

A STUDY TO DETERMINE THE PRACTICES OF
HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS WHO
EFFECTIVELY FOSTER CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN HIGH
SCHOOLS.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to discover the ways that central office and school level leaders initiate and advance a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools. The conceptual framework for this study was built from a synthesis of literature related to professional learning and leadership for continuous improvement. Relying heavily on the five dimensions of professional learning communities advanced by Shirley Hord (2004), multiple descriptive research methods were used to investigate the leadership practices and development processes that resulted in a learning culture in two high schools. A survey (Oliver, Hipp, & Huffman, 2003) was given to all licensed staff in order to assess the perceptions about the leadership practices and development processes. Interviews were conducted with administrator and teacher leaders. Documents that archived the aspects of the development process also were sought and used in the data analysis.

Findings revealed the following development strategies were employed by leaders in both school districts and high schools: (1) defining a reason for change, (2) aligning resources to the mission and vision, (3) engaging in shared decision-making that is accepted and practiced by all, (4) offering high quality professional development, (5) supporting and respecting teacher leaders, (6) creating structures for accountability and reflection, and (7) designating leaders to provide accurate and purposeful data on which to base instructional decisions. Each high school was able to create a culture of continuous professional learning by implementing these seven dimensions at critical periods during their journey. Further, a three-stage framework became apparent during

data analysis that provides a chronological description of how the two high schools journeyed to create a culture of continuous improvement and professional learning. Specific implications for practice, policy and research are offered in the concluding sections of this thesis.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Public schools across America are increasingly becoming the target of education reform. Many of these reform efforts have been directed at public high schools. The federal government has been centrally involved in attempting to increase student achievement by creating the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002. This legislation has increased pressure on public schools as the 2014 deadline for having every student working at grade level is drawing near. Recently, the National Governors' Association released its action agenda for improving American high schools. This initiative presents a detailed plan to restore value to the high school diploma, upgrade curricula and coursework, and develop assessments that align with college and the workplace expectations (National Governor's Association, 2005). In Minnesota, the State Legislature is currently engaged in dialogue about implementing many of these action items in this initiative in an effort to increase student achievement. Given that these discussions have been taking place and countless initiatives have been passed by legislators, why have the nation's schools not been reformed and, specifically, why are we not seeing broad reform at the high school level?

Frustration regarding the inability of high schools across the country to increase student achievement is growing. One only has to look at the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) to understand that the average 17-year-old today is no more proficient at reading or mathematics than his or her 1970 counterpart (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001).

There are many potential explanations for why high schools have not, as a whole, increased student achievement scores nationwide. Two central explanations have been offered about why high school students have not seen a growth in their achievement scores: (1) the traditional resistance of high schools to reform (Lee, 2001, McQuillan, 1998, Muncey and McQuillan, 1996, Sarason, 1990); and (2) the over reliance on too limited a number of key personnel for successful reform (Fink, 2000). Reforming high schools is highly challenging and is rarely welcomed (Hord, 2004). In addition, when positive attempts are made to reform high schools, they often are not sustained due to the fact that the leader(s) who initiated the changes moved on and the system reverted back to the way it did business prior to the reform effort (Hamann, 2005).

Many leading researchers in the field of professional development would suggest that one of the most promising approaches for school improvement and reform is to develop a climate of continuous professional development and inquiry (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Burman, & Yoon, 2001; Newman et. al., 2000). This can be accomplished by organizing educators into learning communities that have similar goals and interests that lead to positive and effective professional development and increased learning (National Staff Development Council, 2001). This approach to increasing student achievement obviously means that the roles of high school principals and central office administrators need to move from that of just managing to that of leading high quality professional development and learning that directly leads to increased student achievement.

In the last several years high school principals and central office administrators have reacted to the increased pressure to increase student achievement scores by

attempting to implement a culture of continuous professional learning. Research suggests that effective principal leadership that is focused on organization development and promoting a positive school climate can be directly related to overall student achievement (Heck, Larsen & Marcoulides, 1990). Several other researchers have gone so far as to say that 25% of any increase in student achievement in schools can be directly related to school leadership (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Although strong principal leadership is a key component to increasing school achievement it must also be noted that central office leadership is critical if school districts are truly interested in reform. The role of central office administrators now must place more emphasis on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability (Schmoker, 2004). It is essential that district leaders make every attempt to remove obstacles for teachers and administrators so that they can focus on increased student achievement (Knudson & Wood, 1998) and direct resources accordingly. While principal and central office leadership is crucial to reforming high schools, it goes without saying that teachers account for the largest amount of any student achievement gains (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

In an effort to engage teachers to focus on increasing student achievement many administrators have attempted to implement professional learning communities (PLCs) in their high schools over the last several years (Fullan, 2006). Darling-Hammond (1995) suggested that schools where teachers worked in collaborative settings to deeply examine and engage in dialogue about teaching, learning, and effective instructional practices increased student achievement more quickly than in schools that did not. This type of

collaboration is very uncommon in high schools, which have typically been places where teacher isolationism is the norm.

This paradigm shift in how teachers and administrators interact has created and substantiated the need for high quality professional development. The research clearly states that effective implementation of PLCs involves three forms of leadership: principal leadership, teacher leadership, and central office leadership (Garet et al., 2001). It is obvious that establishing PLCs/continuous professional learning in high schools is most successful when supported by principals and central office administrators. The type of support necessary to engage teachers in this difficult work ranges from (1) time for teachers to meet and engage in dialogue, (2) support from principals/central office administrators, Boards of Education, and local communities, (3) and balancing school autonomy and the bureaucratic constraints that exist in practically every district (Boyd, 1992; Desimone et al., 2002; Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newman et al., 2000).

Problem

High school principals and central office administrators face numerous and complex challenges when it comes to reforming high schools to meet the demands of today's students and the ever changing post-school job market. High quality professional development is needed if a true paradigm shift in how high school teachers and administrators engage in school reform is to happen (Desimone et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001; Newman et al., 2000). Establishing a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools is an intervention that has received attention and has shown results (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Hord, Schmoker & Protheroe, 2004; Lester, 2003; Louis & Kruse,

1996). Principal, teacher, and central office leadership has been identified by several authors as being crucial to creating an atmosphere that fosters collaboration among high school faculty members (Desimone et al., 2002; Heck et al., 1990; Leithwood et al., 2004; Newman et al., 2000; Scribner et al., 1999; Spillane, 1996). Although principal and central office leadership has been identified as crucial in the successful implementation of continuous professional learning, information is lacking about specific practices and strategies that successful administrators have used to foster continuous professional learning in high schools. Fullan (1996) supports this idea by stating that although the literature on the role of school leaders is both enormous and inspiring, at the end of the day it is very difficult for the most insightful leader to know what to do.

Study Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to conduct an in-depth investigation to determine the practices used by central office administrators and school level leaders, both administrators and teachers, which influence and foster the establishment of continuous professional learning in high schools. The multi-site descriptive study design used in this study yielded findings about the processes and practices employed by high school and central office leaders to successfully reform their high schools into organizations of continuous professional learning. The strength of the multi-site study design is that it offers an opportunity to learn from multiple settings, recognizing the importance of context, setting, and participants' frames of reference (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Using a multi-site and multi-method descriptive study allowed the researcher to “elicit multiple constructed realities” in this study of two high schools, that can be studied first

individually and then comparatively and holistically (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53).

It was vital to gain the perspectives of practicing educators in this study to identify successful processes and practices. The overarching research question and three supporting sub-questions for this study were as follows:

In what ways do central office and school level leaders initiate and advance a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools?

- a) What are key targets of central and site level development work to create a culture of continuous professional learning?
- b) What development processes and practices are employed by central and site leaders to foster a culture of continuous professional learning?
- c) How do central and site leaders interact with one another and with other school personnel to align, connect, and coordinate the work of creating a culture of professional learning?

While these questions guided the design of the study, as the data were categorized and analyzed, findings were not reported related to each specific question. Instead a more holistic and coherent approach to reporting was used, which included two sections for each of the high schools. First, a multi-year story about how each school progressed toward enacting a culture of continuous learning is described. Much of the information shared in the story was derived from the interviews. Second, data from the survey and from the documents are presented as aligned with the five dimensions of Shirley Hord's (2004) framework for professional learning communities. These five dimensions are shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and

application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. This re-organization best honored the findings. In particular, it reflected a major finding that attributions of various types of leadership effort (e.g., initiation) could have emerged from any of the formal leaders at any level in the district. Ultimately what was important was partnership in the leadership work. Specific leadership contributions were not definitely assigned to central or site leader roles. For example, in one of the high schools studied, the initiating force came from both the high school principal and central office leaders. In the other high school, the initiating force originally came from a teacher leader who was quickly joined by a district leader. Ultimately, district and site leaders joined in partnership to advance their learning system.

Research Design

The design for this study is covered in depth in chapter three but a brief overview is provided here. A study of two high schools that are engaged in continuous professional learning, using multiple descriptive methods of research, was used to investigate the research questions. The descriptive study's unique strength is the ability to deal with a variety of evidence and to provide a picture drawn from multiple perspectives. The methods used in this study were: surveys, interviews, and document analysis. Information collected from the surveys, interviews, and documents allowed the researcher to gather both targeted and open information from a broad range of perspectives about the learning culture of their high schools and how the culture was created.

Significance of the Research

This study focused on high schools because of increased accountability measures, along with the recent and increasing national attention that they are receiving.

Sergiovanni (2000) states that schools need to “become communities where professional learning is continuous, reflective, and focused on improving student outcomes. But building a professional learning community is difficult due to the many demands on teachers and administrators, the growing accountability issues, the increasingly diverse needs of students, teacher isolation and burn-out, and many unimaginable stressors” (p. 142).

