are able to gain from their participation; this

enhances and extends their practice beyond the special education classroom. They enjoy seeing how other staff members work with the students and appreciate the insight they have gained into how the school functions overall.

The general educators on the LCMT also reported the experience as positive, although they struggle a bit more both in understanding their roles and with the added responsibility. One of the most important positives they described was the opportunity their participation gave them to develop more positive relationships with the at-risk students in the building. The novice general educator sees his participation on the LCMT as a valuable learning experience that has taught him about how the school operates. It has also given him a better understanding of how to approach interventions and has added to his knowledge of best practice.

The first sub-question asked: "What factors influence LCMT's perceptions of the strategies involved in a multidimensional intervention approach for at-risk students?" All of the themes were used to answer this question. Vested interest was one of the most significant factors in the team's perceptions of the strategies they have at their disposal, which speaks to their accountability to the students. They express this component in the fact that they are in attendance every week, regardless of the lack of compensation and because they spend a great deal of their time outside the meetings thinking about the students they discuss. The LCMT is generally happy with the current composition of the team and makes it a priority to retain individuals who share a high level of interest in the success of the students. In fact, they have purged members who have hindered the process.

Those who were unhappy with some of the members of the team were not unhappy because they believe the team is not committed. Rather, they believe that some of the members, in particular the general education teachers, do not pull their weight. They feel as though those

members should be assigned additional duties, and that their participation should be less passive. However, even those members observed an increase in participation from the members from whom they want more.

Regarding the interventions themselves, for the most part, the team felt positively about their knowledge of the interventions and how to apply them. The exceptions to this would be in regard to attendance and in getting staff outside of the LCMT to follow through. Follow-through is another area that specifically mars the experience of the counselors because they believe that they and the administrators shoulder the responsibility. They are the people who often have to chase down teachers for much-needed documentation. The counselors believe that better educating the staff about what the LCMT actually does could mitigate some of this. However, despite these frustrations, they feel as though they experience success with most of the at-risk students who end up on their agenda.

Regarding how the team feels about its efficacy in administering interventions to the school's at-risk population, the team members believe they are effective in approximately 80% of the cases that they manage. Some members reported that this efficacy could be bettered by improving communication with the rest of the school about the students with whom the team is working, which interventions have been recommended, and what the expectations are for the staff members who have contact with those students. The team also expressed how frustrating and sometimes heartbreaking it is for them when the same students remain on the agenda despite multiple attempts at intervention.

However, the factor that seems to make the experience genuinely difficult for many members is the fact that for some students, even after the team has applied every intervention at its disposal, those students remain apathetic about their education. The team attributes some of

this to being unable to pinpoint the source of the students' apathy (anti-intellectualism). However, all of the members agreed that even with those students, the team remains committed to continue to try as best it can to help those children to become successful.

The second sub-question asked: "How did these factors influence the degree to which they used these strategies effectively to target and personalize care in their work with at-risk students?" The themes of time, knowledge, and escalating intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to success were used to answer this question. Vested interest, knowledge, and efficacy all positively impact the degree to which the LCMT used the strategies available to it successfully to target and personalize care in its work with at-risk students. However, apathy had a significant detrimental impact.

By all outward appearances the use of MTSS is implemented with a high rate of fidelity at Elan Junior High and in MCPS as a whole. Elan Junior High reported that it is successful in utilizing short-term, targeted, research-based interventions to reach 93% of its at-risk ninth-grade students who are then able to move on to high school without credit deficiencies. The team reported that when a student's struggle is one that is solvable or treatable, the team is highly effective in helping that student to achieve success. However, with the approximately seven percent of the at-risk ninth-grade population with whom the team has been unsuccessful and who require long-term care, the team cites attendance issues, apathy, or a combination of the two as contributing factors. The LCMT collectively agrees that although the district is rolling out new guidance for attendance and truancy, there is currently no intervention available to them that is overwhelmingly effective in addressing the issue of truancy.

Discussion

The empirical evidence from this study explains how LCMTs utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students is effective within the framework of a community of practice. This study examines an LCMT assisting at-risk students in their transition from junior high to high school. The study applies the theoretical framework of communities of practice by examining how the participants worked as a collective and leveraged their knowledge to maximize student achievement. Thus, they effectively delivered interventions earlier and met their goal of improved student outcomes and progress.

Empirical Foundations

In the United States there is an abundance of research on dropout prevention which demonstrates that the transition from middle or junior high to high school requires particular attention, since it occurs during a time of tremendous psychophysical changes. This transition is exacerbated for some because the probability of dropping out is greater for racial/ethnic minorities, students who attend urban and rural schools, students with immigration or linguistic challenges, male students, and students who misbehave at school (Longobardi et al., 2016; Peguero et al., 2016). Many of these at-risk youth are also living without a parent in the home, are in a lower socio-economic group, lack secure shelter, and have few support systems to which to turn during this transitional period of life (Flennaugh, Stein, & Carter Andrews, 2018). Consequently, approximately 17 % of youth aged 16 to 24 in the United States are disengaged from school or work, have not completed high school, and do not have a diploma, GED, and/or employment (Flennaugh et al., 2018).

The phenomenon of dropout is complicated. There are numbers of diverse factors that potentially influence the possibility a student will drop out of school before graduating from

MCPS. At Elan Junior High, this appears to be particularly true for students of Hispanic origin, those whose families are mobile, and those whose families are in a lower socio-economic group with parents who have lower occupational stations.

Although studies have typically only focused on one type of precipitating event at a time, dropping out of high school is more of a process than an event (Dupéré et al., 2015). By utilizing LCMTs in its schools, MCPS takes into account circumstances surrounding dropping out and explores ways to mitigate the various situations and stressors that impact this event. Because the LCMT at the junior high level begins to address dropout prevention in the seventh grade, this early intervention illuminates situations that emerge for students before the decision to drop out is made and takes into consideration the vulnerability students may experience leading up to failure in school (Dupéré et al., 2015).

Although historically little in the way of policy and practice regarding intervention have actually had an impact on dropout and completion rates, the staff at Elan Junior High is quickly able to identify precipitating factors, document those factors, and refer the students who encounter these obstacles along the way to LCMT for intervention. This has impacted dropout rates for MCPS (Freeman and Simonsen, 2015). Adolescents who were once without the direct encouragement of caring and competent staff now experience that boost toward academic pursuits though LCMT facilitation and intervention (Zaff, 2017).

Regardless of how Elan Junior High identifies students who are potential dropouts, those students are not viewed as a collective, and because of the level of personalization the LCMT provides, the staff is able to implement more effective and targeted interventions. Furthermore, MCPS and Elan Junior High, through their use of MTSS and PBIS, demonstrate an understanding that unfair discipline practices and high percentages of student misbehavior result

in a fraught relationship between the district, the school, and their at-risk population (Freeman &
Simonsen, 2015; Young-sik et al., 2018). This confluence of understanding potentially accounts
for increased graduation rates among MCPS students (Freeman and Simonsen, 2015). Through
evidence-based research, MCPS has analytically addressed system-level failure to identify a
multidimensional model of intervention, which acts as a significant contributing factor for
dropout prevention (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Young-silk et al., 2018).

MCPS and Elan Junior High have put into place viable strategies for identifying at-risk
students to prevent them from dropping out. Hence, early interventions can be developed and
implemented to help those students to stay in school successfully. Empirical studies, which have
developed criteria for identifying at-risk students, indicated that dropping out is a gradual
process, and there are no facets of students' lives that do not affect their ability to learn and
achieve in school (Allensworth, 2013). Student behaviors, and in particular their course
attendance, are identified by Elan Junior High's LCMT as significant triggers that can cause
students' educational development to stagnate. This, in turn, may lead to dropout (Vanneste et
al., 2016). The consistent presence of attendance and truancy issues on the LCMT agenda
confirms that they are more accurate predictors than test scores, which statistically only explain
12% of the variance in failure (Allensworth, 2013; Vanneste et al., 2016).   The success that Elan
Junior High's LCMT experiences can potentially be correlated with the fact that the students are
monitored and supported through early intervention and subsequent follow-through. This
ensures that students do not "get away with" engaging in poor academic habits before the decline
that generally occurs in the ninth grade, when good academic habits become a choice
(Allensworth, 2013).

MCPS and Elan Junior High's LCMT use an EWS designed to alert the LCMT through

procedures and instruments for the early detection of at-risk students, which enables the LCMT to implement appropriate interventions. Thus, those students stay in school (Grasso, 2009; Heppen & Bowles, 2008; Marquez-Vera, 2016). The LCMT regularly observes these specific indicators, which include the students' school performance, credit deficiency reports, and teacher and parental referrals. Also, Aspen™ ® and Encore™ ® function to provide early warning before those students increase their risk for dropping out. This systemically based early warning protocol closely monitors students to prevent the LCMT from focusing exclusively on students with obvious challenges. It also examines all potentially at-risk students (Allensworth, 2013).

Although Elan's LCMT's data-mining utilizes a multi-variable model, its Excel spreadsheet and student databases rely on the LCMT's interpretations to correlate that information to provide real-time data, which is used to monitor students continually and adjust interventions as necessary (Heppen & Bowles, 2008; Marquez-Vera, 2016). Although this system lacks the formality of the Chicago schools' EWS, known as an "on-track indicator," it is equally as effective in identifying students for intervention and support (Allensworth, 2013). Subsequently, the LCMT uses the tools available to it to establish relationships with struggling students and to monitor their attendance and grades. For those students who present behaviors that emerge in high school due to biological and/or social developments or vulnerabilities, prevention efforts in MCPS focus on assisting these students through the use of comprehensive counseling and psychology programs (Dupéré et al., 2015). While no single intervention program has been effective in the past by being reliably more successful than any other to predict dropouts among these students, the LCMT assuredly utilizes a range of more effectual gauges to move those students toward all available resources (Lovelace et al., 2017). Therefore, the LCMT can use those malleable interventions to manipulate these factors to impact outcomes for the

students (Zaff et al., 2017). Thus, while the LCMT is not able to utilize a magic bullet to account for all risk factors students may experience, the LCMT undoubtedly is able to monitor how well students are succeeding in their classes and intervene when necessary.

Since the evidence is clear that at-risk students are not all alike, it stands to reason that they and their differences would require different types of interventions in order for those students to be successful (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017). The available empirical research focused on single component, individual, or small group interventions. However, this case study supported the view that it is necessary to address multiple risk factors (Hahn et al., 2015; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). Researchers have also found that many of those accumulated risk factors are fundamentally mutable in nature, and success is directly related to intervention and school success (Longobardi, 2016). The comprehensive approach utilized by MCPS focuses on prevention, tiered intervention, improving school climate, and diminishing risk factors. It integrates intervention practices into a comprehensive, multidimensional model that offers LCMTs a menu of options for addressing those students who present as at-risk (Freeman et al., 2015; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015).

Whereas most schools and teachers feel unprepared to handle a multitude of intervention programs, Elan's LCMT-driven intervention programming does not suffer from any resulting poor implementation and/or lack of program fidelity. Due to the extensive training in which the district engages with its principals and student support teams, schools are effectively able to disseminate to the entire staff which program(s) they are executing and why (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). Furthermore, these interventions are readily adopted by the LCMTs because they are not presented as a package that needs to be implemented precisely as it is offered (Edwards et al., 2014; Vennebo & Ottesen, 2015). According to Holdsworth and Maynes

(2017), this is because, "Innovations that are developed or adapted to a specific school context are much more likely to result in long-term and sustainable positive change" (pp. 688-689).

Research from the Institute for Educational Sciences (IES) asserted that single-intervention programs cannot effectively address the dropout problem and that, "The greatest success in reducing dropout rates will be achieved where multiple approaches are adopted as part of a comprehensive strategy to increase student engagement" (IES, pp. 1-5). Researchers have acknowledged that the evidence supports the use of "multicomponent interventions, early intervention, and strategies that address the school organizational structure" (Freeman et al., 2015; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015, p. 242). This case study has extended the literature, as those researchers previously suggested, to include empirical evidence and a confirmation of the efficacy to support the use of these multidimensional interventions and programs (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017).