With the exception of literature relating to central office leadership, there currently is an abundance of research highlighting the positive effects of high quality professional development and teacher-principal leadership. Most of the research, however, depicts learning and leadership at the elementary level. Such information is more difficult to locate for high schools. Cultural norms of such high schools across the country include teachers working in isolation and efforts to promote change being met with a high level of resistance. Examples of high schools where a change in culture and structure fostered continuous professional learning are few and far between. This researcher has found that there is a gap in the literature in regard to high quality professional development, teacher-principal-central office leadership, and supportive conditions for improvement in the implementation context of high schools, as opposed to other levels in the K-12 system.

The good news is that there are some high schools that have been successful in providing professional development to teachers and administrators that result in cultivating communities of continuous learning and accessing key support from stakeholders. By conducting this study at two high schools in which high quality professional learning has been identified as an organizational norm, findings will add to the research base in regard to effective practices of high school principals and central office administrators. Findings from this study will provide high school and district administrators with information that will support their efforts to develop a learning and development plan to address needs in their own districts.

Definitions

A number of terms will be used throughout this thesis and have been defined in this section. They include culture of continuous learning, professional development, professional learning communities (PLCs), and teacher leadership.

Culture of Continuous Learning

The principal, as instructional leader, needs to promote a climate of continuous learning that ensures teachers and students know what is expected of them. For this study, a culture of continuous professional learning will be defined as a culture where: (1) time is provided for teacher reflection so that they can work, plan and think together to improve instruction, (2) there is an investment in teacher professional learning that is connected to school learning goals, and (3) principals recognize the need to continually improve their own professional practice (Parker & Day, 1997).

Professional development

Professional development and staff development are often used interchangeably. For this paper, the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) definition of staff development will be used. The NSDC defines staff development as "the means by which educators acquire or enhance the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students" (2001, p. 2).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been in existence for the past several years. Professional learning communities is a term that has been used rather freely since its inception. For this paper, a professional leaning community will be defined as a group that has the following five key characteristics that guide its work: (1) agreed upon norms and values, (2) dialogue and collaboration among teachers and administrators, (3) shared leadership, (4) a focus on learning and instruction—not teaching, and (5) deprivatization of practice (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Hord, Schmoker & Protheroe, 2004; Lester, 2003; Louis & Kruse, 1996).

Teacher Leadership

This researcher will use the definition for teacher leadership that York-Barr and Duke (2004) used in their summary of various researchers' work. They defined teacher leadership as: "The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (pp. 287-288).

Delimitations and Limitations

The purpose of this research was to investigate and determine the processes and practices used by high school principals and central office administrators to effectively foster continuous professional learning in high schools. A delimitation of this study is that it will not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of these factors in learning how they relate to student achievement.

One limitation of this study is that it is limited to two high schools in the State of Minnesota. Therefore, the findings from this study may be unique to these particular contexts and generalization to other contexts must be cautiously considered. A second limitation is that the researcher is a former high school principal and current associate superintendent of secondary schools and thus will need to be aware of any bias resulting from differences with the subjects of the study in regards to the researcher's leadership style and experiences. My personal beliefs were put aside so that I could accomplish the purpose of this study, which is to determine effective strategies to foster continuous professional learning in the selected high schools. A final limitation of this design is the fact that data are composed of teacher, principal, and central office administrators' perceptions. While it is possible that the espoused views of the study participants do not accurately reflect the actual practices and experiences at each of the high schools, honesty and accuracy of responses is presumed.

Overview of the Study

The remainder of this thesis has four major sections. Chapter Two presents a review of related literature. Chapter Three describes the research design and methods.

Chapters Four and Five will present respective findings for each of the two high schools.

Chapter Six will summarize key findings across the two high schools and suggests

implications for practice, policy, and research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Secondary teachers are willing to learn how to implement instructional strategies that will help their students learn content material, and they will buy into professional development programs in which they feel their voices are heard and valued. Ongoing collaboration about the professional development process ensures continued support at all levels. (Lester, 2003, p. 56)

INTRODUCTION

Today's high school principals are faced with greater challenges than their predecessors faced even a few years ago. The increased accountability for student achievement has shifted the role of the principal from that of a manager to the instructional leader. This shift has required principals to be skilled in providing, organizing, and leading quality professional development for teachers that directly leads to increased student achievement.

Various studies have linked principal leadership to overall student achievement. Heck, Larsen and Marcoulides (1990) showed that a relationship exists in regard to how a principal manages the school's instructional organization and school climate. When these two factors were present there was a direct and positive effect on student achievement. Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) found that approximately one quarter of increased student achievement in schools could be directly related to school leadership. In addition, the authors claim that the impact of high quality school leadership has the most positive effects on schools in which the student learning needs are the greatest.

In the past ten years professional learning communities (PLCs) have increasingly been used as a means to increase student achievement. "Evidence exists that schools in

which teachers act in collaborative settings to deeply examine teaching and learning, and then discuss effective instructional practices, show academic results for students more quickly than schools that do not” (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 164). PLCs provide a vehicle for teachers and administrators to engage in dialogue about instruction and student achievement. This is a paradigm shift from how teachers in typical high schools have gone about the business of communicating with their peers about instruction and achievement. Realizing the core attributes that make PLCs effective have required teachers and administrators to learn new skills and seek out other supports that are needed to make these endeavors successful.

One of the resources that many principals use to promote change in schools and help with a shift to PLCs is encouraging and supporting teacher leadership. "The most reliable, useful, proximate, and professional help resides under the roof of the schoolhouse with the teaching staff itself” (Barth, 2001, p. 445). Teacher leaders contribute both assistance and expertise to the development of cohesive plans for increased student achievement. Also needed to accomplish school improvement goals are effective staff development training and time for teachers to meet to accomplish the lofty accountability standards that schools face today.

The PLC model has the biggest chance for success if supported by principals and district administrators. This support can take the form of staff development training, curriculum revision and alignment, and providing time for teachers to meet. “Since the early 1980s, researchers and practitioners have talked about the importance of central office in implementing school improvement, but there has been little attention on

identifying central office's important role in decentralized change” (Knudson & Wood, 1998, p. 27).

The literature review contained in this paper was conducted by examining research studies in the fields of professional development, professional learning communities, and leadership for learning and improvement (principal-teacher-central office leadership). Searches were conducted for peer reviewed works through JSTOR, Education Full Text, and ERIC databases. A number of prominent authors in the fields of professional development and leadership are included in the peer reviewed literature. Also searched were results of original research and recent studies in the areas mentioned above. Some authors included here did not conduct research but synthesized major findings of the research at the time of their writing and have generally been included for context-setting purposes.

This review begins with discussing a policy context for professional learning. Next, studies are reviewed, for the most part, in chronological order, beginning with the earliest studies and ending with the most recent. In this way readers can track a relative progression of lines of inquiry and knowledge generation. The general field of professional development is addressed first with professional learning communities and leadership for learning and improvement addressed later. Finally, this chapter ends with a summary of key findings, a conclusion, and a brief overview of the current study.

POLICY CONTEXT

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has increased the pressure on public schools across the nation due to new state standards being developed and assessed at all

levels of the K-12 spectrum. “Schools are feeling pressure to shift from public to private sector norms. Standardized assessments and top-down accountability systems are forcing public education to pay more attention to test scores, which can be tallied, than to the cultivation of learning, which is not so amenable to measurement” (Lieberman & Miller, 2005, p. 152). A majority of the responsibility to see that these standards are implemented and that students are achieving at high levels often times falls on the principal.

As a result of federal pressure to increase student achievement and rigor at the high school level, the National Governors Association has taken action. During the 2005 National Education Summit, the National Governors Association endorsed the *Agenda*, which “calls for states to develop comprehensive plans to restore value to the high school diploma by revising academic standards, upgrading curricula and coursework, and developing assessments that align with the expectations of college and the workplace” (Perkins-Gough, 2003, p. 88). “*The Agenda's* other recommendations include providing students with excellent teachers and principals, attracting and retaining the best educators to the neediest schools and subjects, holding schools accountable for student success, and streamlining education governance so that the K-12 and postsecondary systems work more closely together” (Heck, 2003, p. 54).

This renewed focus on high schools across America has many principals and teachers concerned about the strategies that federal and state governments are suggesting to improve our schools. Principals and teachers have a reason to be cautious as reform efforts in the past have shown little or no growth in student achievement scores. If

practitioners look at standardized test scores, graduation rates, or a college admission test results they would realize that American high-school performance has hardly budged over the past three decades (Green, 2006). According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the average 17-year-old today is no more proficient at reading or mathematics than his counterpart in 1970. The point is not to label high schools as good or bad, but rather to suggest that they have not gotten better as evidenced by the flatness of high school students' NAEP achievement scores (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2001).

The explanations for this lack of increased test scores are many and hard to define, but two key and related explanations are (1) the traditional resistance of high schools to reform (Lee, 2001, McQuillan, 1998, Muncey & McQuillan, 1996, Sarason, 1990); and (2) the reliance on key personnel for successful reform, making it unlikely that reforms will remain after these individuals leave (Fink, 2000). In other words, “high schools are hard to change, but, even when they are purposefully changed, too often the change is temporary, disappearing when a teacher retires, a principal moves, or a superintendent is fired ” (Hamann, 2005, p. 2). “Changing schools is highly challenging, complex, and messy work—and change is rarely welcomed” (Hord, 2004, p. 3).

So what is the answer to increase rigor and student achievement at the high school level? According to the National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development (2001), learning communities or small groups or teams of teachers with similar goals and interests result in positive professional development experiences and higher levels of learning for everyone involved. Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman and

Yoon (2001) found that "sustained and intensive professional development is more likely to have an impact than is shorter professional development" (p. 935). Lester (2003) stated that "an effective professional development program involves a system of continuing dialogue to survive in a hectic high school environment" (p. 55).

REVIEW OF STUDIES

Professional Development

In this section of the literature review the author's goal is to define the characteristics that constitute high quality professional development. Three major studies are reviewed followed by a summary that synthesizes the research regarding high quality professional development and also offers what makes professional development in schools successful.