An MTSS serves as the framework for how the LCMTs in MCPS operate. Elan Junior High provides appropriate instruction and intervention for all students in the school in order to address problems at various levels within the building, "including whole-school, grade- or department-level, classroom, or individual student problems," which, based on Elan's success rate in moving students on to high school without credit deficiency, appears to be implemented with high fidelity (MCPS). Although the LCMT has a hand in addressing whole-school intervention and implementation, it is primarily focused on short-term intervention for the students who are not benefiting from or are not responsive to the whole-school programming and are on long-term, highly individualized interventions (Mellard, 2017).

Successful implementation of MTSS in MCPS schools is possible because they utilize the LCMT, which represents a range of talent, solicits support from the greater school community

for the model, and guides implementation. Facets of MTSS which assist the Elan LCMT to be successful in intervening on behalf of its at-risk population include (a) effectual training and coaching; (b) program alignment; (c) the utilization of data for decision making; (d) removing labels from at-risk students, and (e) changing the behavior of staff and administration (Bohanon et al., 2016). The LCMT is a direct reflection of the public health model mentioned previously, which is guided by how the learner responds to intervention and parallels a decision-making process guided by a prediction model of how those with similar symptoms previously responded to the interventions (Mellard, 2017). Furthermore, the LCMT's approach is shared, measurable, has explicitly stated goals, has an efficient and effective process for identifying and/or referring students, utilizes evidenced-based practices (EBPs), and has school- and district-level administrative support (Bohanon et al., 2016).

MCPS' implementation of MTSS uses PBIS and the LCMT as a collaborative model whereby school professionals, including administrators, counselors, school psychologists, special educators, and general educators, intervene effectively on behalf of students who need additional supports (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). This contributes to the current literature on interdisciplinary collaboration, which previously had not received much attention. The collaboration that underpins the LCMT makes knowledge a more deliverable resource among the various practitioners (Castillo et al., 2016). These collaborations build a solid argument for transitioning the effective features of MTSS into a multidimensional community of practice.

A collaboration of qualified school professionals can ease the burden of intervention when all are focused on implementing and evaluating school-wide prevention efforts and building an evidence-based community culture that turns research into practice (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). Despite some disagreement about the role of the general educators on the

LCMT, everyone on the team clearly plays a role within this community of practice as it draws

actively on their individual expertise to inform and develop an understanding of each student

(Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). The results of this study are also consistent with other literature; it

reinforces that collaboration increases the use of data to make decisions and to implement

school-wide proactive support systems that extend the school's capability to address the

intensive (and extensive) needs of individual students (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016; Freeman et al.,

2015).

The nine years of successful implementation of MTSS programs to form the basis of the

intervention programs in MCPS' schools is heavily influenced by school-based professional

development that is directed by leadership within the school community. It also addresses (a) the

basics of teaching and learning; (b) has goals that meet the needs of the students and overall

school improvement plans; (c) includes the use of a menu of effective research-based practices,

and (d) has sufficient leadership resources provided by the membership on the LCMT, all of

which enable the district to achieve systematic results (Sugai et al., 2016).

Of the single interventions examined in Chapter Two, Elan Junior High integrates several

in its operation as a community of care that utilizes MTSS with a focus on PBIS and targeting

absenteeism. Some of the evidence-based interventions it adopted from the ones examined

include mentoring, small learning communities, teacher impact and school engagement, and

personalization. When students have a relationship with a caring adult in the school community,

even an informal connection, it can increase students' sense of belonging in school, and enhances

the likelihood that a student will graduate (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). In many cases, the LCMT

will assign struggling students to either a study hall course or to a specific teacher as a TA,

where the teacher-mentor can address that student's academic needs and progress including

tutoring, homework assistance, and study and self-advocacy skills (Wilkins & Bost, 2016).

Furthermore, the teacher-mentor is responsible for communicating with students' families and

ultimately reporting back to the LCMT, which can additionally ensure that any IEP or 504

accommodations are being met in students' classes (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Although this

teacher-mentoring program is somewhat informal, the school has piloted a program called

"Check In, Check Out." This is similar in nature to the C&C mentoring program and is used at

Elan with current seventh-grade students in the hope of rolling it out for the ninth grade in the

fall.

 The "Check In, Check Out" program connects students who have been identified as at-

risk with a staff member with whom the students check in at the beginning of the day for goal-

setting and encouragement. The students check out with that adult at the end of the day to

discuss how they did that day and what goals they might set for the next day. Between those

visits, students have a tracker that they use to check in with the rest of their teachers over the

course of the day; teachers provide feedback that should include at least one positive comment to

encourage the student. "Check In, Check Out" is a research-based intervention to help students

develop a more positive relationship with school that could result in improved academic

achievement (Tsai & Kern, 2018).

 Although C&C did not impact students' relationship with school, based on Heppen et al.

(2018), Elan Junior High may see better results because: (a) beginning with the seventh-grade

year, intensive intervention begins earlier; (b) LCMT combines other types of resources and

supports to address those students' needs, and (c) mentors have the LCMT on which to rely as an

established network of support, including their ability to monitor carefully these case loads for

one-on-one interventions like "Check In, Check Out (Heppen et al., 2018). The LCMT, along

with the teachers who engage in these mentoring relationships with students, have what

Hargreaves and Fullen (2012) called *high human capital,* and what Noddings (2012) described as

an "ethic of care" (Hargreaves & Fullen, 2012; Noddings, 2012, p. 235). The examined

literature indicated a statistically significant impact between positive teacher-student

relationships on at-risk students when students are able to communicate with teachers about both

academic and personal issues during this developmental phase. What occurs at this time in

adolescents' lives that coincides with junior high may determine whether or not those students

ultimately stay enrolled in school (Longobardi et al., 2016; Zaff et al., 2017).

Moreover, the literature concluded that for youth at risk of dropping out, getting back on

track is about more than just academic and behavioral intervention; it also requires attention to

the pupils' perception of school and their engagement in extracurricular activities (Wilkins &

Bost, (Lovelace et al., 2017) 2016). Positive extracurricular interactions with coaches and other

adult mentors (such as those discussed in the case study regarding the student enrolled in the

track program that the LCMT leveraged to foster that student's adolescent sense of agency) are

supported by several empirical studies that predict a positive likelihood of graduation (Hughes,

Cao, & Kwok, 2016; Zaff et al., 2017). Furthermore, this likelihood is also increased because

the student specifically participated in an extracurricular athletics program during the

middle/junior high years, thus also increasing the probability that the student will remain

enrolled in school through the 12th grade (Zaff et al., 2017).

Although class sizes in MCPS remain large, sometimes with 40 students in a classroom,

Elan Junior High uses an advisory to create an SLC focused on improving student academic

achievement and creating a more caring environment by structuring smaller communities of

students and teachers (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014; Hazel et al., 2014; Zalensky, 2013). While

Hazel et al. (2014) pointed out that the SLC by itself is not particularly successful for focusing on individual students, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2014) found that the emphasis it places on strong student-teacher relationships has indeed shown a positive effect on student success (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014; Hazel et al., 2014). Students' interpersonal relationships with these teachers are crucial during transitional periods such as ninth grade, and "have shown that teachers [who] act as a 'secure base'—that is, being available, responsive and acceptingof students' needs—improve their students [outcomes]" (Longobardi, 2016). Ultimately, these advisories are just one piece of a larger plan that Elan Junior High uses to address its at-risk population at the Tier One level.

Although attention to students' emotional well-being remains a relatively new field of study, examination of the LCMT extends this limited research by demonstrating that by promoting students' emotional well-being through the organizational culture of the LCMT, it capitalizes on the opportunity to reach students by improving their conditions and the effects of some of the immediate causes of dropout. These include traumatic events experienced during childhood, which often have a detrimental impact on a child's ability to learn (Andersen et al., 2018; Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). The members of the LCMT reported that many of the at-risk students with whom they come in contact have experienced childhood trauma, placing them at increased risk of multiple academic concerns. MCPS and Elan's LCMT have decided to take steps to become trauma-informed and have adjusted their management, service, and delivery system to make it a school-wide undertaking (SAMHSA, 2015).

Rutledge et al. (2015) suggested the following for further research: (a) further study of the ways in which schools attend to students' social emotional needs and (b) additional focus on attending to both the academic and social components of schooling (Rutledge et al., 2015). This

study of the Elan LCMT addressed the team's predominantly successful experiences when it fostered a combination of students' social, emotional, and academic needs. It is important to note that this success was largely related to the fact that the LCMT utilizes the aforementioned "'ethic of caring' or a 'relational ethic'" to address the challenges its students are facing (Rutledge et al., 1988). Therefore, this study illuminates some of the conditions required for schools to establish the conditions necessary to link the academic and social dimensions of schooling effectively (Rutledge et al., 1988). These relationships and environments are imperative in helping to contribute to at-risk students' decision to remain in school (Mac Iver et al., 2017).

Ultimately, throughout the scholarly literature, and supported by this examination of LCMTs, in order to better the school community, it comes down to improving the classroom experience for students by creating a caring community (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013; Holdsworth & Maynes 2017). Ellerbrock & Kiefer (2014) encouraged further study of communities of care that have persisted over time like that of the LCMT, which has led an evolutionary existence for more than eight years. Though the development of personalized interventions based on individual student needs is labor intensive, LCMTs are successful in lowering the dropout rate by fostering an adolescent-centered community of care that is committed to relationships *and* academics (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017; Ellerbrock et al., 2017). The Elan LCMT also makes it abundantly clear that a community of care is a prerequisite for at-risk students to be successful. This supports Noddings (2005) assertion that, "The living other is more important than any theory" (p. xviii) and that theory is secondary to caring relationships in schools (Ellerbrock et al., 2017; Noddings, 2005).

Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) addressed the need for additional research to answer the questions: "What does care look like in a school setting?" and "How does the organization of a school affect the existence of care?" which this study on LCMTs begins to answer (Ellerbrock and Kiefer, 2013, p. 321). The LCMT as a community of care is responsive to student needs and strengthens their environment by increasing services and support opportunities even when that student's environment is overloaded with obstacles (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). MCPS and Elan Junior High recognize that teachers need to be involved in the implementation of programs and initiatives by engaging their knowledge, professional judgment, and leadership when that leadership is honed effectively. They are essential to create a community of care by providing a bridge between the school and the students, ultimately preparing them for success in high school (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014; Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). The study of the LCMT supports prior research which indicates that to create a stronger sense of community and a collective purpose within the school, leadership and responsibility need to be distributed to ensure that intervention approaches will be integrated and sustainable (Holdsworth & Maynes, 2017). Although some MCPS schools accomplish this by using grade-level PLTs in conjunction with their LCMTs, Elan Junior High does not, which may account for the difficulties they have in communicating with the rest of the school staff.

The one place where Elan Junior High consistently falls short is with targeting absenteeism. Despite early warning indicators in place, neither the school nor the district have been able to develop specific interventions that target chronic absenteeism and truancy. According to past research, a correlation between attendance and dropout rates indicated that a high rate of absenteeism is a substantial risk factor for dropout. Therefore, it is imperative that schools intervene on chronic absenteeism before ninth grade (Freeman et al., 2015; Mac Iver &

Messel, 2013). However, despite the use of an EWS, a school-wide attendance program,

personalized interventions including attendance contracts and/or a family conference with the

school, and the use of LCMT resources, several students at Elan Junior High have what seem to

be insurmountable chronic attendance issues (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). Unfortunately, schools in

Utah have their hands tied in many ways regarding attendance, sometimes due to legislative

issues involving HB 239 and often due to the fact that the state has done away with truancy

courts.

Though programs that include a focus on absenteeism, like those at Elan Junior High,

purportedly to lead to improved student behavior in the classroom, more work is needed to

combat chronic absenteeism during this critical period in a student's education (Haight et al.,

2014). Despite Freeman et al. (2015) recommending that researchers, schools, and districts need

to understand better how academics, attendance, and school dropout rates are related to each

other and to the overall school context, those who design initiatives at the state and federal level

would be wise to listen to the conclusive evidence that is seen in study after study, including this

one: Students need to be in school in order to learn, and school staff, regardless of how

committed they are to helping at-risk students, simply cannot do their jobs when students are not

there (Freeman et al., 2015).

Theoretical Foundations

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice was used to understand the

impact of LCMTs on at-risk ninth-grade students. Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory explains

how the collective relationship between knowledge, tacit or otherwise, and the individuals who

bear and extend that knowledge and engage in the development of communal learning in a

common domain of human endeavor are a community of practice that is dynamic, effective, and

productive (Wenger, 2002). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), communities of practice are structured based on three basic elements: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 2002). This case study extended the existing knowledge in this area by adding to and expanding upon the small body of existing literature on the utilization of Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory of communities of practice in contemporary schools. It provides an understanding of how LCMTs as communities of practice impact students at-risk for dropping out of high school, which will benefit schools by better preparing them to help their future at-risk ninth-grade students who might benefit from the effect LCMTs have on graduation outcomes.

At its core, Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory is a social learning theory. However, in recent history it has generally been applied by social scientists to corporate knowledge strategy to analyze organizations. Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the theory while studying apprenticeship as a learning model, where they determined that apprenticeship is a more multifarious set of social relationships. Within those relationships learning takes place customarily with journeymen and more advanced apprentices. Subsequently, the term "community of practice" referred to a community that performs as a living curriculum for the apprentice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These intervention teams are deeply rooted in Lave and Wenger's (1991) three basic elements of communities of practice: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 2002).

In the context of the LCMT, it is useful for telling meaningful stories about the human condition, which in this case relies upon finding success for students at-risk for dropout, the domain of human endeavor from which the LCMT was born. (Lave and Wenger (1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) also stated that a community of practice refers not to a group of people per se, but to the social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time (Lave & Wenger,

1991). MCPS saw a need for a community of trained experts assembled in their schools to reach

out to all at-risk students, and additionally to extend knowledge to help when a student suddenly

surfaces as at-risk (Wenger, 2002). Important to the success of at-risk students in the classroom

is the social fabric of learning the LCMT provides (Wenger, 2002). Consequently, Elan's

LCMT demonstrated that this learning does not reside with the individual expert on the team;

rather it is a collective social practice of meaning-making (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Lave and Wenger (1991) argued that communities of practice structure people's social

relationships among one another in various ways, which ultimately results in an unambiguous

connection and functionality between them. While described as a team, the LCMT is better

defined as a learning partnership focused on the domain of success for students at-risk for

dropout. Members of the LCMT engage in the same practice while working on different tasks

within the community (Farnsworth et al., 2016).

The LCMT as a community of practice has developed patterns of competency over time,

which is a reflection of its history and accountability. This was revealed throughout the

interviews with its members. Furthermore, the members of the LCMT, who are considered

specialists in their field, do not merely implement research or policies without examining the

complicated connection between research and implementation (Wenger, 2016). Instead they

take into consideration the identity each student presents as a local endeavor to be viewed from a

community perspective. Alternatively, they allow identity to be an organizing principle in the

individualized design of education for each of the at-risk students who are on the caseload.

Consequently, the LCMT does not create a dogmatic curriculum of objective knowledge that

teachers must apply rigidly in their classrooms for all students. Instead they focus on designing

learning contexts for each student that promote identity negotiation and classroom

personalization (Wenger, 2016). Elan Junior High's LCMT strives to do whatever it takes, regardless of the subsequent outcome, to ensure that students succeed by working as a community of practice to interact and engage together in informal learning processes such as "storytelling, conversation, coaching and apprenticeship" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 9). Using communities of practice to guide individual school practitioners' knowledge growth while connecting the professional identities of the practitioners to the strategy of the organization is inherent in the success of Elan's LCMT (Wenger et al., 2002).

Elan Junior High's LCMT embodies the terms community and practice implicitly, and their well-defined domain provides the LCMT a sense of common identity. These educators can change the outcome for at-risk ninth-grade students by stewarding and developing their knowledge through engaged scholarship and inquiry, which consequently legitimizes the community by affirming its purpose in intervening successfully on behalf of those students (Wenger et al., 2002). Ultimately, because the LCMT operates as a community in this framework of practice, it is able to "help students before learning difficulties grow into permanent patterns of failure" (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016, p. 59). Students with chronic absenteeism and/or truancy are the unfortunate exceptions.

Implications

This study was conducted to understand the impact of LCMTs on at-risk ninth-grade students. The goal of LCMTs is to utilize a multidimensional approach to intervention on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students. Thematic generalizations from this study were examined to determine implications of the study for future research possibilities (Yin, 2018).

Theoretical

Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice provided the theoretical framework for this research. As previously stated, Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory explains how the collective relationship between knowledge, tacit or otherwise, and the individuals who bear and extend that knowledge and engage in the development of communal learning in a common domain of human endeavor are a community of practice that is dynamic, effective, and productive (Wenger, 2002). According to Lave and Wenger (1991) communities of practice are structured based on three basic elements: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 2002). In Lave and Wenger's vision, the community of practice is most successful in stewarding knowledge when it enables its participants to take collective responsibility for managing the knowledge they need because they comprehend that if those communities are structured properly, their participants are in the best position to do this.

The broad stimulus in Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory is that the practice of a community is dynamic and involves scholarship on the part of everyone in that community. An LCMT that responded to the needs of at-risk ninth-graders was the dynamic community that informed this study. MCPS' implementation of LCMTs in its district's schools was the impetus that led to the establishment of this team of professionals to intervene on behalf of its at-risk ninth-grade students to decrease the likelihood that they will ultimately drop out of high school. My recommendation is that each school district considers the needs of its at-risk student populations and implements a community of practice similar in nature to that of the LCMT studied. Furthermore, these school districts should also keep in mind that they already possess personnel who are passionate about student success and bear the knowledge required to intervene effectively on behalf of their students to ameliorate high school dropout rates. Consequently,

that participation in the community of practice will develop a social structure that gives meaning to the district's personnel's actions as educators, regardless of their position in the building.

In addition, schools should consider adopting the following redefined learning theory of communities of practice for those working in a tiered structure of intervention. Furthermore, this additional definition would build upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of communities of practice. It would explain how the collective relationship between pedagogical differential diagnostic reasoning and the educational clinicians who communally identify either early or sudden warnings from students, process those warnings, come to an understanding of the problem, plan and implement interventions, evaluate outcomes, and reflect and learn from the process creates a dynamic, effective, and productive community of practice in the domain of heuristic intervention (Wenger, 2002).

At the center of Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory is the domain of knowledge, to which members of the community of practice commit in order to improve their expertise, collaborate with other members, and problem-solve. The common domain of human endeavor in a community of practice creates a common ground and a sense of common identity that legitimizes the community and avows its significance to participants and other stakeholders (Wenger et al., 2002). At-risk students and their families, administrators, counselors, school psychologists, special educators, teachers and all other members of the greater school community are stakeholders in the domain of intervening on behalf of students who are at risk for dropout. This domain is critical in inspiring members to contribute and participate, couriers their learning, and offers value to their actions (Wenger et al., 2002).

This study further focused on the aspect of Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory which considers the importance of community. As applied to LCMTs, this entails the activities

happening within their domain where members interact, learn from each other how to improve best practices, and build collegiality. In doing so, they develop a sense of belonging and mutual commitment (Wenger et al., 2002). My recommendation is to extend membership in the community to include not only the current composition of administrators, counselors, school psychologist, special educators, and general educators, but also definitively to include school social workers and resource officers when possible. Furthermore, I recommend that schools examine or reexamine the teacher membership in the community and to move away from volunteer members who, although they may have good intentions, may be there merely as rubberneckers and do not add value in this formal pseudo-administrative role.

Instead, I recommend they invite teacher members who have emerged from the teacher ranks as individuals who are unafraid to take the initiative to address problems or institute new programming, who have influence among their peers, and command respect by virtue of their expertise and practice. According to Danielson (2007), teaching is a flat profession, as opposed to other professions, wherein as individuals gain experience, they have the opportunity to move up in the ranks (Danielson, 2007). However, in teaching, veteran teacher's responsibilities are essentially the same as the neophyte's. Becoming an administrator need not be the only avenue for teachers who want to exercise greater influence in their schools and who desire greater responsibility. When schools utilize effective teacher-leaders, they harness their important skills, values, and dispositions, which will contribute to the community and will mobilize others to improve teaching and learning systematically. Finally, as budgets permit, districts may want to incentivize these master teachers similarly to the way that schools use incentives in PBIS programs to motivate students. It encourages buy-in from those teachers, nurtures the fidelity of the program, and ensures that those teachers are fairly compensated for the additional duties they

perform outside of their contracted time. However, there is some danger to incentivizing

teachers in this role; the school runs the risk of inadvertently recruiting volunteer members who

are merely there for the boost in pay and not because they want to improve outcomes for

students.

Lastly, this study focused on the aspect of Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory which

considers the importance of practice. In the LCMT, practice is where members leverage their

knowledge and strategize to handle problems and strengthen the domain of intervening on behalf

of at-risk students. For example, members of the LCMT in this stage are all committed to

strategizing and analyzing which of the available interventions will most effectively address each

student's individual needs. In this aspect of communities of practice, members of the LCMT

also brainstorm creative approaches to intervention that are informed by member perspective,

while also targeting the overall team objective: Successful intervention.

This study of LCMTs that utilize a multidimensional approach to intervene on behalf of

at-risk ninth-grade students extends Lave and Wegner's (1991) theory of communities of

practice by decisively rediscovering its place in learning theory, whereas in recent history it has

been applied predominately by social scientists to corporate knowledge for the purpose of

analyzing corporate strategy. However, the origin of communities of practice was in learning

theory. Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the theory while studying apprenticeship as a

learning model wherein they determined that apprenticeship is a more multifarious set of social

relationships, and the community of practice referred acts as a living curriculum (Lave and

Wenger, 1991). Redefined in learning theory for those working in a tiered structure of

intervention, Lave and Wenger's (1991) supposition would explain how the collective

relationship between pedagogical differential diagnostic reasoning and the educational clinicians

who communally identify early warnings from students process those warnings to come to an understanding of the problem, plan and implement interventions, evaluate outcomes, and reflect and learn from the process creates a dynamic, effective, and productive community of practice in the domain of heuristic intervention (Wenger, 2002). However, both in the corporate model and in the case of LCMTs, they are still deeply rooted in Lave and Wenger's (1991) three basic elements of communities of practice: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 2002).

Empirical

There are a number of qualitative studies on intervention that focus on single-intervention programs instituted on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students despite the fact that those programs do not meet with significant success in decreasing dropout rates. The main aim in this study was to describe an LCMT utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students in a large suburban school district, MCPS, in Utah. This was accomplished directly by observing and interviewing the Elan Junior High LCMT as the members went about their work as a community of practice, which utilized a multidimensional program to intervene successfully on behalf of at-risk students.

Technology and easier access to student data over time have allowed many schools across the United State to develop EWS that identify students for intervention and support (Allensworth, 2013). Generally, these EWS utilize a combination of the following indicators to alert schools to incoming ninth-graders who are at-risk: Background characteristics (eighth grade test scores, mobility, age beyond grade level, race, economic status, and gender); on-track in ninth grade (alone); GPA; course failures, and absences (Allensworth, 2013). However, it needs to be monitored. The vast majority of schools using EWS alone reported that school administrators were primarily responsible for monitoring the system, followed by guidance

counselors, and only a small percentage of schools used student support teams to monitor the early warning system (USDE, 2016). Only 44% of schools reported checking the data weekly, with some checking less than once a month, and six percent reporting that they had no idea how often the system was checked (USDE, 2016). Many of those schools, which checked the EWS either less than once a month or did not know how often it was checked, cited limited resources or staff as the reason(s) behind these inconsistencies (USDE, 2016). Although most users of EWS were generally positive about using them, not all feedback on EWS was positive. Many schools were frustrated with how their EWS was linked to continuing to track interventions and monitor progress. EWS is only one facet of an effective school intervention program.