The purpose of high quality professional development as defined by NCLB legislation is to improve and increase teachers' content knowledge through sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused work that is aligned with state and local standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Professional development is considered an essential mechanism for deepening teachers' content knowledge and developing their teaching practices. As a result, professional development could be a cornerstone of systemic reform efforts designed to increase teachers' capacity to teach to high standards (Smith & O'Day, 1991).

A professional consensus is emerging about particular characteristics of "high quality" professional development. These characteristics include a focus on content (i.e., subject area) and how students learn content; in-depth, active learning opportunities; links

to high standards, opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles; extended duration; and the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, grade, or department (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002).

In a two-year study of nine urban elementary schools to “determine the extent to which professional development addresses key aspects of schools’ capacity to offer instruction that boosts achievement and to explain why some schools have more success than others in doing so” (p. 263) Newman, Kings and Young (2000) found considerable variation in schools’ use of professional development. They determined that professional development should address five aspects of school capacity: teachers’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions; professional community; program coherence; technical resources; and principal leadership (p. 259). Further, Newman et al. (2000) asserted that “professional development should concentrate on instruction and student outcomes in teachers’ specific schools; provide opportunities for collegial inquiry, help, and feedback; and connect teachers to external expertise while also respecting teachers’ discretion and creativity” (p. 259). Finally, they argued that professional development should be sustained and continuous, rather than short-term and episodic.

Garet et al. (2001) engaged in a study to examine the relationship between features of professional development that have been identified in the literature as best practice and self-reported change in teachers' knowledge and skills and classroom teaching practices. This study used a national probability sample of 1,027 mathematics and science teachers to provide the first large-scale empirical comparison of effects of different characteristics of professional development on teachers’ learning. Findings

indicated “three *core* features of professional development activities that have significant, positive effects on teachers' self-reported increases in knowledge and skills and changes in classroom practice: (a) focus on content knowledge: (b) opportunities for active learning; and (c) coherence with other learning activities” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 916). These features also align with current research that suggests that professional development is more likely to be effective if it is sustained over time.

In their study Garet et al. (2001) also found that professional development was more likely to produce enhanced knowledge and skills for educators if it focused on academic subject matter, gave teachers time to engage in hands-on work, and was embedded into the daily lives of teachers. In addition, they found that “activities that are linked to teachers' other experiences, aligned with other reform efforts, and encouraging of professional communication among teachers appear to support change in teaching practice, even after the effects of enhanced knowledge and skills are taken into account” (p. 936).

Desimone et al. (2002) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the effects of professional development on teachers' instruction. This study involved a sample of approximately 207 teachers in 30 schools, in 10 districts in five states. Specifically, they examined the features of teachers' professional development and its effects on changing teaching practice. They found that professional development focused on specific instructional practices increased teachers' use of those practices in the classroom. What is interesting to note is that they also found that active learning opportunities for teachers increased the effect of the professional development on

teachers' instruction (p. 81). It is important to note that the Desimone et al. (2002) findings are consistent with the idea that professional development characterized by "active learning" increases the impact of professional development activities. These findings are consistent with other research that suggests adult learners must engage in "active learning" such as "interacting with their colleagues on a regular basis to discuss their work and their students' learning, in order to develop a deeper understanding of how children think and learn" (p. 101). In sum, the longitudinal data that Desimone et al. (2002) collected suggest that professional development is "more effective in changing teachers' classroom practice when it has collective participation of teachers from the same school, department, or grade; and active learning opportunities, such as reviewing student work or obtaining feedback on teaching" is present (p. 102).

Summary of professional development literature. Prevalent in nearly all the research findings of high quality professional development is the notion that it must address teachers' knowledge and skills and must focus on instruction and student outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Also clear is the importance of an expectation for teachers to inquire and learn collectively to maximize the effects of professional development. The studies further suggested that strong principal leadership influences the effectiveness of professional development and the growth of school-wide capacity for improvement and learning (Desimone et al., 2002). In addition to these findings it was found that professional development experiences were most successful if sustained and continuous, rather than short-term and episodic (Newman et al., 2000) and coherent with other learning goals and activities (Garet et al., 2001). Together, these

findings call for professional development activities to be linked to teachers' other experiences, be aligned with other reform efforts and, whenever possible, be integrated into the daily life of the school which allows teacher to be engaged in leadership roles (Garet et al., 2001).

Professional Learning Communities

Various studies were reviewed to define the key characteristics of professional learning communities. Emphasis was also placed on highlighting important factors that can make the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) successful. This review is then followed by a summary of key findings in regards to the successful implementation of PLCs.

We now know from emerging research that effective professional development requires teachers to be at the forefront of school improvement. In particular, “secondary teachers are willing to learn how to implement instructional strategies that will help their students learn content material, and they will buy into professional development programs in which they feel their voices are heard and valued” (Lester, 2003, p. 56). Professional learning communities, in their purest form, encompass the best practices for effective professional development highlighted previously in this literature review. Over the past decade professional learning communities have increasingly been used as a vehicle of design and implementation for effective professional development in schools.

Sergiovanni (2000) defines communities as “centers of values, sentiments, and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of ‘we’ from the ‘I’ of each individual. They are organized around relationships and ideas” (p. 128). More

specifically, Louis and Kruse (1996) describe professional community as having five elements: shared norms and values, focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, deprivatization of practice, and collaboration. Similarly, Hord (2004) organized the characteristics of PLCs into five themes: supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared practice (p. 7). Studies of PLCs have determined that when teachers are involved in a collaborative process to examine instruction and are given an opportunity to engage in dialogue with other teachers, student achievement increases more quickly than when teachers are not involved in this type of process (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

Some schools have been successful implementing PLCs while others have stumbled and seem to have fallen back into the traditional patterns of how schools have always operated. The research on professional learning communities does provide some insights into why more schools are not engaging in redesigning themselves as true learning communities. Supovitz (2002) conducted a 4-year evaluation of a team-based schooling initiative entitled “Student’s First” in the Cincinnati Public Schools (CPS). This district is a medium-size urban district with 79 schools and just fewer than 50,000 students. The goals for the Students First program were that teams of teachers would be organized by a particular grade level to develop a curriculum and select instructional methods and materials so that all students they served would meet the district and school learning objectives. In addition, teams were to stay together for several years to ensure maximum benefits from collaboration and longer term relations with students.

Through this team-based program, Supovitz (2002) found that the culture in most buildings improved, but the student achievement did not. He argues typically in organizations that attempt to develop professional learning communities, discussions around instructional improvement do not occur so, not surprisingly, there is not much change in instruction or learning. To be effective, teacher communities must focus on instructional improvement and they “need organizational structures, cultures of instructional exploration, and ongoing professional learning opportunities to support sustained inquiries into improving teaching and learning” (p. 1591). In the study of the CPS system, Supovitz (2002) found that certain groups of teachers were engaging in dialogue about group instructional practices. Students who were being taught by teachers who were engaged in this practice were doing better academically than those students whose teachers were not engaged in this process. Results suggest, therefore, that site level and district-wide academic achievement is more likely to occur when more teachers engage in conversations about instructional practices. Supovitz (2002) suggest that “continuous well-ordered engagement in the ways that instructional strategies mix with curriculum to produce increasingly higher quality student work that represents standards for student performance does not develop organically but needs to be taught, modeled, and nurtured through ongoing, content-based, localized professional development” (p. 1616).

Through his work with the CPS system, Supovitz (2002) identified three characteristics of professional learning communities that relate to student achievement. First, teachers collaboratively plan for instruction and use the experience as a learning

opportunity. Second, teachers in this type of community engage in peer-observation with one another to learn from each other. Third, teachers engage in grouping students in ways that take into account the strengths of both teachers and students. Realizing that providing opportunities for teachers to work together does not necessarily mean that it will result in increased student achievement, Supovitz (2002) also proposed three conditions that must be fulfilled for professional learning communities to be formed. First, groups need structure, resources, and incentives to engage in this difficult work. Second, teachers need to be in a culture that allows for instruction strategies to be shared, practiced, and critiqued on an on-going basis. Third, on-going professional development opportunities must exist to further develop and solidify instruction techniques and strategies.

Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell and Valentine (1999) engaged in a 2-year qualitative case study of twenty-seven schools (8 elementary schools, 9 middle schools, and 10 high schools) in a Midwestern state to understand the role of a school improvement process (SIP) in creating and sustaining professional learning communities. They found that there are many issues that schools must work on that sometimes result in tension between bureaucracy and professional community. Four organizational factors that influence the establishment of professional community were articulated: principal leadership (style and approach to school level change), organizational history (past events and occurrences remembered and passed on to new organizational members), organizational priorities (politics of allocating scarce resources), and organization of teacher work (the persistent bureaucratic organization of schools) (Scribner et al, 1999). Although not all of these factors were present in the schools involved in this study the factors in one way or

another influenced how the SIP process was implemented at each building. For instance, the authors found that the “principal’s approach to leadership influenced the extent to which professional communities were established. In each of the schools, data revealed how leadership actions either facilitated or impeded the establishment of professional communities through SIP”.

There are several implications from the Scribner et al. (1999) study regarding the use of the SIP to develop professional learning communities. First, teachers are constantly learning and critically reflective. “Given that professionals have differing views grounded in different career experiences, embracing these diverse views is a fundamental first step toward establishing professional communities” (p. 156). Second, although creating professional learning communities is difficult work, the SIP could provide a framework in which PLCs could be successful. “Third, an important implication of this study is the need to understand those factors or characteristics that define a school’s place on the professional community-bureaucracy continuum” (p. 156). Finally, one of the most important implications in regards to the development of PLCs was the central role of the principal. Scribner et al. assert that the principal can either make or break the successful development of PLCs and that principals’ “leadership styles played critical roles in the degree of professional community achieved” (p. 157).

Summary of professional learning communities’ literature. Emerging from much of the research regarding professional learning communities are the following characteristics: agreed upon norms and values, dialogue and collaboration among teachers and administrators, shared leadership, a focus on learning and instruction—not

teaching and deprivatization of practice (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Hord, Schmoker & Protheroe, 2004; Lester, 2003; Louis & Kruse, 1996).