Career academies can be an effectual way to engage students since they are established in real world contexts that frame academic classes and provide opportunities for field-based studies (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). This type of education potentially prepares students for direct entry into the labor force as a skilled worker; thus, it attracts students who favor non-academic learning (Andersen et al., 2018, p. 2). However, while studies show that these academies are ineffectual on their own, vocational programs, which were once seen as a lesser form of schooling, can be rebranded as a promising intervention to ameliorate the dropout problem and help students, who might otherwise not graduate, to get decent jobs.

In 2019 the NDPC updated its literature on dropout prevention and identified 15 effective strategies that have the most positive impact on reducing school dropout. Although they can be implemented as stand-alone strategies, according to the NDPC, positive outcomes are far more likely when school districts develop programs that utilize most or all of these strategies (NDPC, 2019). Since the reasons for dropping out of school are not one-dimensional, it stands to reason the solutions are multidimensional.

One of the 15 strategies includes mentoring. When students have a relationship with a caring adult in the school community, even an informal connection, it can increase students' sense of belonging in school and strengthen the likelihood that a student will graduate (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). A mentoring program that received some level of endorsement from WWC was the Check & Connect (C&C) program. However, mentoring programs on their own have no more success than any of the other single-intervention programs including, but not limited to, small class sizes, trauma informed instruction, and programs that promote school engagement. While these strategies appear to be ineffective independently, they can work together effectively and frequently overlap as demonstrated by the success that the LCMT studied here had in intervening on behalf of its at-risk students.

Practical

There are several practical implications of this study which deserve further consideration. The first major practical implication of the present research is that there is a necessity for an intermediate level or tier between the teachers in the classroom and those designing and implementing interventions. For example, MCPS indicates the necessity for grade-level PLTs that act as this intermediate step. In this examination of Elan Junior High's LCMT, evidence of such a PLT was not uncovered. This might explain some of the difficulties the team had in communicating with the rest of the staff. The PLT would also contribute to teacher buy-in. It would be a logical step in the MTSS and PBIS frameworks the district and school utilize for providing appropriate instruction and intervention for all students in the school. Others could derive a similar implication from these findings.

Schools in the district that do make use of the transitional grade-level PLT structure implement it similarly to the LCMT. The PLTs also utilize an agenda that is premised on a

credit-deficient report, and they then determine interventions that the PLT can put into place to help students reach success. More often than not, that involves assigning each student a mentor chosen from among the teachers who feel as though they either have a relationship with the student or could develop one.

The second practical implication regards the fact that school districts need to discard the notion that a one-size-fits-all approach that may include an expensive pre-packaged intervention program will prevent dropout. Instead, they should focus their attention on targeting interventions that address each student's individual risk factors. For example, while some students may benefit most from mentoring, other students may instead benefit from more clinical interventions (Dougherty & Sharkey, 2017; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; IES, 2017). This implication follows from the unique finding that the work is carried out by school professionals using inter-disciplinary collaboration as an effective approach to getting involved on behalf of students who need additional supports and to provide interventions throughout the tiers of MTSS (Avant & Swerdlik, 2016). This collaboration was successful in making these involvements a more deliverable resource among the various practitioners on the LCMT. The LCMT was able to provide more effectual front-line intervention programs to the at-risk students in their care. These findings point to a specific set of capabilities identified within this inter-disciplinary, multidimensional approach. The following provides a visual model of what this could look like for schools:
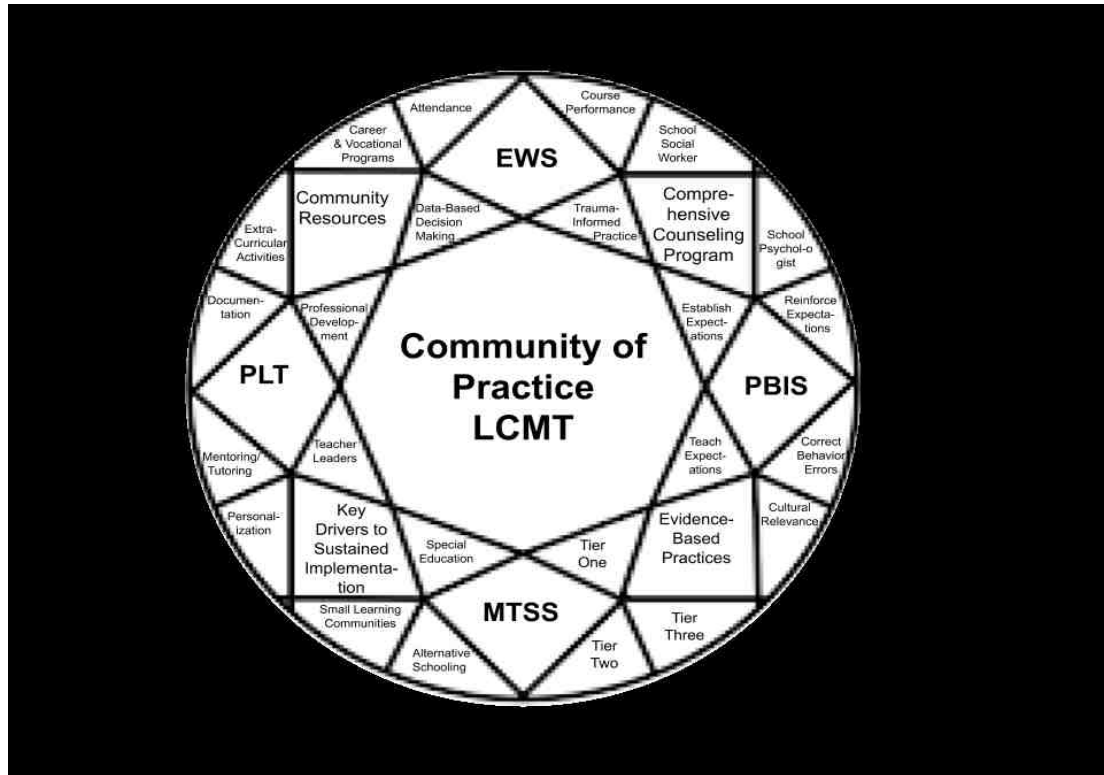
Figure 3. Multidimensional Approach to Intervention (Top View)

This implication distinguishes the work of the Elan Junior High LCMT from that of other administratively driven intervention teams.

School districts need to utilize the expertise they have at their fingertips in the way of professional, trained experts who should be assembled to reach out to all at-risk students and to extend their knowledge, tacit or otherwise, to help when a student suddenly surfaces as at-risk (Wenger, 2002). A third implication stems from the identification of teacher efficacy as teacher-leaders in their role on the LCMT. It is vital that administration, and even counselors, nurture and support the development of teacher leadership as part of these interdisciplinary teams. Findings suggest that because teacher leaders must enlist colleagues to support the work of the LCMT and convince those colleagues of the imperative nature of their endeavors, teacher-leaders must be respected for their ability to collaborate with others. This is a hallmark of school leadership and is crucial to achieving gains in student learning. According to Danielson (2007),

working with one's colleagues is "profoundly different from working with students, and the skills that teachers learn in their preparation programs do not necessarily prepare them to extend their leadership beyond their own classrooms" (p. 15). Furthermore, this level of leadership requires proficiency in curriculum planning, assessment design, intervention, behavior, and data analysis, which are skills not typically taught in teacher preparation programs. Although teachers have a rightful and necessary place in these communities of practice, when extending membership on the LCMT, administrators must discern between inviting teacher-members who take the initiative to address problems and/or to institute new programming and who are influential and respected within the school community and teachers who are merely willing volunteers.

In implementing such a model, there are several steps I would suggest that schools take in an effort to ensure that the multidimensional approach will be effective and maintain fidelity in the long term as MCPS' program has done. First and foremost, I would suggest that districts seek out this particular model in an effort to observe or shadow the procedural elements involved in order to ensure that it is an appropriate intervention approach for their own districts. Second, I suggest that districts utilize the materials that MCPS has made available through their web site (many of which are included in the appendix of this dissertation) in order to relay a structure to each school's administration that is manageable for implementation. These documents can be modified as implementation goes on to be tailored to fit the particular needs of the district/schools.

Furthermore, while the financial output for such a program is minimal because districts will capitalize on the talent they already have available, districts will need to redirect some of their budgets for professional development into training for the individuals involved in each

school's LCMT. This training can begin with school administrators, who can, in turn, relay that training to the staff until the LCMTs are well-established, at which time the trainings might shift to more nuanced trainings designed around what scholarly research has deemed the most effective interventions available. Finally, districts would need to ensure program fidelity by utilizing a method for evaluation both by the teams themselves and from the district. MCPS utilizes a rubric (Appendix N) that LCMTs use to evaluate their effectiveness periodically, which serves as a reminder to incorporate all of the tenants of a community of practice and multidimensional programming. The Tiered Supports Coordinators for MCPS are working on a revision of this document that will be available to the schools in the fall of 2019.

A fourth implication stems from the evident lack of resiliency among today's students. The question arises as to whether schools are what is described in the medical field as "treating the symptoms, but not the cause." Many students experience significant disadvantages or even neglect, yet somehow are still able to succeed in school and in later life. Many of the aforementioned intervention strategies target the negative impact of stressful or traumatic experiences. While there is value to intervening after the event, there is also value in exploring *pre*-interventions to shield students against challenges before they occur. Rotter (1972) brought to light the duality of an internal or external locus of control, in which people believe they have power over events in their lives and that they can influence events and their outcomes. Someone with an *external locus of control* blames outside forces for everything. People who are considered resilient have an internal locus of control and perceive stressful events as an opportunity to learn and grow; they are able to operate under the premise that what happens is not traumatic unless they perceive or experience it that way.

While LCMTs operate with an academic internal locus of control within their community, they often treat children who have learned to blame instead of learning and growing from their experiences. In examining the meeting minutes and listening to anecdotes from many members of the LCMT, it is quite clear that schools are experiencing a crisis of prevention and treatment, and perhaps need to add treating the cause to the myriad of interventions used for pupils who require amelioration of their symptoms. The following graphic represents how this would add to the multifaceted nature of intervention presented in figure 4.
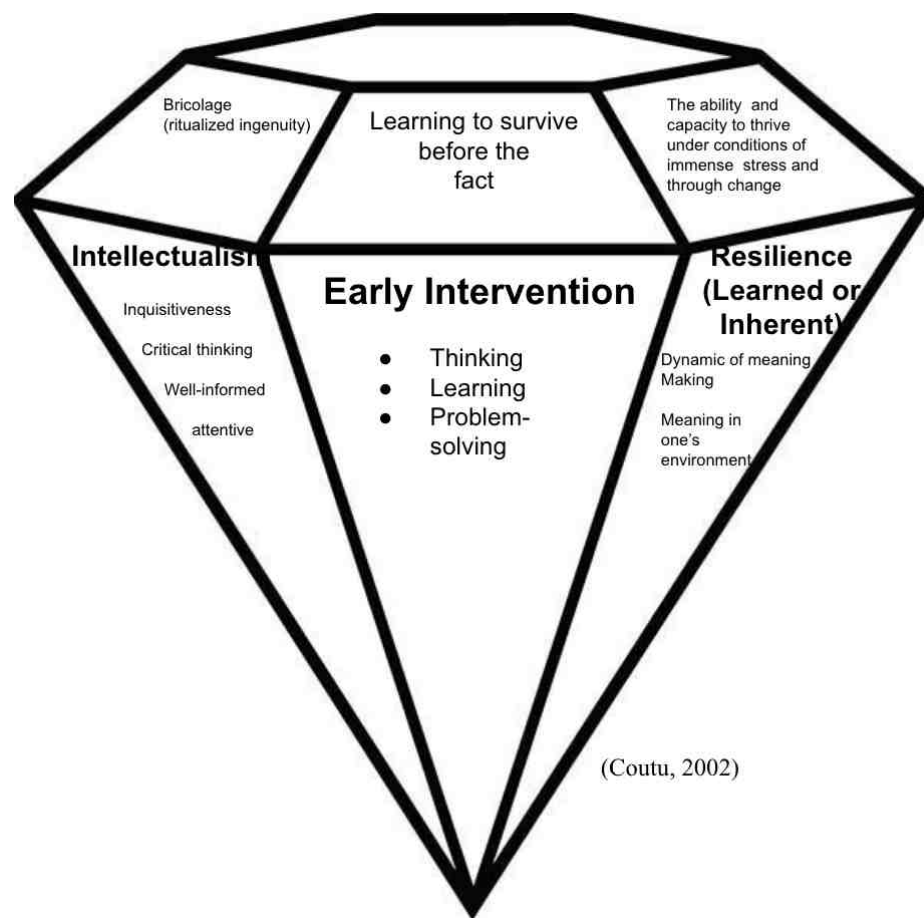
Figure 4. Pre-intervention Model

Finally, school districts across the country need to eliminate what Wilkins and Bost (2016) called, "Killer policies that contribute to the problem of dropout, such as punitive and inflexible attendance and disciplinary procedures that exclude students from school" (p. 268).

The State of Utah has conducted the suggested evaluation of policies such as punitive and inflexible attendance and disciplinary procedures that exclude students from school, and have instead developed their Safe Schools policies that include a mandate for the use of PBIS in all Utah public schools (Wilkins & Bost, 2016). However, attendance policies may have become too flexible in the State of Utah. Therefore, attendance remains a virtually unsolvable concern that these policies do not improve.

Delimitations and Limitations

In this study, the delimitations are purposeful decisions the researcher made to limit or define the boundaries of the study. Delimitations of this study included the selection of a single case study as opposed to other forms of qualitative research: Since the purpose of the study was to understand the impact of LCMTs on at-risk ninth-grade students, this was the better choice (Yin, 2018). In this qualitative single embedded case study, the researcher chose one LCMT based on its success in intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students and the significant decrease in the number of that junior high's students who leave credit-deficient for high school. Another delimitation of this study was the purposeful decision to define the participants as those who those have worked a minimum of one school semester on an LCMT and who participated in the same LCMT location during that time period. This allowed the researcher to determine the impact of an established community of practice in which the members consistently participated (Creswell, 2013). Those delimitations helped define both the scope and focus of the study.

There were several limitations in this study that were beyond the control of the researcher. The first limitation was that the public school system in Mooseland County initially declined the researcher access to their LCMTs. Upon appeal, MCPS granted access, but to only a single LCMT at a single site. After this conditional approval was received, the researcher was

unable to conduct cross-case analysis between multiple LCMTs throughout the district and was limited to studying an LCMT whose administration was willing to communicate its amenability to the district.

The second limitation was that the selected school represented a very different student population than that of the rest of the district. Approximately 32% of the student population qualifies for FARM at the site studied. However, across the district, there are schools that experience numbers as high as 58% and as low as 5% (daviscountyutah.gov). It is worth noting, though, that Elan Jr. High was only .5% higher than the average of the high and low, rendering this limitation statistically insignificant.

The third limitation of this study was that the participants on this particular LCMT were narrowed by ethnicity, which did not reflect the student population it serves. Finally, the fourth limitation of the study was the geographical location of the study. After an exhaustive search of school districts across the country, the researcher was only able to locate LCMTs in the state of Utah, and more specifically, in MCPS.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the study's findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, there are multiple recommendations and directions for future research. Several areas of qualitative research might be pursued later on to judge the effectiveness of the multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students. It would be useful to know if participants on LCMTs throughout the district share the experience of their colleagues on the Elan Junior High LCMT. A qualitative study on school culture in those schools that utilize the LCMT model as prescribed by the district might be useful to determine if the LCMT has a broad impact at the Tier One level with their student populations. Conversely, it would be beneficial to

describe the experiences of students who were cared for by an LCMT. Ultimately, not all districts across the United States use the junior high model. Thus, it would be prudent to conduct a qualitative study on the benefits of this type of programming (focused on eighth grade) to determine if it can achieve the same level of success.

A significant question left unanswered is how schools can alter the trajectory of students who encounter stressors and/or experience increased vulnerability, which are circumstances that might lead them to drop out. A qualitative study on the impact of social-emotional learning that is inclusive of programming which encourages resiliency and growth mindset is warranted. Such a study would determine if this type of programming could better help students to navigate the process children go through to acquire knowledge, attitudes, skills, and grit through the lens of their experience, expression, self-regulation of emotions, and their ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others, set and achieve constructive goals, feel and demonstrate empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make conscientious choices (Rutledge et al., 2015, Thiers, 2018). Furthermore, there is a great deal of opportunity for research to investigate whether training teachers on how they can support social-emotional learning that will bolster both the emotional needs of students and their academic success (Zaff et al., 2017).

A quantitative study on the impact of LCMTs on high school graduation rates might indicate specifically whether or not students who were on the LCMT caseload were ultimately able to graduate after four years of high school. Lastly, a quantitative study comparing the success of districts/schools of similar socio-economic composition versus some of the reportedly more effective single intervention programs could further validate the value of the multidimensional intervention model that utilizes communities of practice. LCMTs are used

exclusively in MCPS, which is limited by geography and socio-economic status. In contrast to the experience of the Elan Junior High LCMT, schools with decidedly different geographical and socio-economic circumstances might not experience the same level of success due to exacerbating circumstances.

Summary

The purpose of this study research was to describe an LCMT's experiences utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth-grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah. A goal of this multidimensional approach is to prepare students to graduate from high school successfully. Another goal was to provide districts with a model for this multidimensional approach that is a relatively cost-free alternative to expensive packaged intervention programs.

About nine years ago, MCPS recognized that sometimes when there is a concern about a child, the process can be overwhelming and ambiguous. Therefore, the district designed a clear model for staff within the schools and for parents so that all stakeholders now know to whom to talk; who is part of the process if there is a concern; how long the process takes, and what exactly the process entails. Consequently, MCPS has a system in place where teachers, staff members, administration, parents and any other concerned stakeholders can refer students directly to a school's LCMT. The LCMT is in place to identify at-risk students earlier and to examine school-wide areas of concern. Elan Junior High School's mission focuses on putting students first, which is a reflection of the school district's vision. The district believes that through collaboration with parents, school, and the community, students can grow into active citizens who are well-rounded and career-ready.

Elan Junior High School serves approximately 953 students, while the district junior

highs serve anywhere from approximately 700-1200 students depending on the school and

geographical location. The LCMT at Elan has 11 members including administrators, guidance

counselors, school psychologist, special education teachers, and general education teachers. This

number and composition varies across the district and is dependent upon each individual

administration's preferences. Administrator turnover in MCPS is a regular occurrence, and by

all outward appearances is not dissimilar to the model under which the military operates whereby

personnel change duty stations every three to five years to develop their skills in variable

environments. This ensures that neither the units nor the personnel at these duty stations become

stagnant under the same leadership and plan. For these administrators, sometimes the changes

take place as part of a domino effect when a principal retires or is promoted to the district level

offices. Thus, shifts take place in the schools to ensure that candidates are chosen to fill

positions based on which best fits the school's needs. Alternately, changes also occur to freshen

up the leadership and school climate.

The administrators I spoke with cite preventing stagnation and keeping things fresh as a

reason for frequent teacher turnover on LCMTs. While there is some validity to this model,

there needs to be the assurance that this turnover in teacher members is not merely for the sake of

a random model of turnover. If a school is utilizing its most effective teacher leadership and

interventionists, it may not be necessary to make those changes in an effort, often to, as Louis

cited, "Give someone else a chance." However, this teacher turnover could potentially increase

the communication between the LCMT and staff by virtue of the staff overall having more

familiarity with the team and what it does for at-risk students in the building. Though, I reiterate

that the breakdown in communication and accountability between the LCMT and staff could be

easily alleviated by following the district's model and utilizing the PLT at each grade level to disseminate information to and from the LCMT.

Another goal MCPS has set is to make students and families aware that there is a collaborative and supportive environment at their school. LCMTs are communities of practice that include well-defined roles and responsibilities, consistently use data to identify problems and evaluate the impact of interventions and solutions, provide clear definition of who is going to carry out actions and provide follow-up support to teachers (MCPS). The teams represent all of the critical educational personnel, including administrators, counselors, a school psychologist, and both special and general education teachers. The team comes together with the collective goal of being able to have rich conversations that truly get to the heart of what is happening with their at-risk students.

MCPS' LCMTs are focused on the process of problem-solving. They operate under the premise that in order for any evidence-based practice to have the desired effect on students, it must be implemented with fidelity. It must be effective, appropriate, and sustainable over time. The educational science behind MCPS' LCMTs relies heavily on ongoing research from the National Implementation Research Network, specifically on the key drivers to the sustained implementation they have identified. According to the school district's web page for parents, the LCMT can be compared to a multidisciplinary critical care team in the medical profession where all practitioners work together on particularly challenging cases. School administrators want to be able to connect parents and families with the most impactful person in the building for their student.

Implementation of the LCMT includes a written plan for the school to ensure the effectiveness of the school's LCMT. The plan includes: Specific roles and responsibilities for

team members; expectations for interventions and data collection, and a step-by-step process for referral. MTSS establish a framework for supplying appropriate instruction and intervention for all students in the school. They utilize tiers that represent increasing intensity and individualization in the instruction and intervention the school provides, which applies to both academics and behavior. When these tiers of intervention are applied to behavior, it is through the framework of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). All Utah schools or Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are mandated by law (Rule R277-609) to utilize the pillars of PBIS when designing their intervention programs: Standards for LEA Discipline Plans and Emergency Safety Interventions must have a plan in place to implement practices in line with these pillars in an effort to foster good behavior and provide appropriate supports for students who misbehave.

LCMTs use data to sustain effective implementation practices to ensure the fidelity of implementation data and outcome data; these are used to make adaptations to practices. Components of effective use of data include: Regular and systematic review; use of systems and procedures to change practices based on data, and frequent reports to staff and stakeholders (McIntosh, et al., 2009). This use of data begins when a parent or teacher refers a student to LCMT. They are asked to gather data and information to support the team's decision-making.

Time management is a challenge for the entire school community, including the LCMT. For school administrators, time management is problematic because as the demands on schools, and teachers in particular, increase, finding time to address those demands increases exponentially. As volunteer members, teachers on the LCMT do not receive a stipend for the time they spend in these meetings. The time spent is outside of their contract hours, and the teachers are faced with putting something else on the back burner each time they attend.

Teachers reported that the time they spent in LCMT meetings took away from the time they would otherwise have spent with students or on planning. However, regardless of the time that it takes away, they reported that the time was spent well. The team agreed that this is a commitment they make because they are all dedicated to working toward bettering the outcomes for their at-risk students. During the LCMT meetings, time is also a commodity. The team only has approximately 45 minutes each week to get through its agenda, which often includes a lengthy list of students. Teachers who are not members of the LCMT, but are tasked with implementing the LCMT's student intervention plans, also have issues with the demands made on their time because of the multiple roles teachers are required to take on in the classroom. Furthermore, there are legislative demands, all of which result in the teachers reporting that they are overloaded.

All of the members of the LCMT share the burden of accountability. Previously, the responsibility for a student or concern brought to the committee was automatically the responsibility of the counselors to resolve. However, the administration has spread out the responsibility. Each LCMT distributes the responsibility differently; nonetheless, when the team involves teachers, the team looks to the various teachers for their professional expertise in discussions of students. The foundation of the team's accountability is built on showing up, participating, keeping things confidential, knowing policy, understanding FERPA, taking on the intervention strategy, completing it, seeing it through, and reporting back to the team. The LCMT experiences some difficulty with maintaining its accountability to the rest of the school community. This does not go unobserved by the administration, which is not blind to this shortcoming in accountability.

Furthermore, all of the team members, regardless of how long they have been in education, clearly have expertise to contribute to the LCMT. The administrators see their extensive background in teaching and knowledge of best practice and leadership skills as assets they contribute to the team. However, other members see their contributions differently. The counselors see it as their duty to share their knowledge of FERPA and other laws under which they are required to operate. The psychologist sees her contribution to the knowledge pool in the roles of interventionist and behaviorist, while the special educators see themselves as strong contributors to the team since they work with behavior issues daily. As special educators they can help the rest of the team determine how accommodations can be implemented more effectively in the classroom. Some of the newer teachers see their creativity in the classroom as their greatest asset to the team. Alternately, some teachers see their relationship with students as their qualification for being on the team.