The research also suggests that the act of grouping teachers together with the hope that they will engage in dialogue around improving or changing instructional practices for the ultimate goal of increasing student achievement will not happen without leadership and a framework in which to conduct this work. “The accountability component of professional development is essential to the process of improving teaching and learning. High school teachers need a professional development program that is directed by someone who will hold them accountable for participation in the meetings, for implementing job-embedded practices, and for follow-up activities” (Lester, 2003, p. 56). Principals must “provide teacher groups with content-based professional development around instructional preparation and practice and leverage the advantages of teacher teams through a host of policy mechanisms, incentives, and leadership tools can increase the likelihood that teams will transform into communities of instructional practice, with powerful positive consequences for the performance of both teachers and students” (Supovitz, 2002, p. 1618). This view is corroborated by Hord (2004), who found that in “schools that successfully operate as PLCs, there was clear evidence that the administrator is key to the existence of a professional learning community. In all of the schools we examined, some external force or event provided an opening for profound change” (p. 20).

Leadership for Learning and Improvement

In this section of the literature review three areas of school leadership: principal, teacher, and central office are reviewed. More specifically, the characteristics that make each of these leaders successful and how they can contribute and impact the development of communities in schools that focus on inquiry and learning are reviewed. Each section is then followed by a summary of the key findings in the research reviewed.

Principal Leadership

Current best practice research makes it quite obvious that it is essential for principals to be knowledgeable about quality professional development and professional learning communities. Further, it would seem obvious that for a building to engage in a paradigm shift to become a professional learning organization that the leader of the school should be the person to lead this change. To do this, principals must first be committed to leading by example by engaging in their own professional development. Many researchers have come to the conclusion that the principal is the primary person responsible to lead this paradigm shift at high schools. “The new job description for the principal's role is that of a leader of leaders, chief instructional officer, and chief learning officer. This role requires a new set of assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and skills of leadership. The skills include analyzing and interpreting data, setting vision, and facilitating systems that support professional learning” (Childs-Bowen, 2005, p.7).

Heck, Larsen and Marcoulides (1990) conducted a study that involved 332 teachers and 56 school principals in California public schools in which they attempted to test the correlational relationships between selected instructional leadership behaviors of

the principal and school achievement. The authors proposed that the way in which the principal governs the school's internal and external political environments directly affects the principal's implementation of key instructional leadership behaviors within the domains of work structure, including school climate and school instructional organization. It was their belief that these domains directly affected student achievement. They tested a model that suggests that principals could influence school student achievement through managing the political relationship of the school to its environment, supervising the school's instructional organization, and building a positive climate for learning. They found that one of the strongest predictors of increased student achievement was the ability of the principal to establish a strong school climate and the ability to effectively organize a system for instruction. They also found a direct correlation between high-achieving schools and the amount of teacher involvement in instructional decision-making. Interestingly, this study suggested that, although parent and community involvement is important, the extent to which the principal protects staff from external pressures such as the community and central office, appears to be an important variable in school climate.

In the area of school climate Heck et al. (1990) found that successful principals openly communicated school goals, engaged teachers in dialogue about instruction, and helped set goals that were agreed upon by teachers in relation to district and community expectations. As a result of their findings, the authors emphasized that principals should pay special attention to providing resources that will help teachers achieve agreed upon student achievement goals and should directly observe teachers' use of instructional

strategies in the classroom and follow up these observations with feedback aimed toward improvement.

To conclude, the Heck et al. (1990) study demonstrated that a relationship exists between how a principal manages the school's instructional organization and school climate. When these two factors are present there is a direct and positive effect on student achievement. Although these authors found that directly observing and engaging in dialogue about teachers' instructional practices is important they also state that principals may need to reassess the amount of time they spend in direct teacher observation. They would suggest that principals reflect on how they use their time and would argue that the important instructional leadership variables examined in this study that directly influence increased school achievement are not only related to direct observation of teachers. They found that principals also need to focus on the school's instructional organization and school climate and the impact they have on student achievement. "Some of these efforts involve clarifying, coordinating, and communicating a unified school educational purpose to teachers, students, and the community" (p.122). These authors suggest that because time is limited during a typical school day some principals may "over-attend to variables that are not as important in facilitating strong educational outcomes" (p. 122).

In a recent review of studies on how leadership influences student learning Leithwood et al. (2004) set out to determine the essential components of successful school leadership and how these components increase student achievement. This study examined current and past research in an effort to offer stakeholders interested in promoting successful schools some answers to questions about leadership strategies that

increase student achievement in schools. The authors suggested that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning. They found that approximately a quarter of increased student achievement in schools can be directly related to school leadership. In addition, the authors claim that the impact of high quality school leadership has the most positive effects on schools where the students' learning needs are the greatest.

Leithwood et al. (2004) further determined that for school leaders to have a positive impact on their organizations they must be able to set goals and directions that are understandable by everyone in the organization, develop people by providing them with the training and resources they need to be successful, and have the ability to strategically organize their school/district so that initiatives support rather than hinder teaching and learning. Neither superintendents nor principals can do this work alone. Successful principals and superintendents need to be creative in tapping into resources both inside and outside of the district to make this type of leadership change a reality.

In their study, Leithwood et al. (2004) made suggestions as to what educational leaders should focus on when concerned about increased student achievement. First and foremost it was suggested that focusing on teachers and improving content knowledge was essential to improving student achievement. It was also suggested that the professional community inside and outside of the school is critical in to impact learning. Of course, the "evidence is quite strong in identifying, for example, school mission and goals, culture, teachers' participation in decision making, and relationships with parents and the wider community as potentially powerful determinants of student learning". And

finally the factors that influence student learning at the district level include the “district culture, the provision of professional development opportunities for teachers aligned with school and district priorities and policies governing the leadership succession. Districts also contribute to student learning by ensuring alignment among goals, programs, policies and professional development”.

In this time of high stakes testing it is especially crucial to take into account the three basic leadership practices on which the authors’ focused: setting directions, developing people, and making the organization work. Superintendents and principals are faced with balancing increased accountability standards and funding concerns at both the federal and state levels. Leaders in today’s schools will continually be challenged in how to adapt their organizations and make decisions regarding the allocation of resources.

Summary of principal leadership literature. Common across the research regarding successful principal leadership is an emphasis on the leader focusing on climate and supervising the school’s instructional organization (Heck et al., 1990; Leithwood et al., 2004). This suggests that a successful principal needs to be able to do the following:

- create and develop agreed upon and openly communicated school goals that directly relate to district and community expectations,
- create a positive climate (professional community) for learning that involves the principal protecting staff from external pressures such as the community and central office (managing the political relationship of the school to its environment);

- develop teachers by offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support and providing appropriate models of best practice and beliefs considered fundamental to the organization (Leithwood et al., 2004);
- directly observe teachers' use of instructional strategies and follow up with feedback to help improve instruction;
- monitor the district culture by ensuring alignment among district goals, programs, policies and professional development (Leithwood et al., 2004);
- provide resources and professional development opportunities for teachers that are aligned with school and district priorities that will help them achieve agreed upon student achievement goals (Leithwood et al., 2004); and
- engage teachers in dialogue about instruction and encourage their involvement in instructional decision making.

As the research suggests, neither superintendents nor principals can do this work alone. They need to tap into existing and new resources both inside and outside of the district. Setting priorities for securing and allocating scarce resources (e.g., time, funding, and personnel) with which to implement change is a constant challenge for principals and leadership teams (Scribner et al., 1999). One of the often untapped resources that exist in districts all across the country is that of teachers.

Instructional leadership is accelerated when the leadership is distributed through an organizational culture and infrastructure that supports teaching and learning for both students and teachers. This requires skillful balancing in autonomy, support, and accountability of staff for student learning. "If we seek to raise the standards of our

students, we need to work harder at raising our standards of staff development, starting with principal learning” (Childs-Bowen, 2005, p. 132). Teacher behavior is often a function of principal behavior (Lambert, 2005). Administrators, along with teachers, must be learners: questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions for school improvement and increased student achievement (Hord, 2004). “If professional learning communities provide the best hope for sustaining school improvement, and shared leadership is a crucial component of successful professional communities, then principals must be both willing to share leadership and able to develop conditions and communicate expectations that will advance shared leadership among school professionals” (Hord, 2004, p. 140).

Teacher Leadership

“For the most part, American teachers work in high-volume, short-term relationships with students. Within these constraints, teachers seek to make significant positive changes that are difficult to measure accurately, while also living up to mandated measurements that may or may not—and perhaps should not—be directly connected to classroom activities” (Hord, 2004, p. 153). To make matters worse, teachers at the secondary level are routinely isolated from their peers either by choice or by organizational constraints. Hobson (2001) stated that “schools are simply not organized to facilitate interaction among teachers” (p.145). Choosing a degree of isolation is a way to fend off the disruptions and distractions that so often come from being too caught up in an overwhelming system”.

Early in this literature review, the benefits of professional learning communities were addressed and we now understand that this is one model that can not only

counteract isolationism that is prevalent in schools but can also lead to increased student achievement and improved climate. Although the principal is extremely important in creating professional learning communities, creating teams of teachers cannot be done without strong teacher leadership. “Widespread development of PLCs cannot occur without a paradigm shift, among the public, and among educators themselves about what the role of the teacher entails. Changing perspectives to enable the public and the profession to understand and value teacher professional development will require focused and concerted effort” (Hord, 2004, p. 14).

Marks and Louis (1999) conducted a study of 24 public schools (elementary, middle, and high school) that were engaged in restructuring activities to investigate the overlap between teacher empowerment and capacity for organizational learning. The goal of the study was to determine if there was a link “between the empowerment of teachers through participatory decision making with emerging theories about learning in organizations” (p. 707). These authors found that there was strong evidence to suggest that “a unified organizational culture built around ongoing inquiry into the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning depends on the collective influence of teachers who function as empowered professionals” (p. 708).