One thing upon which everyone can agree is that more pupils are struggling in school now than at any other time in history, and that intrinsic and extrinsic barriers to success are escalating. The district, along with every member of the LCMT, is concerned with helping children. Some of the intrinsic issues the team sees involve issues related to special education or mental health. The LCMT has seen an increase in cases of students whose academic difficulties appear to stem from mental health concerns including anxiety and depression as some of the top concerns. However, the number of extrinsic barriers to learning also continues to mount. Some of the issues with which the team contends include: attendance, multiple failing grades, homelessness, unaccompanied minors, abuse, suspected neglect, poverty, medical and dental care, lack of clothing and/or food, and safe school violations. The state of Utah's policy 53A-11-

904 G also includes "harm to others or self, weapons, fire setting, harassment, sexual misconduct, drug/alcohol use, threats, theft, etc." (MCPS).

In addition, there are students who seem to be struggling inexplicably and failing all of their classes. Regardless of the mitigating circumstances, the main issue with which the team deals currently is truancy. In many cases, this is due to lack of parental involvement and/or apathy on the part of the student. Regarding attendance, schools' hands are tied; in the State of Utah if a parent clears an absence, there is nothing the school can really do about it.

Fortunately for Elan's at-risk population, the LCMT has almost as many interventions at its fingertips as there are issues to which to apply them. Some interventions are easier than others. In this era of technology, the team has a fair amount of electronic information available to help with tracking students and determining interventions. Furthermore, access to interventions has made its way into the age of technology with an application the district has designed and which it provides for its schools. The school picks and chooses from a variety of different interventions including, but not limited to "Lunch and Learn," "Check in, Check Out," a math study hall, double-blocking of classes for students who struggle in English and/or math, and early intervention for seventh graders. For at-risk ninth-grade students, their primary focus is on these students being in line for graduation. Therefore, a lot of the team's focus is on how it can help those students to recover any credit that they might be lacking and to ensure that they continue to earn credit and move forward.

Elan has also put together, in conjunction with the district and with the school's behavior team, a hierarchy of interventions to which all of the teachers have access both digitally and in hard copy. The school also has access to extra counseling including a school social worker who will call students in to meet at least once a week to discuss where they are academically, among

other things. For the financial issues students face, the school has a food pantry that sometimes also includes donations of school supplies. However, it all comes down to having the leeway to match students to the best intervention for the best possible outcome. The school has seen success with this menu of programming. When the current principal arrived at Elan Junior High, there were approximately 85 ninth-graders out of 300 who were going on deficient-of-core credit; for the 2017-2018 school year that number was 21.

The results of this study highlight two specific take-aways from its examination of the impact of LCMTs on at-risk ninth-grade students. First, regardless of whether schools specifically adopt the LCMT model, they should consider adopting the redefined learning theory of communities of practice for those working in a tiered structure of intervention, which would build upon Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory to explain how the collective relationship between pedagogical differential diagnostic reasoning and the educational clinicians who communally identify early warnings from students, process those warnings, come to an understanding of the problem, plan and implement interventions, evaluate outcomes, and reflect and learn from the process creates a dynamic, effective, and productive community of practice in the domain of heuristic intervention (Wenger, 2002).

Second, as part of successful multidimensional programming, schools must consider the evident lack of resiliency among today's students. While this study acknowledges the value to intervening after the event, there is also value in exploring *pre*-interventions. Schools spend a great deal of time and resources treating children who have learned to blame instead of learning to grow. Schools are experiencing a crisis of prevention and treatment and perhaps need to add treating the cause to the myriad of interventions used before pupils require treatment for their symptoms. In fact, this approach may even have implications in resolving the chronic issues of

attendance. There is no question that there are many reasons why students miss school, many of which involve blaming struggles in the classroom, bullying, or challenges at home, and that blame game only results in their trajectory toward graduation becoming riddled with even more barriers to success. This research suggests the practical solution of building resiliency in children before they become students who have factors to blame and subsequently require intervention for those symptoms.

According to Lukianoff and Haidt (2018), America has taught an entire generation expertise in the habits of anxious, depressed, fragile, and vulnerable people, who never question the underlying culture in which this symptom of anti-intellectualism seems to thrive. Tom Nichols (2017), an academic specialist on international affairs, pointed out a similar conclusion regarding individual accountability: "There is plenty of blame to go around for the parlous state of the role of expertise in American life. . . . Experts themselves, as well as educators, journalists, corporate entertainment media, and others have all played their part. In the end, however, there is only one group of people who must bear the ultimate responsibility for this current state of affairs, and only they can change any of it: The citizens" (p. 118)

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 14, 2019

Jessica Anne Grant IRB Exemption 3717.031419: Local Case Management Teams: A Case Study of a Whole Approach to Ninth Grade Intervention for Students at Risk for High School Dropout

Dear Jessica Anne Grant,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office

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APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Local Case Management Teams: A Case Study of a Whole Approach to Ninth Grade Intervention for
Students at Risk for High School Dropout
Jessica A. Grant
Liberty University
School of Graduate Education

You are invited to be in a research study of local case management teams who have intervened on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a building administrator, guidance counselor, registrar, special educator, study skills teacher, school psychologist, or school resource officer who is a member of a Local Case Management Team. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jessica Grant, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to understand the impact of Local Case Management Teams on at-risk ninth grade students. **The research questions I am hoping to answer are:**

- How do local case management teams describe their experiences in ninth grade intervention/dropout prevention?
- What factors influence Local Case Management Team's perceptions of the strategies involved in a multidimensional intervention approach for at-risk students?
- How did these factors influence the degree to which they used these strategies to effectively target and personalize care in their work with at-risk students?

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Meet with the researcher for an approximately one-hour interview. Notes will be taken and the interview will be audio recorded for researcher review at a later time.

2. Be observed during your regularly scheduled one-hour Local Case Management Team meeting(s).

3. Review the interview transcript for accuracy and to determine if you would like to add, delete, or clarify any of your responses. This may take up to thirty minutes.

While this will not require any effort or time on your part, the researcher will be obtaining meeting minutes from the registrar and documents related to the local case management team from the district office.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, no more than you would encounter in everyday life. The only potential risk to participants is a breach of confidentiality if the data is lost or stolen.
Benefits of Participation: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include possible assistance to education in general, specifically in regards to intervention programs for students considered at-risk for dropping out of high school. This includes, but is not limited to, the contribution to intervention programming that includes a multidimensional approach.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject.

- Participants and study sites will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Paper data will be stored in locked storage areas, while any electronic data will be stored in a password locked computer. Per federal regulations, data will be retained for three years upon completion of the study. After three years, all identifiable data will be destroyed either by shredding of paper documents or by deletion of electronic media.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Verbal recordings of the interviews will only be made available to the researcher and a paid professional transcriptionist, who will sign a confidentiality agreement. These recordings will be held in a locked storage area until they are downloaded into a password protected private computer. These recordings and written transcriptions, will assist the researcher in reviewing the interview material discussed. Once the research is concluded, all recordings and transcriptions will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then permanently erased.
- All information shared with the researcher will remain completely confidential.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Davis School District. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Jessica Grant. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 973-349-6887/jgrant22@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's dissertation committee chair, Dr. Russell Yocum, at ryocum@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall Suite 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____ Signature of
Participant   Date

_____ Signature of
Investigator   Date

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]
[Title]
[Company]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]
[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Graduate Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction. The purpose of my research is to describe Local Case Management Teams (LCMT) utilizing a multidimensional approach to intervening on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students in a large suburban school district in Utah. The research seeks to determine how local case management teams describe their experiences in ninth grade intervention/dropout prevention. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are 18 years of age or older, have worked to intervene on behalf of at-risk ninth grade students as part of a Local Case Management Team, are a building administrator, guidance counselor, registrar, special educator, study skills teacher, school psychologist, and/or school resource officer, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual participant interview, participate in an observation(s) of the LCMT meeting(s), and participate in a review of the interview transcript. It should take approximately 1 hour for you to complete the interview listed, while the observation should have no time impact on your regular day. The review of the interview transcript may take up to thirty minutes. While this will not require any effort or time on your part, the researcher will be obtaining meeting minutes from the registrar and documents related to the LCMT from the district office. Your name and other information will be requested as part of your participation in this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, complete and return the consent document and I will contact you to schedule an interview.

The consent document is attached to this email and contains additional information about my research. Please review and electronically sign the consent document if you would like to take part in the study.

Sincerely,

Jessica Grant

Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University School of Graduate Education

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Before the interview, all participants will:

- Return a signed copy of the consent letter or sign a consent letter.

- Be reminded that the interview will be audio recorded.

- Be reassured of anonymity during the study and when the results are published.

- Be informed that they can discontinue the interview or study at any time.

The following questions will be asked of each participant.

Background Questions

Interviewer Introduction: *The first series of questions are going to ask you about how you came to be where they are now. I would like you to think about your schooling as well as how your career began.*

1. Tell me a little about your background.

2. How long have you been with Mooseland County public school system?

3. What is your position with the district?

4. What prompted did you to want to be a _____?

5. What does your own education look like thus far in your life?

6. Tell me a little about your favorite teachers growing up.

7. Why were they your favorite?

8. What about the teachers you learned a lot from, but were not necessarily your favorite?

   (What did they do that helped you learn?)

LCMT Underlying Characteristics

Interviewer Script: *Now, I want you to think about the defining features of your local case management team, including your relationship with the other members, the focus of the team, how it functions, and what capabilities the team produces.*

9. Describe for me, in your own words, what Local Case Management Team is to you?

10. Why do you think a team like this was developed?

11. Describe a typical Local Case Management Team Meeting.

12. What kinds of issues can you expect to see during a Local Case Management Team meeting?

13. Define accountability within the Local Case Management Team?

14. What is the balance between giving and taking among members?

LCMT Membership

Interviewer Script: *Now, I want you to think about the characteristics the LCMT possesses that make the LCMT a community and a shared practice.*

15. What are the areas of common interest you share with the other team members on the LCMT?

16. Describe the social environment of the LCMT.

17. Describe the relationship(s) you share with the other LCMT members?

18. How does being on the LCMT benefit or impair your daily work in addressing at-risk students?

19. To what degree are you a willing participant in the LCMT?

20. Describe how you share your work-related knowledge to build up the LCMT.

21. Describe the communication among staff members on the LCMT?

22. How would you describe the role and qualities the facilitator of the LCMT brings to the team?

LCMT Domain

Interviewer Script: *Now, I want you to think about your contributions to the LCMT.*

23. What are the issues that the LCMT generally encounters with the school's at-risk population?

24. What are some of the strategies the LCMT uses to address its at-risk ninth grade population?

25. What function does the LCMT perform in implementing those strategies?

26. In your opinion, how does the LCMT express its interest in the success of the school's at-risk ninth grade students? To each other? To the rest of the school community?

27. In your opinion, can you please describe how the team either does or does not possess the relevant experience to intervene on behalf of the school's at-risk population?

28. How diverse in character or content are the members of the LCMT? Can you please explain your response?

Actions

Interviewer Script: *Finally, I want you to think about how the LCMT utilizes their knowledge, implements it, leverages it, and spreads it throughout the school community.*

29. How effective or ineffective do you believe the LCMT is at solving problems?

30. Describe how the LCMT shares information with one another.

31. What does the LCMT do if there is a need for additional expertise in addressing the problems they encounter with the at-risk ninth grade students they encounter?

APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Field Notes: Local Case Management Teams

Setting:

Observer:

Role of Observer:

Time:

Length of Observation:

Characteristic	Definition	Description	Reflection
Community of Practice	Group of individuals who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.		
Underlying Characteristics	A domain, a community, and a practice that is shared across participants.		
Membership and Domain	Identity is defined by a shared domain of interest in current practices. Membership implies a commitment to the domain, and a shared competence that		

	distinguishes members from others. Members are practitioners who develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems, etc.		
Community	Members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from one another. The focus is on improvement of the domain. Traditionally, Communities of Practice have been physically located in one place and have expanded over time.		
Actions	Problem-solve, share information, seek and foster expertise, visit others, map knowledge.		

APPENDIX F: VALIDATION STATEMENT

Validation Statement

Thank you for having participated in my study regarding local case management teams as a whole approach to ninth grade intervention. This statement serves to share with you the results of my study. Additionally, this statement serves to increase the trustworthiness of our research by allowing you the opportunity to review transcripts of your participation in a one-on-one interview (if applicable) and to indicate your level of agreement with our conclusions based on the research.

Thank you again for your time.

1. If you participated in a one-on-one interview session as part of this research, a transcription of your interview will be provided to you with this statement. Please take a moment to review the transcript. You can make a note of any corrections you feel necessary on the margins of the transcript. If you participated in the one-on- one interview, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement. If you did not participate in the one-on-one interview, please skip to question number two (2) below.

The transcript accurately reflects my interview with the researcher.

☐ Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2. The next several statements will summarize the themes I identified during data analysis. For each statement, please indicate your level of agreement with the validity of the identified theme. You may also use the space provided to make any notes about each identified theme.

TIME: Time management can be a challenge for the entire school community. For school administrators, time management is problematic because as the demands on schools, and teachers in particular, increase, finding time to address those demands increases exponentially.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

My notes about the theme, if any:

_____
_____
_____

ACCOUNTABILITY: The additional work that comes with interventions does not fall solely on the shoulders of any one individual within the school community. The foundation of the team is built on being accountable for showing up, participating, keeping things confidential, knowing policy, understanding FERPA, taking on the intervention strategy, completing it, seeing it through, and reporting back to the team. In addition to the some confusion surrounding the teachers' roles on the team, the LCMT's experiences some difficulty with maintaining their accountability to the rest of the school community.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

My notes about the theme, if any:

_____
_____
_____

KNOWLEDGE: Not only does each of the members have the requisite bachelor's degrees required for their respective positions in the school district, between the members interviewed, they share the collective knowledge of 11 master's degrees and one Ed.D. However, the team's contributions go beyond their educational backgrounds. Knowledge, expertise, and experience are important; however having people who know kids personally, and are professional and collegial are important as well. All of the members of the team, regardless of how long they've been in education, clearly have expertise to contribute to the LCMT.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

My notes about the theme, if any:

_____
_____
_____

ESCALATING INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC BARRIERS TO SUCCESS: One thing everyone can agree on is that we have more kids struggling in school than at any other time in history. The district and every member of the LCMT, are concerned with helping kids. Some of the intrinsic issues the team sees involve issues related to special education or mental health. However, the number of extrinsic barriers to learning also continues to mount. The team deals with lack of attendance, apathy, multiple failing grades, drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol, homelessness, unaccompanied minor, suspected abuse, suspected neglect, medical care, dental care, clothing, food, sexting, and finances. Some of the most difficult issues to address are attendance and apathy. Then there are the students who seem to be inexplicably struggling and failing all of their classes.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

My notes about the theme, if any:

_____
_____
_____

MULTIDIMENSIONAL PROGRAMMING: Fortunately for Elan's at-risk population, the LCMT has almost as many interventions at their fingertips as there are issues to apply them to, which are all rooted in MTSS and PBIS.

Some interventions are easier than others. In this era of technology, the team has quite a bit of it at their disposal to help with tracking students and determining interventions. There are many different programs the school can use to intervene on behalf of its at-risk population. In conjunction with the district and with the schools behavior team, there is a hierarchy of interventions that all of the teachers have access to both digitally and in hard copy. Sometimes the team gets creative with the issues they are confronted with. Furthermore, sometimes the intervention simply amounts to someone taking the time to build a relationship with the student who is struggling. The LCMT places a special focus on monitoring from teachers.

I agree that this theme is a sensible conclusion considering my knowledge of the research topic.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

My notes about the theme, if any:

_____
_____
_____

APPENDIX G: PROBLEM SOLVING

Question	Purpose	Guiding Questions
What is the problem?	To define the problem as the measurable difference between the desired outcome and the actual behavior or performance.	• What is the desired outcome? • What is the actual performance? • What is the difference between the two? • Is there more than one problem (determine highest priority)? • Is the problem at a school wide, grade, whole class, small group, subgroup, or individual level?
Why is it happening?	To gather relevant information in the domains of instruction, curriculum, environment and the learner(s) through the use of reviews, interviews, observations and tests to determine contributing factors to the problem.	• Have we collected data about variables that are educationally relevant and alterable?
What should be done?	To select and implement a system support or an intervention that is focused on what to teach, how best to teach it, and how to monitor progress.	• What is the simplest thing we can do that has the greatest impact?
Did it work?	To determine the effectiveness of implemented system supports or interventions and make appropriate educational decisions.	• Was the system support or intervention successful? • Does the plan require more time and monitoring or modification? • Was the system support or intervention implemented with fidelity? • Was the outcome met according to set criteria? • Do we have the resources to sustain these supports? • Do we need to go back to previous steps? • Celebrate progress!

APPENDIX H: DISTRICT MTSS

Level 1	Teacher	**Teacher - Student Process:** 1. Establish Expectations/Rules/Outcome 2. Explicitly Teach 3. Reinforce 4. Correct Try multiple interventions for a minimum of 4 weeks • Collect and track interventions and effect. • If data indicates no progress, move to level 2.	**Checklist:** 1. Teacher-Student Conference (Enter in Encore) 2. Teacher-Parent Conference (Enter in Encore) 3. Teacher-Counselor Conference
Level 2	Counselor	**Counselor – Teacher – Student Process:** 1. Gather data from initial teacher 2. Review previous interventions 3. Review academic data 4. Contact other teachers on student's schedule, gather data 5. Meet with student and gather data 6. Contact parent and gather applicable data 7. Review data with initial teacher Try multiple interventions for a minimum of 4 weeks • Collect and track interventions and effect. • If data indicates no progress, move to level 3.	**Checklist:** 1. Counselor -Student Conference (Enter in Encore) 2. Counselor - Parent Conference (Enter in Encore) 3. Counselor – Teacher – Student - Parent Conference 4. Counselor – Admin Conference
Level 3	Admin	**Admin - Student Process:** 1. Gather data from counselor 2. Meet with student and review interventions 3. Contact parent and review interventions 4. Review data with applicable teacher(s) and counselor Try multiple interventions for a minimum of 4 weeks • Collect and track interventions and effect. • If data indicates no progress, move to level 4.	**Checklist:** 1. Admin -Student Conference (Enter in Encore) 2. Admin - Parent Conference (Enter in Encore) 3. Admin – Counselor – Student - Parent Conference 4. Counselor – Admin Refer to LCMT
Level 4	LCMT	**LCMT Process:** 1. Counselor/Admin presents student 2. Review progress monitoring data 3. Discuss additional services/resources 4. Determine next steps/interventions/recommendations 5. Collect and track interventions and effect (report in future meeting). LCMT determines length of intervention. If data indicates no progress, consider Special Ed referral, 504, or district referral. District LCMT recourses if needed.	**Checklist:** 1. LCMT Initial Review (Enter in Encore) 2. LCMT Update Report (Enter in Encore) 3. Admin/Counselor contact parent with update (Enter in Encore) 4. Admin Refer to SPED, DCMT

Step 1	Counselor and School Administrator meet to review referral/request: • Parent may be contacted • Review student data • Initial intake • Document in Encore
Step 2	Intervention Intake Meeting – All teachers for the student meet with counselor and administrator: • This meeting should take about 15 minutes and will be scheduled on early-out Fridays • An email invite will be sent to teachers. Teachers will be asked to review notes, assessments, and interventions prior to the meeting. • The At-Risk Intervention Documentation form will be used to record notes (counselor or admin will keep notes). • Each teacher will briefly report interventions and concerns related to student (1-2 minutes per teacher). Teachers could email additional information to counselor/admin after. • Admin/counselor admins documents in Encore
Step 3	Admin, counselor, and special education teacher will review teacher reports and other data to determine if: • No interventions are needed (resources will be given to parent and student) • Uniform interventions should be attempted by all teachers for a length of time • A 504 should be implemented (parent, student, counselor meet with admin – LCMT approves) • An IEP should be implemented (referred to LCMT) • Document in Encore
Step 4	The student is presented in LCMT for guidelines and approval: • Determine assessment and timeframe • Set timeline for report by SPED • Document in Encore

APPENDIX I: LOCAL CASE MANAGEMENT REFERRAL FORM

Local Case Management Form

Date: _____ Student: _____ Teacher: _____

REASON FOR REFERRAL:

Areas of Concern/Difficulty (please circle all areas of concern)

Academic	Behavior	Attendance	Speech	Language
Family Support	Comprehension	Motivation	Fine Motor	Gross Motor
Articulation (stutter/ lisp)	Oral Language	Memory	Task Completion	Organization
Following Directions	Change in Mood	Aggression	Social Skills	Activity Level
Other:				

ACADEMIC SKILLS

Rate the concerns you have about this student for each skill. 1 = Far Below Basic; 2 = Below Basic; 3 = Basic 4; = Proficient; 5 = Advanced	
___ Basic Reading	___ Reading Comp.
___ Written Expression	___ Spelling
___ Homework	___ Organizational Skills
___ Math Calculation	___ Math Problem Solving
___ Following Oral Directions	___ Following Written Directions

Specific behaviors impeding academic progress:

_____

_____

INTERVENTIONS
Please list interventions that have been implemented.

Date	Issue	Intervention	Result	Parent contacted?	Outcome
				Y / N	
				Y / N	

APPENDIX J: AT RISK DOCUMENTATION

At Risk Documentation
Please make sure all interventions are added into Encore

Interventions will be picked up on:
_____

Student Name: _____   **Teacher:** _____

Subject Taught: _____   **Current Grade:** _____ (attach a sample of student work)

What is your area(s) of concern? (mark all that apply)

○ **Academic** (math, reading, writing)

○ **Articulation or Language** (grammar, vocabulary)

○ **Behavior** (on-task, talk-outs, following directions, task completion)

Student Comparison Data (Required)
List two assessments or assignments that you have done in class below. Place the target students score in the first box and the class average on the assessment or assignment in the last box.

Assignment/Task	Student Score	Class Average		Assignment/Task	Student Score	Class Average

Level One Interventions (complete all that apply)

Intervention	Date	Effective		Intervention	Date	Effective
Student Contract		Y N		Seating Change		Y N
Contact Parent/Conference		Y N		Shortened Assignments		Y N
Visual Examples		Y N		Meet with the Counselor		Y N
Classroom Exit Tickets		Y N		Good Peer Support		Y N

Level Two Interventions

ACADEMIC - Support During School (2 or more Level 2 Academic Interventions below required for referral)

	Start Date	How Often	Effective	Results
Small Re-teaching Groups			Y N	
One-on-One Re-teaching			Y N	
Frequent Checks for Understanding			Y N	
Tests/Assignments Read Aloud			Y N	
One-on-One Flashcard Material Review			Y N	
Frequent Vocabulary or Facts Review			Y N	
			Y N	

At-Risk Student Referral

Student Name: _____   **Date:** _____

Student # _____   **DOB:** _____   **Student Grade:** _____

Parent/Guardians notified of concern on: _____   **By:** _____

Primary language of student: _____

Primary language of home: _____

Data Information Required

Has this student ever received special education?   Y   N   If Yes, when _____

Has this student ever received 504 services?   Y   N   If Yes, when _____

Has this student ever received ELL Services?   Y   N   If Yes, when _____

Date of vision screening: _____   Pass   Fail   Action: _____

Date of hearing screening: _____   Pass   Fail   Action: _____

Has the student received any of the following support classes?