It is important to note that one key finding in the Marks and Louis (1999) study was that “even among restructured schools, high schools typically lack a strong capacity for organizational learning and the empowerment of teachers that is fundamental both to their professionalism and, indirectly, to school improvement” (p. 729). Overall, the findings suggest the following:

Once decentralization provides the school with autonomy, both the capacity for organizational learning and empowerment are largely a matter of internal relationships among people. School staff provide each other with support, exchange ideas and reach consensus, and treat each other in professional and egalitarian ways. These are not aspects of reform that cost a great deal of money; they are reforms of culture and not of external resources, buildings, assessment programs, or student schedules. (pp. 731-732)

In an effort to identify what is known about teacher leadership and how to leverage this invaluable resource to advance teaching and learning, York-Barr and Duke (2004) summarized findings from the last two decades of teacher leadership research. The review included over 50 teacher leadership studies. They found that there are many definitions used for teacher leadership due to the fact that the term itself can include a wide range of job duties and roles. After reviewing the literature, these authors defined teacher leadership as:

The process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement (pp. 287-288).

One of the points stressed by York-Barr and Duke (2004) was how difficult it can be for a teacher leader to step forward and accept the responsibility to take on a new role in the organization. “Professional norms of isolation, individualism, and egalitarianism challenge the emergence of teacher leadership” (p. 288). The authors suggest that teacher leaders can overcome these challenges by developing trust and engaging in dialogue with their colleagues. In addition, the authors made the following assertions regarding the success of teacher leaders:

The success of teacher leaders depends, in part, on the nature of their leadership work, which must be valued by their peers, visible within the school, and continually negotiated on the basis of feedback and evaluation of its effectiveness.

Also important is that the leadership work of teachers is best shared among teachers and collectively addressed. Conditions known to support the work of teacher leaders include the active support of their principals and colleagues, the availability of time and resources necessary to carry out the work, and opportunities to learn and develop in ways that directly support their leadership work (289-290).

One of the positive intentions for implementing, encouraging, and developing teacher leaders is to support the schools' continuous improvement process. York-Barr and Duke (2004) suggested a process for effectively using teacher leaders in this capacity:

- 1) Schools and districts must clearly articulate student learning and school improvement goals and related priorities for development and action.
- 2) Possible ways in which teachers can lead efforts related to goal accomplishment must be generated, recognizing that specific leadership functions and needs that are well served by teachers are fluid, meaning they are likely to change and evolve as improvement goals and emphases change.
- 3) Unique and varied leadership capacities of individual teachers must be matched with unique and varied leadership functions.
- 4) Conversations about the purpose of and expectations for the varied leadership work must be held among formal and informal leaders and with school faculties.
- 5) Schools must identify supports that can advance the leadership work of teachers. Decisions about how time can be restructured to create space for leadership work must be made, as well as decisions about what resources might be tapped to assist in developing the knowledge and skills of teacher leaders for their designated leadership functions.
- 6) Regular opportunities to obtain feedback and to reflect on progress that is being made toward goal accomplishment must be embedded in program planning (p. 290-291).

Prevalent in the research regarding teacher leadership is the idea that the development of teacher leaders needs to be supported at many levels. Given the fact that the use and definition of teacher leaders varies in the literature and in reality, principals

must be clear in regards to teacher leaders' roles, responsibilities, and training. "The likelihood of being successful as a teacher leader is increased if roles and expectations are mutually shaped and negotiated by teacher leaders, their colleagues, and principals on the basis of context-specific (and changing) instructional and improvement needs" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, p. 288).

In regard to teacher leaders and their role in professional learning communities within schools, York-Barr and Duke (2004) stated that one of the biggest areas of concern is that of the "constraints of time, schedules, access, and space" (p. 291). In addition, these authors suggest that one of the key questions for further research is, "how can the work space of all teachers be reconfigured to promote continuous learning and development as a cornerstone of educational practice?" (p. 291).

Summary of teacher leadership literature. Clearly teacher leaders have a central role in the success of professional learning communities. They have the potential to exert a strong positive influence on their teacher colleagues in fostering a culture of inquiry and learning. Equally clear is the need for explicit support from administrators in terms of: developing communication structures that reduce isolationism among staff, clearly defining leadership roles and responsibilities in the building, creatively providing the necessary supports (time, workspace, training, etc.) that teachers need to work together on increasing student achievement, and clearly defining learning and instructional goals for school improvement for teachers to be successful in this regard.

Central Office Leadership

Principals who serve as strong instructional leaders and teachers who effectively engage their colleagues are not the only people needed to implement professional learning communities in high schools. “Top district leaders set the direction for the reform effort and the direction for professional development, although a mix of top-down and bottom-up elements is usually present” (Marsh, 2002, p. 29). Central office support is a key component of any shift to becoming a professional learning community. District and school leaders are seen as having the biggest impact on reform strategies that are targeted to improve student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2004; Stiegelbauer, 1991). It takes a talented and trained district leader to facilitate change while working with the “tension between a professional community ethic of caring for students, critical reflection, and collaboration on the one hand, and the bureaucratic necessities of hierarchy, accountability, rationality, and control on the other” (Scribner et al., 1999, p. 154).

It has been well noted that building and district leaders’ roles have changed from being that of managers to that of being facilitators who are viewed as instructional leaders. These new roles also suggest that district leaders are instrumental in removing obstacles that might be in the way of providing a clear direction for the district (Knudson & Wood, 1998). Another major role change for district leaders is that there is now much more emphasis on “teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 88). As part of this shift in district leaders’ roles it is essential that they lead by example by fully participating in

staff development activities and their own professional learning community (Bloom & Stein, 2004).

Spillane (1996) conducted a case study of two school districts in Michigan with approximately 15,000-20,000 students in each district. The two districts had different demographics as evidenced by one of the districts having a diverse population (just fifty percent Caucasian students) and a fifty percent free-reduced population rate while the other district was not very diverse at all (ninety percent Caucasian students) and had a free-reduced population rate of only seven percent. The author set out to determine the impact that districts and district leaders had on reading instruction in the district after a reading policy was handed down from the State of Michigan.

The first major finding in Spillane's (1996) study was that local school districts do matter in that "their instructional policy making efforts have the potential to undermine state policymakers' efforts" (p. 83). The author also stated that the school districts in this study engaged in and implemented changes in district policy/instruction due to the policy that was mandated from the state. These districts saw an opportunity to promote change in their own districts due to the state mandating a reading policy rather than perceive it as a barrier to implementing change.

Spillane (1996) also found that "school districts' policy-making initiatives matter in that they influence state policymakers' efforts to broadcast their messages for instructional reform to school practitioners" (p. 84). In this way, the author suggested that district leaders can influence state policy that will, in turn, help them promote change in their own districts by organizing and shaping the districts' instructional improvement

efforts based on current best practice research. Along these same lines, Spillane (1996) also suggested that district leaders can advocate for changes to state policy that directly lead to more coherent instructional practices for teachers in their particular district. Further, the author contends that state policy mandates did not impede central office administrators; in reality it made them highly selective about the parts of the mandated policy they would focus on in their districts. Finally, Spillane concluded that successful central office administrators focused “not only on what was taught but also on what materials were used, how well it was to be taught, and in some cases, even how it should be taught” (70).

Desimone et al. (2002) conducted a study using a national probability sample of Eisenhower (Title II of NCLB) district professional development coordinators to examine the link between federal policies and the mechanisms and strategies that districts implemented to offer high-quality professional development to teachers. Rather than conduct a case study, these authors used data from a national sample to determine if relationships existed between districts’ initiatives and the impact that these initiatives had on the professional development for teachers. The authors focused on the following management/implementation strategies because they are seen as predictors for providing high quality professional development: (1) the alignment of professional development activities with state and district standards and assessments; (2) coordination among multiple professional development programs; (3) continuous improvement efforts based on indicators, needs assessments, evaluation, and guidance; and (4) how districts involve

teachers and other school staff in planning professional development efforts (Desimone et al., 2002).

Alignment and coordination of professional development activities to standards and assessments in a district is seen as important because it sends a common message to teachers throughout the district about instructional expectations (Desimone et al., 2002; Massell, 1998). Desimone et al. (2002) found that districts that aligned standards with professional development activities were more likely to engage in continuous improvement efforts and reform type activities. Results of this study suggest that districts who aligned their professional development activities with standards and assessments found the resources necessary to implement these activities and coordinated efforts of the various professional development programs/initiatives existing in their districts were much more successful in carrying out a professional development plan than those districts who did not engage in alignment and coordination activities.

When Desimone et al. (2002) collected data regarding continuous improvement efforts in these districts, they agreed that continuous improvement meant more than “establishing goals, measuring progress toward these goals, assessing the needs of teachers, and evaluating professional development activities” (p. 1272). They suggested that continuous improvement also means that stakeholders, in a systematic way, are engaged in dialogue through feedback loops that focus on the results of assessments and how instructional practices must adapt to meet the needs of learners. Overall, however, the districts involved in this study were not as strong in the area of continuous improvement as they could be. It was generally suggested that schools “may need

assistance in building capacity to foster continuous improvement efforts” (p. 1295) and more specifically asserted that districts should focus on “content, active learning, and coherence, delivered with sufficient duration and collective participation” (p. 1295).

The job of planning for professional development should involve teachers and administrators with the overall goal of providing teachers with the training that is necessary to increase student achievement (Desimone et al., 2002). Of course, the chances for meeting teachers’ professional development needs are much greater if they are heavily involved in the planning process. “Having all teachers in a school share a knowledge base, as well as share expectations for teaching and learning, facilitates teaching and learning toward high standards” (O’Day & Smith, 1993).

What Desimone et al. (2002) found in regard to planning professional development was that “activities planned at the district level span a longer period of time than activities not planned at the district level and that teacher participation in planning is associated with more opportunities for active learning and more targeting of teachers of at-risk students” (p. 1296). They also suggest that the benefits for involving teachers in planning professional development activities were that it could “ensure that topics and learning activities in professional development programs address areas of knowledge and skills that are relevant to teachers” and it also allows “for more coherent professional development that is closely tied to the needs of teachers in a particular school and thus potentially more relevant to classroom practice” (p. 1296).