Read 180   O No O Yes If Yes, when: _____   Grade Received: _____

English Support Class   O No O Yes If Yes, when: _____   Grade Received: _____

Math Support Class   O No O Yes If Yes, when: _____   Grade Received: _____

Study Skills/Study Hall   O No O Yes If Yes, when: _____   Grade Received: _____

Please print and attach the following data before submitting for review

O Student grade report   O Student SAGE results

O Student attendance report   O Student discipline report

Level Two Interventions Continued

BEHAVIOR - Support During School

1. Have you directly taught and practiced all classroom procedures individually with the student

   that relates to their misbehavior? _____

(2 or more Level 2 Behavior Interventions below required for referral)

Intervention	Start Date	How Often	Effective	Results
Modified Assignments			Y N	
On Task/Zero Noise Cards with Rewards			Y N	
Increase Reward/Positive Reinforcement			Y N	
Check-in & Check-out With Teacher			Y N	
Sit in Alternate Classroom to Complete Work			Y N	
Redirect and Demonstrate Correct Behavior			Y N	
Student Tracker			Y N	
In Class Break			Y N	
Schedule Change			Y N	
			Y N	
			Y N	

Please list what strengths the student has and what concerns or weakness they may have in the spaces provided below.

Strengths:

_____

_____

_____
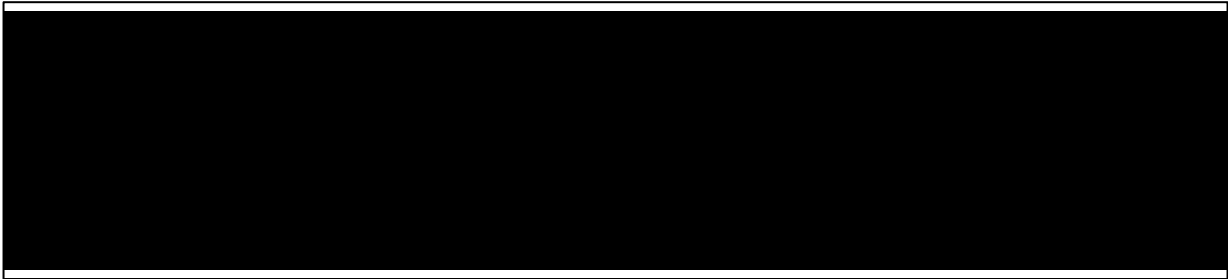
_____

Weakness/Concerns:

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX K: CODES

1. academics A, G, P, S, E, O, D
2. access to resources A, G, P, E, D
3. accountability A, G, P, S, E, D
4. adverse childhood experiences A, G, P, E, D
5. agenda A, G, P, S, E, O, D
6. apathy A, G, E, O
7. attendance A, G, P, S, E, O, D
8. behavior A, G, P, S, E, O, D
9. brainstorm A, G, P, S, E, O
10. caring A, G, P, S, E, O
11. collegiality A, G, P, S, E, O
12. confidentiality A, G, E, D
13. contracts A, G, P, S, E, O, D
14. creativity G, P, S, E
15. data A, G, P, E, O, D
16. deadlines A, G, P, S, E, O, D
17. diagnostic testing A, G, P, S, E, O, D
18. district-based programs A, G, P, S, E, O, D
19. documentation A, G, P, E, O, D
20. early intervention A, G, E, O, D
21. education A, G, P, S, E
22. equity A, G, D
23. experience A, G, P, E, O
24. expertise A, G, P, S, E, O
25. failure A, G, P, S, E, O, D
26. finances A, G, E, O, D
27. focused A, G, P, O
28. follow-through A, G, P, E
29. home life A, G, E, O
30. improvement A, G, P, S, E, O
31. knowledge A, G, P, E, O
32. knows students A, G, S, E, O
33. laws A, G, D
34. leadership A, G, P, S, E, O, D
35. legislature A, G, E, D

36. low-level P, S, E, O
37. medical/dental issues A, G, E, D
38. mental health A, G, P, E, O, D
39. mentoring A, G, P, S, E, O, D
40. MTSS A, G, P, S, E, O, D
41. outside resources A, G, P, E, O, D
42. overwhelmed teachers A, G, E
43. paperwork A, G, P, S, E, O, D
44. parent contact A, G, S, E, O, D
45. parents A, G, P, S, E, O, D
46. PBIS A, G, S, E, D
47. personalization A, G, P, S, E, O, D
48. perspective A, G, P, S, E, O
49. planning G, S, E
50. policy A, G, S, E, O, D
51. policy A, G, S, E, O, D
52. professional A, G, P, E, O, D
53. representation A, G, P, S, E, O, D
54. representation A, G, P, S, E, O, D
55. responsibilities A, G, P, S, E, O, D
56. role A, G, P, S, E, O, D
57. Safe School violations A, G, E, O, D
58. schedule A, G, P, S, E, O
59. school social worker A, P, E
60. school-based programs A, G, P, S, E, O, D
61. special education A, G, P, S, E, O, D
62. struggling A, G, P, S, E, O, D
63. tasks A, G, P, S, E, O, D
64. technology A, G, P, S, E, O, D
65. time A, G, E, O
66. time-keeping A, G, P, S, E, O, D
67. Trauma Informed A, G, P, E, D
68. volunteer A, G, E, D

APPENDIX L: THEME DEVELOPMENT

THEMES	CODES
TIME	agenda, deadlines, overwhelmed teachers, volunteer, schedule, paperwork, time-keeper, tasks, planning
KNOWLEDGE	experience, creativity, collegiality, education, resources, expertise, knows students, improvement, solutions, brainstorm, perspective, representation, laws, policy, data,
ACCOUNTABILITY	responsibilities, leadership, represent, professional, focused, follow-through, caring, role, legislature, policy, confidentiality, documentation
ESCALATING INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC BARRIERS TO SUCCESS	attendance, parents, behavior, mental health, Safe School violations, academics, struggling, home life, hunger, finances, apathy, failure, low-level, unaccompanied minor, medical/dental issues, equity, adverse childhood experiences
MULTIDIMENSIONAL PROGRAMMING	technology, school-based programs, district-based programs, mentoring, study hall, interventions, outside resources, special education, MTSS, PBIS, early intervention, Trauma Informed, trackers, diagnostic testing, parent contact, contracts, school social worker, personalization

APPENDIX M: ENUMERATION TABLE

Open-Codes	Enumeration of open-code appearance across data sets	Themes
Agenda	48	Time
Deadlines	7	
Overwhelmed Teachers	9	
Volunteer	6	
Schedule	39	
Paperwork	7	
Time-keeper	7	
Planning	7	
Experience	39	Knowledge
Creativity	6	
Collegiality	6	
Education	30	
Resources	19	
Expertise	8	
Knows Students	10	
Improvement	8	
Solutions	14	
Brainstorm	6	
Perspective	12	
Representation	28	
Laws/Policies	9	
Data	30	
Responsibilities	19	Accountability
Leadership	10	
Professional	18	
Focused	29	
Follow-through	34	
Caring	37	
Role	16	
Legislature/Policy	12	
Confidentiality	12	
Documentation	14	
Attendance	101	Escalating Intrinsic and Extrinsic Barriers to Success
Parents	71	
Behavior	73	
Mental Health	12	
Safe School Violations	9	
Academics	27	
Struggling	41	
Home Life	36	

Hunger	9	
Finances	10	
Apathy	29	
Failure	23	
Low-level	52	
Unaccompanied Minor	7	
Medical/Dental Issues	8	
Equity	16	
Adverse Childhood Experiences	13	
Technology	90	
School-Based Programs	24	
District-Based Programs	14	
Mentoring	14	Multidimensional Programming
Study Hall	13	
Interventions	112	
Outside Resources	19	
Special Education	68	
MTSS	12	
PBIS	17	
Early Intervention	12	
Trauma Informed	26	
Trackers	16	
Diagnostic Testing	43	
Parent Contact	23	
Contracts	8	
School Social Worker	19	
Personalization	11	

APPENDIX N: LCMT SELF-ASSESSMENT FORM

Local Case Management Team Self-Assessment

School_____   Date completed_____   Overall score_____/22

The LCMT Self-Assessment is intended to guide the team in evaluating their practices regarding 11 key indicators of effective Local Case Management Teams. For each indicator, the team should score their team/school a 2 (fully in place), 1 (partially in place), or 0 (not in place), considering the descriptions for each score. The team should then identify 2-3 action items for improvement.

Indicator	2	1	0
Members	Team includes appropriate representation including administrator, grade/department representation, special education teacher, counselor/school psychologist, parent/student input (age appropriate), and other appropriate individuals (attendance secretary, instructional coach, etc.) and attendance is at least 80%	At least half but not all positions are represented on team and/or members attend less than 80% of meetings	Less than half of positions are represented.
Frequency	Team meets weekly	Team meets at least 2x/month	Team meets less than 2x/month
Structure	Roles are defined including facilitator, minute-taker (using agenda), and time-keeper. Process for student referral and follow-up is clearly defined and communicated	Some but not all roles defined or process for referral or follow-up not used consistently	Roles not defined and/or no process defined for referral or follow-up
Interventions	Team can provide evidence of use of proactive and responsive evidence-based interventions in behavior (Least-Restrictive Behavior Interventions manual) and academic interventions	Team can provide evidence of use of evidence-based interventions in academics or behavior but not both	Team cannot provide evidence of use of evidence-based interventions in academics or behavior

Data	Team uses screening data (e.g., early warning system, DIBELS, ENCORE, office discipline referrals) to identify struggling students, fidelity data to measure implementation, and outcome data to measure impact of interventions for students	Team uses screening, fidelity, and outcome data inconsistently	Team does not use data to identify students or measure implementation and/or impact of interventions
School Policies	School adheres to state, district, and school policies to implement preventative practices in academics and behavior (Positive Behavior Supports) *and* makes adjustments and accommodations for students where appropriate	School adheres to state (e.g., legislative rule 277-609), district, and school policies to implement preventative practices in academics and behavior (positive behavior supports)	School has policies that conflict with district or state policies around academic and behavior supports, or policies are not implemented appropriately
Discipline	Team has well-defined plan for documenting and responding to discipline referrals that is consistently used and communicated to all staff	Team has well-defined plan for discipline referrals but no evidence of it being used consistently (across all grade-levels or departments) or communicated to all staff	Team does not have well-defined plan for discipline referrals
Academic Intervention	Team has well-defined plan for documenting and responding to academic referrals that is consistently used and communicated to all staff (e.g., credit recover for secondary, identified tier 2 interventions)	Team has well-defined plan for academic referrals but no evidence of it being used consistently (across all grade-levels or departments) or communicated to all staff	Team does not have well-defined plan for academic referrals
Documentation	Team uses consistent process for documenting discipline decisions, interventions, attendance, and citizenship in ENCORE	Team is inconsistent in documenting data or does not document in at least two but not all areas listed in ENCORE	Team documents less than two areas listed in ENCORE

Follow Up	Team uses consistent process for staff to report back on intervention implementation and student response to intervention (i.e., who will do what by when and how will intervention fidelity and outcomes be measured)	Team has process for follow up that address fidelity or outcomes but not both	Team does not have consistent process for follow up on identified interventions
Resources	School team and all faculty can identify available school, district, and community resources and how to access them (e.g., student and family resources, community programs, school-wide incentive programs, Least Restrictive Behavior Interventions manual)	School has access to resources but not all team members and/or faculty are aware of how to access them	School team can't identify school, district, or community resources

Considering your scores, identify 2-3 list action items (who will do what by when) to address areas of needed improvement

Action item 1:_____

Action item 2:_____

Action item 3:_____

APPENDIX O: FIGURE 1. AUTHOR PERMISSION

Re: Copyright Permission

From: Jolie Daigle <jdaigle@uga.edu>
Sent: Wednesday, July 17, 2019 10:32:18 AM
To: Grant, Jessica <jgrant22@liberty.edu>
Subject: Re: Copyright Permission

Yes, I spoke with the co-authors and you have our permission.

On Tue, Jul 16, 2019 at 7:42 PM Grant, Jessica <jgrant22@liberty.edu> wrote:

[External Sender]

> Dear Dr. Daigle,
>
> I am inquiring about the possibility of using your Venn diagram from the article below in the forwarded email for use in my dissertation soon to published for Liberty University. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.
>
> Respectfully,
>
> Jessica Grant

Ziomek-Daigle, J., Goodman-Scott, E., Cavin, J., & Donohue, P. (2016). Integrating a multi-tiered system of supports with comprehensive school counseling programs. *The Professional Counselor, 6*(3), 2202-232. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.15241/jzd.6.3.220

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