Firestone et al. (2005) in their comparison of three urban school systems suggest that district offices can influence teaching through professional development that it is

coherent and content-focused. They also found that the decisions that central office administrators made in regard to vision, professional development activities, and human resources influenced the coherence and content focus of the professional development programs. The district with the most coherent focus on helping teachers develop deeper knowledge about select subject areas had the greatest teacher-reported influence on teaching practice. The findings of this study aligned with that of Desimone et al. (2002) in that they assert that district leadership can have a strong influence on teaching and learning through high quality professional development. Firestone et al., (2005) argue that districts that enact professional development as a priority can develop a “coherent program that improves teacher content and pedagogical content knowledge” (p. 440). It was also noted that this type of involvement in improving instruction and learning can be risky for district leaders because by exercising more “influence over the content and design of professional development” it can lead to teachers feeling as if they have lost autonomy (p. 444). By implementing professional development activities through the central office, superintendents must realize that it can ultimately lead to opposition from segments of the community and educators that can ultimately impact their tenure (Firestone et al., 2005). “Understanding how to prioritize and combine pathways to influence teaching and learning is a critical issue for district leaders” (Firestone et al., 2005, p. 443).

Firestone, Mangin, Martinez and Polovsky (2005) suggest “none of the presently available research offers the new superintendent guidance about which pathway to choose if he or she can only take on one issue or how to simultaneously orchestrate

principal and teacher professional development if both are necessary” (pp. 442-443). In addition, district leaders are faced with many stakeholders’ expectations that can negatively “impact the proposed transformation of a school district committed to transforming the existing organization to one that is an authentic professional learning community” (Hord, 2004, p. 127).

Although there is some research regarding the role of the superintendent in establishing and leading professional development in school districts, less is known about the investment other central office administrators have on impacting the creation of communities of learning and inquiry district-wide. “Leadership research often focuses on individuals in top leadership positions: the principal, the superintendent, the corporate CEO” (Firestone et al., 2005, p. 443). Firestone, et al. (2005) suggest that “like school buildings, district central offices work through distributed leadership and that second- and even third-level administrators in district offices play a key role in district “leadership”(p. 443). Firestone et al. (2005) would suggest that little research has been done in this area.

The limited evidence about districts that break with the conventional pattern of professional development suggests two points. First, effective professional development appears to reflect local initiative and “internal accountability”—that is, accountability that is generated from inside, not from central policies, and becomes a self-enforced part of a school or district culture (Newmann, King, & Rigdon, 1997, p. 43).

Summary of central office leadership literature. By reviewing the research it is clear that the role of central office administrators now must place more emphasis on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability (Schmoker, 2004). One of the recurring themes in the literature is that district leaders set the vision for the reform effort in their districts and, as such, are

instrumental in setting the direction for professional development (Marsh, 2002). Central office support, therefore, is a key component of any shift to establishing professional learning communities (Leithwood et al., 2004; Stiegelbauer, 1991). Of course, being a leader of professional development activities in a district also means that central office administrators should be full participants in staff development and PLC activities (Resnick & Glennan, 2002).

The research also focused on the fact that reform strategies must be linked and targeted to improving student achievement through professional development. Further, professional development should be expanded beyond the improvement of individuals to improvement of other organizational resources (Newman et al., 2000). In order to help central office administrators be successful in leading reform efforts, Desimone et al. (2002) suggest that the following four areas need to be addressed: 1) alignment of professional development activities with state and district standards and assessments; (2) coordination among multiple professional development programs; (3) "continuous improvement" efforts based on indicators, needs assessments, evaluation, and guidance; and (4) ways in which districts involve teachers and other school staff in planning professional development efforts.

Finally, the research suggests that central office administrators play an important role in defining state policies that will directly impact classroom instruction (Spillane, 1996). The central office leader needs to be skilled in working with state policy makers as he/she will be called on to diffuse the tension that may exist between professional development activity needs of teachers and principals and everyday bureaucratic

necessities (Scribner et al., 1999). Along these lines, it is essential that district leaders make every attempt to remove obstacles for teachers and administrators so that they can engage focus on increased student achievement (Knudson & Wood, 1998).

Supportive Conditions

Although there has not been much research concerning supportive conditions for the development of PLCs, Hord (2004) in her three-year study, which involved twenty-two schools across the nation, attempted to better understand how schools develop as professional learning communities. She found that district-level support for developing PLCs was critical. Hord (2004) found in her study that “school activities stalled, stopped, or were never initiated because of actions or inactions at the district level. Securing board of education and superintendent advocacy and support are necessary conditions to make the implementation processes more likely to occur” (p. 70). In particular, she found that one of the biggest supports for which teachers and principals advocated was time.

It is no surprise that time is a significant issue for faculties that wish to work together collegially. It has been cited as both a barrier (when it is not available) and a supportive factor (when it is present) by staffs engaging in school improvement. Compounding the problem is that time needed for working together may conflict with district rules and regulations, parent and educator expectations, and collective bargaining agreements (Hord, 2004, p. 10).

Hord (2004) also realized that principals made heroic efforts in these schools in order to rearrange schedules to create time for teachers to engage in dialogue and to look for new ways to engage in the work of increasing students’ achievement. Finding time for teachers to meet as PLCs is “important both for the principals to build trust with their teachers and to encourage the development of trust between the teachers” (Hord, 2004, p.

36). Finding and creating time for high school teachers specifically is crucial given the job description and isolation of typical high school teachers across the nation.

In addition to time there are other crucial supports that are needed. “The following physical factors that support learning communities have been identified: time to meet and talk, small size of the school and physical proximity of the staff to one another, teaching roles that are interdependent, communication structures, school autonomy, and teacher empowerment” (Louis & Kruse, 1995, p. 85). Boyd (1992) noted two factors beyond the school staff that can enhance a PLC: supportive community attitudes and parents and community members as partners and allies” (p. 45). Newman et al. (2000) found that “organizational features such as time for teachers to plan, school autonomy from unreasonable bureaucratic constraints, school learning climate, the level of support from parents and community organizations, and school funding” all play a part in increasing student achievement (p. 261).

A major challenge to providing this type of high-quality professional development is cost. Garet et al. (2001) suggested that “funds should be focused on providing high-quality professional development experiences. This would require schools and districts either to focus resources on fewer teachers, or to invest sufficient resources so that more teachers can benefit from high-quality professional development” (Garet et al., 2001, p. 937). Desimone et al. (2002) suggested that allocation of resources and local support “play an important role in helping districts and schools overcome these challenges and develop high-quality professional development experiences” (p. 105).

Summary of supportive conditions literature. The small amount of research that exists in regards to supportive conditions and how they relate to PLCs points to a few key areas. First and foremost, the issue of designated time for teachers to engage in dialogue about instruction and learning needs to be addressed (Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newman et. al., 2000). Developing PLCs also requires the support of three major stakeholders: district-level administrators, Boards of Education, and local communities to give principals and teachers a chance to effectively implement high quality professional development activities that are generated by teachers and principals involved in continuous improvement processes (Boyd, 1992; Desimone et al. 2002; Hord, 2004; Newman et. al., 2000). Finally, a third area found in the research regarding supports need to make PLCs successful is the idea of school autonomy and removing bureaucratic constraints that get in the way of PLCs' core concepts (Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newman et. al., 2000).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the research reviewed for this study it is evident that strong teacher and principal leadership must be present to implement the PLC model in schools. In addition, support from district administrators, school boards, and local community members must also be present to successfully engage in the PLC process. Furthermore, within the PLC model a focus must be maintained on high quality professional learning aimed at implementing best practices for learning and instruction. Specifically, professional development must address teachers' knowledge and skills and must focus on instruction and student outcomes. Further, to maximize the effects of professional development,

teachers need to work collectively by engaging in collegial inquiry and providing feedback and assistance (Newman et al., 2000). Professional development experiences should be sustained and continuous, rather than short-term and episodic (Newman et al., 2000) and must be coherent with other learning and development work (Garet et al., 2001). Finally, the research emphasizes that strong principal leadership is necessary to lead effective professional development and to develop school-wide capacity for improvement and learning.

The research regarding professional learning communities suggested the following guidelines to make them successful: agreed upon norms and values, a focus on dialogue and collaboration among teachers and administrators, promotion and celebration of shared leadership, focus on learning and instruction—not teaching, and deprivatization of practice (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Hord, Schmoker, & Protheroe, 2004; Lester, 2003; Louis & Kruse, 1996). The research also suggests that just having teachers working together without a common framework is not enough to increase student achievement. There must be some form of accountability for teachers/administrators as they immerse themselves in the work of increasing student achievement scores (Lester, 2003).

Prevalent in nearly all the research regarding successful principal leadership is the notion that the leader needs to focus on climate and supervising the school's instructional organization (Heck et al., 1990). To accomplish this, a successful principal must: (1) create and develop agreed upon and openly communicated school goals that directly relate to district and community expectations, (2) create a positive climate (professional community) for learning that involves the principal protecting staff from external

pressures such as the community and central office (managing the political relationship of the school to its environment), (3) develop teachers by offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support and providing appropriate models of best practice and beliefs considered fundamental to the organization (Leithwood et al., 2004), (4) directly observe teachers' use of instructional strategies and follow up with feedback to help improve instruction, (5) monitor the district culture by ensuring alignment among district goals, programs, policies and professional development (Leithwood et al., 2004), (6) provide resources and professional development opportunities for teachers that are aligned with school and district priorities that will help them achieve agreed upon student achievement goals (Leithwood et al., 2004), and (7) engage teachers in dialogue about instruction and encourage their involvement in instructional decision making.

The research on teacher leadership suggests teachers play a central role in leading the work of continuous improvement and learning in schools and that the specific ways in which teachers contribute can vary greatly (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). One of the biggest challenges for teacher leaders is that of the “constraints of time, schedules, access, and space” (p. 291). These authors suggest that one of the key questions for further research is, “how can the work space of all teachers be reconfigured to promote continuous learning and development as a cornerstone of educational practice?” (p. 291).

One of the recurring themes in the literature regarding district leaders is that they must set the vision for the reform efforts in their districts, as well as be instrumental in setting the direction for professional development (Marsh, 2002). It was also found that central office support is a key component of any shift to becoming a professional learning

community (Leithwood et al., 2004; Stiegelbauer, 1991). Research also focused on the fact that reform strategies must be linked and targeted to improving student achievement through professional development. To leverage central office administration in leading reform efforts, Desimone et al. (2002) suggest that administrators must base professional development activities on the indicators and assessments (based in state and district standards) that the district has chosen to focus on. Of course, this should be done in a collaborative process that includes key stakeholders throughout the district. In addition, central office administrators must be careful to make sure that the various professional development activities taking place throughout the district are aligned so that duplication or inefficiencies are addressed. Finally, central office leaders need to be skilled at working with state policy makers so they can act as a buffer between the professional development activity needs of teachers and principals and everyday bureaucratic necessities that are handed down from the state level (Scribner et al., 1999).

It is essential that district leaders make every attempt to remove obstacles for teachers and administrators so that they can focus on increased student achievement (Knudson & Wood, 1998). One of the main concerns by teachers and principals in regard to obstacles that prevent high quality professional development is the issue of designated time for teachers to engage in dialogue about instruction and learning (Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newman et al., 2000). Principals and teachers also need the support from district-level administrators, boards of education, and local communities to effectively implement high quality professional development activities that are generated by teachers and principals involved in continuous improvement processes (Boyd, 1992; Desimone et

al., 2002; Hord, 2004; Newman, et. al., 2000). Finally, a third area found in the research regarding supports needed to make PLCs successful is the idea of school autonomy and removing bureaucratic constraints that get in the way of PLCs' core concepts (Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newman et al., 2000).

It is evident from the research that strong principals, effective teacher leaders, time to meet professionally, and support from central office are conditions that enable the creation and implementation of PLCs. What is less clear are the specific ways in which district and building administrators create structures, resources, and culture that allow time for professional learning. Also missing from the current research is more refined information about the roles of central office administrators in the creating of support systems for buildings, principals, and teachers in the development of effective PLC implementation.

STUDY

Due to increased accountability measures facing high schools, research regarding the practices employed by administrators to create cultures of continuous inquiry in high schools is critical. There is much useful information and research about high quality professional development and the importance of teacher and principal leadership. Further, there is a considerable amount of research that shows effective learning and development work at the elementary level. Unfortunately, the literature also shows that high schools have proven more resistant to improvement efforts and have largely remained institutions in which teachers are isolated from one another and in which changes in cultures and structures that foster continuous professional learning have not taken place. There seems

to be a gap in the literature regarding high quality professional development, teacher and principal leadership, and supportive conditions for improvement in the implementation context of high schools, as opposed to other levels in the K-12 system.

By accessing some of the few high schools that have been successful at providing the necessary high quality professional development that teachers need and accessing key support from both principals and district administrators, this study will discover the practices employed by high school principals and central office administrators to organize systems of teaching and learning, to develop professional communities of inquiry, to foster and support teacher leaders, and to gain district-wide and community support to improve student achievement in high schools buildings. This study will add to the research base on effective implementation practices with the overall goal of increasing student achievement. Specifically, high school and district administrators will be provided with information that will support their efforts to develop a learning and development plan to address needs in their own districts.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This third chapter describes the design and methodology that was used for this descriptive study. There are five sections. The first section outlines and provides a rationale for the research design. The second section describes the sampling procedures. The third section outlines instrumentation. The fourth section explains the data collection process and presents data management and analysis. The fifth and final section describes the methodological integrity of the research.

Research Design

A multiple site, multiple methods descriptive study design involving two Minnesota high schools was used to address the following research questions:

In what ways do central office and school level leaders initiate and advance a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools?

- a) What are key targets of central and site level development work to create a culture of continuous professional learning?
- b) What development processes and practices do central and site leaders employ to foster a culture of continuous professional learning?
- c) How do central and site leaders interact with one another and with other school personnel to align, connect, and coordinate the work of creating a culture of professional learning?

While these questions guided the design of the study, as the data were categorized and analyzed, findings were not reported related to each specific question. Instead a more

holistic and coherent approach to reporting was used, which included two sections for each of the high schools. First, a multi-year story about how each school progressed toward enacting a culture of continuous learning is described. Much of the information shared in the story was derived from the interviews. Second, data from the survey and from the documents are presented as aligned with the five dimensions of Shirley Hord's (2004) framework for professional learning communities. These five dimensions are shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. This re-organization best honored the findings. In particular, it reflected a major finding that attributions of various types of leadership effort (e.g., initiation) could have emerged from any of the formal leaders at any level in the district. Ultimately what was important was partnership in the leadership work. Specific leadership contributions were not definitely assigned to central or site leader roles. For example, in one of the high schools studied, the initiating force came from both the high school principal and central office leaders. In the other high school, the initiating force originally came from a teacher leader who was quickly joined by a district leader. Ultimately, district and site leaders joined in partnership to advance their learning system.

This study is a descriptive and interpretive form of research. Merriam (1998) expounded on the work of Carr and Kemmis (1986) in regard to the three basic forms of education research—positivist, interpretive, and critical. In positivist research, education is seen as the object or phenomenon that can be studied with the belief that the data gleaned from this type of study are objective and quantifiable. “In interpretive research,

education is considered to be a process and school is a lived experience. Understanding the meaning of the process or experience constitutes the knowledge to be gained from” this method of research (Merriam, 1998, p. 4). In the third basic form of educational research, critical, “education is considered to be a social institution designed for social and cultural reproduction and transformation” (Merriam, 1998, p. 4). An interpretive research design is well aligned with the purpose of this study in that study of individual and collaborative experiences in unique and various contexts can yield information about what it is like to live in such contexts. Furthermore, using multiple sites and a descriptive approach is validated by Merriam (1998) by stating that “if there is a lack of theory, or if existing theory does not adequately explain the phenomenon, hypotheses cannot be developed to structure a research investigation” (p. 38). A culture of professional learning in high schools is a rare phenomenon at this time.

Maxwell and Rossman (1996) stated that there are five different research purposes: (1) understanding *meaning* for participants in the study; (2) understanding the *context* within which the participants act; (3) identifying the *unanticipated* phenomena and influences and generating new grounded theories about them; (4) understanding the *process* by which events and actions take place; and (5) developing *causal* explanations. The fourth purpose, understanding the process, aligns most directly with the proposed study because, as a researcher, I have no control over events occurring at the schools. Further, the focus of the study is to discover the critical processes and practices employed by district and site leaders to effectively foster a culture of professional continuous professional learning in their high schools.

Sampling

When discussing the selection of samples for multiple case studies, Yin (2003) stated that the “simplest multiple case study would be the selection of two or more cases with exemplary outcomes in relation to some evaluation theory” (p. 52). Although this study is not accurately considered a case study given the lack of observation data, Yin’s advice applies to this study as well. The high schools and leaders chosen for this multiple site study were purposefully selected using a predetermined nomination process. Merriam (1998) suggests that “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” and “to begin purposive sampling, you must first determine what selection criteria are essential in choosing the people or site to be studied” (p. 61). The objective for selection was the identification of high schools in which a culture of professional learning had been established and in which the seated principal had been actively involved in the establishment of the process.

Sampling involved four stages. First, a sample of potential study sites was identified. Second, this initial sample was narrowed and ranked. Third, top sites of interest were specifically identified and contacted. Fourth, specific individuals (i.e., central office and high school site leaders) in each of the sites were identified to participate in the study. Each of these four phases is described here.

Stage 1—Identifying Potential Case Study Sites

Recipients of State Department of Education grants, award-winning high school principals, and nominations from university professors were used to identify potential schools for this study. Each means of identification is described here.

The State Department of Education had awarded grants to high schools to support them in their redesign efforts. As part of the National Governors' Association (NGA) Honor States Grant to Minnesota, eight Minnesota high schools received \$20,000 grants for the purpose of planning and implementing new career and technical education courses leading to industry certifications. In addition, 20 Minnesota high schools were awarded a total of \$400,000 in incentive grants for innovative model programs in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) earlier this year. These grants assist high schools in the development and implementation of innovative programs that promote improved academic achievement and successful transition from high school to postsecondary education (Minnesota Department of Education website, 2007). The researcher reviewed the list of grant recipients from 2006 to the present to generate a list of potential schools for this study. Both high schools selected for this study were Lighthouse Grant recipients. Lighthouse grants were awarded to high schools that were willing to conduct action research about their experience implementing substantive school improvements over a three-year period. The overall goal of this grant is to implement meaningful reforms that result in improved academic achievement in high schools.

The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) recognizes secondary principals for outstanding leadership and succeeding in providing high-quality learning opportunities for students. The selection criteria for being named a principal of the year includes demonstrating strengths in the following areas: (1) collaborative leadership; (2) curriculum, instruction, and assessment; and (3) personalization of the school community. A list of winners of the MASSP Principal of the Year award from the last ten years was compiled and then reviewed to discern whether those principals remained at their sites to identify potential schools for this study.

After reviewing this information, the researcher created a list of high schools that might be participants in this study based on the reputational recommendation made by two professors at the University of Minnesota. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined reputational case selection as “instances chosen on the recommendation of an expert or key informant” (p. 28). The professors selected to make these recommendations had worked extensively with schools in the State of Minnesota in their school improvement efforts. Although the goal of this recommendation process was to select ten high schools that had successfully engaged in continuous professional learning, only five high schools were identified as high schools that were actively engaged in continuous professional learning work.

Stage 2—Narrowing and Ranking the Sample

The list of potential schools to contact and invite to participate in this study were narrowed and ranked by reviewing their performance on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments—Series II (MCA-II’s). The MCA-II’s are used to determine whether

schools and districts in the State of Minnesota made adequate yearly progress toward all students being proficient in 2014. Specifically, the MCA-II results in Reading (administered during grade 10) and Math (administered in Grade 11) from the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years were reviewed. The five schools were ranked based on the amount of improvement in MCA-II scores from the 2005-2006 school year to the 2006-2007 school year in reading and math. The researcher then assigned an overall ranking that combined the overall improvement on these two assessments.

The researcher also visited the websites of all five high schools to look for evidence that the school and district were involved in continuous professional learning efforts. Specifically, I searched for information relating to (1) district and building student achievement goals, (2) ways in which student achievement data were communicated to staff, parents, and the community, and (3) for a systemic framework for continuous improvement. Potential schools for this study were ranked based on their website containing information on these three areas.

After ranking the five potential high schools for this study, the researcher reviewed and assessed the schools' demographics, geography, and general characteristics before moving to stage 3 of the sampling. The researcher, in consultation with his advisor and another committee member, decided to select two high schools for this study that were both actively involved with continuous professional learning work but had different demographic and geographic attributes.

Stage 3—Identify and Contact Selected Sites

Having selected the most desirable sites given the above process, the researcher contacted the building principals at each site to share the purpose of this study. Principals were also told why their site was selected as a possible participant and, should they agree to participate, what would be involved in this particular study (information from the participant consent forms in Appendix A was used to provide information to principals). Principals were then invited to ask questions and provided with information needed to determine whether this study was of interest and appropriate for their school. Before asking whether they were willing to participate in this study, the researcher set a timeline for getting back to each principal to determine his/her interest. The researcher also offered to make a site visit to talk with each high school's leadership team to further explain and answer questions about this study. No principal asked the researcher to meet with his/her leadership team.

Two schools initially were identified as the most advanced in terms of their current culture of professional learning. Only one of these schools (North High School-pseudonym) however, agreed to participate in the study. Given the fact that the second rated high school declined the offer to participate, the researcher invited the third ranked high school (South High School-pseudonym) to participate in this study. Leaders from this high school and district subsequently agreed to be involved.

Stage 4—Specific Sites Identified to Participate in the Study

Once two sites committed to participate in this study, principals were asked to provide the names of central office administrators (superintendent, assistant

superintendent, director of teaching and learning, etc...) who were involved with continuous improvement and professional learning work at the district level. The researcher, based on conversations with principals at both high schools, determined what central office administrators would be interviewed as part of this study. The researcher determined which teacher leaders to interview by asking participants, by way of the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) survey, to identify teacher leaders in each high school. The researcher then reviewed the list of names that were submitted through the survey and shared them with the principal to determine if the teachers identified were directly involved in continuous improvement activities at the high school and/or were members of committees that related to continuous improvement, assessment and instruction, or staff development work. Based on this information the researcher determined which teacher leaders to invite to the interview.

After identifying teacher leaders and central office administrators that had direct involvement with the continuous professional work at each high school, the researcher spoke with each of them to review the purpose and process of the study. In the North School District, I interviewed the: Superintendent, Curriculum Director, North High School Principal, and six teacher leaders. In the South School District, I interviewed the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, South High School Principal, and five teacher leaders. After being identified for this study, consent forms were given to all of these participants for their review and consideration. When the researcher made the first site visit to begin collecting data, the consent forms were presented a second time to the potential participants and a signature was requested after

the identified individuals at each high school chose to participate. Appendix A contains the consent forms for those participating in this study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Three descriptive and qualitative research methods; surveys, interviews, and documents and artifacts were used to collect data for addressing the research questions of this study. Using multiple methods enables the researcher to validate findings through multiple sources of information to provide a comprehensive picture of that which is being studied (Patton, 1990). All three types of data were collected during site visits. The researcher spent two days at each research site to gather the multiple sources of data for this study. The first visit to each site was used to introduce the researcher at a faculty meeting, explain and administer the survey, and collect various documents. The researcher used the second visit to each site to conduct the interviews. Presented in Table 3.1 below is a designation of the types of data that were collected related to each research question.

Table 3.1

Data Collected to Answer Research Questions

Research Questions	Surveys	Interviews	Documents
1. In what ways do central office and school level leaders initiate and advance a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared and Supportive Leadership (1-9) • Shared Values and Vision (10-16) • Collective Learning and Application (17-23) • Shared Personal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central office administrators • High school principal • Teacher leader/s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information shared with teachers at beginning of initiative • Memos from principals and central office administrators • Reporting forms

	<p>Practice (24-29)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive Conditions— Relationships and Structures (30-42) 		<p>for continuous professional learning meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School Improvement /Department plans • Large/Small group Faculty meeting documents • Collaboration Time Format • Teacher Leader job descriptions
<p>a. What are key targets of central and site level development work to create a culture of continuous professional learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared and Supportive Leadership (1-9) • Shared Values and Vision (10-16) • Collective Learning and Application (17-23) • Shared Personal Practice (24-29) • Supportive Conditions— Relationships and Structures (30-42) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central office administrators • High school principal • Teacher leader/s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information shared with teachers at beginning of initiative • Memos from principals and central office administrators • Reporting forms for continuous professional learning meetings • School Improvement /Department plans • Large/Small group Faculty meeting documents • Collaboration Time Format Teacher Leader job descriptions
<p>b. What development processes and practices are</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared and Supportive Leadership (1-9) • Shared Values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central office administrators • High school principal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information shared with teachers at beginning of

<p>employed by central and site leaders to foster a culture of continuous professional learning?</p>	<p>and Vision (10-16)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collective Learning and Application (17-23) • Shared Personal Practice (24-29) • Supportive Conditions— Relationships and Structures (30-42) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher leader/s 	<p>initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memos from principals and central office administrators • Reporting forms for continuous professional learning meetings • School Improvement /Department plans • Large/Small group Faculty meeting documents • Collaboration Time Format • Teacher Leader job descriptions
<p>c. How do central and site leaders interact with one another and with other school personnel to align, connect and coordinate the work of creating a culture of professional learning?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared and Supportive Leadership (1-9) • Shared Values and Vision (10-16) • Collective Learning and Application (17-23) • Shared Personal Practice (24-29) • Supportive Conditions— Relationships and Structures (30-42) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central office administrators • High school principal • Teacher leader/s 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information shared with teachers at beginning of initiative • Memos from principals and central office administrators • Reporting forms for continuous professional learning meetings • School Improvement /Department plans • Large/Small group Faculty meeting documents • Collaboration Time Format

Surveys

Surveys were administered to all licensed staff in each high school with the intent of assessing the perceptions about the school's principal and staff based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community. Survey research is deemed highly significant for this study for several reasons. First, surveys are an efficient way to collect data. Second, because "questionnaires can be administered anonymously; they are useful for collecting information on sensitive matters...Knowing that their responses are anonymous encourages respondents to be truthful" (Patten, 2001, p. 2).

The Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA), created by Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman (2003), is intended to assess perceptions about the school principal and staff based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community proposed by Hord (2004). The dimensions are: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. The PLCA incorporates Hord's (2004) five dimensions but separates the supportive conditions dimension into two categories, supportive relationships and supportive structures.

The PLCA has undergone several tests to determine validity and reliability. To determine construct validity a panel of seventy-six educational experts was conducted to determine the importance and relevance of each instrument item. The next phase of testing included a field test of the PLCA in schools to assess their perceptions about the five dimensions of a professional learning community. Finally, a factor analysis was conducted to provide evidence of construct validity that resulted in the instrument yielded

satisfactory internal consistency (Alpha coefficient) reliability for the factored subscales (Oliver et al., 2003).

The PLCA was administered to all licensed staff at each high school through an online resource, [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). The PLCA was used to collect data to assist the researcher in answering the questions defined at the beginning of this chapter. The PLCA was slightly altered for this particular study in two ways. First, questions that mentioned stakeholders were altered so that only a reference to principals and staff were made. This study was not concerned about collecting information about stakeholders' perceptions other than immediate school staff. Second, the researcher used a five-point Likert scale instead of the four-point Likert scale. The researcher made this change so that respondents could make a neutral choice, assuming a "neutral" perception was a valid option for survey respondents. The survey is located in Appendix B.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow for both emerging and predetermined data collection and qualitative data analysis. This process gave the researcher the flexibility to respond to various situations, emerging themes, and new ideas in the course of the interview. The interviews took place at the respective work sites of the teachers, principals, and central office administrators interviewed. Merriam (1998) states that the reasons we interview are to obtain what normally cannot be directly observed and to get a true sense of how people view their participation in the context of this study. "It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (Merriam, 1998, p. 72).

Three interview protocols were developed for use in this study, one for central office leaders, one for the high school principal, and one for the high school teacher leaders. All of the protocols were constructed in a parallel manner, meaning they each target similar content areas: information about the participant, why and how movement toward professional learning occurred, the specific forms in which learning occurred, key individuals in the process, key supportive conditions, and overall information about the process, practices, and outcomes. The central office leader and principal interviews were individual interviews. The teacher leader interviews were conducted in a group interview format.

Each interview protocol was piloted with a person of the respective role in a site not included in this study. Pilot interviewees were asked to make suggestions for clarifying, refining, and/or sequencing questions. This resulted in a few changes to the interview protocol, including specific follow up prompts on questions that related to leadership at each site and making sure I received detailed descriptions of how staff in each site came together to learn. One of the pilot interviews was recorded so that the researcher could identify areas for improving interview technique, such as pausing, paraphrasing, and probing. As a result of the pilot process, the researcher focused on pausing and asking identified probing or follow-up questions when the interviewee did not fully respond the initial interview question. The interview protocols are located in Appendix C.

Documents and Artifacts

Documents and artifacts are available materials that provide a source of evidence from which the researcher finds meaning related to study research questions (Eisner, 1998). Patton states that “documents prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing” (p. 294). Prior to site visits, information such as demographics, leadership structure and positions, number of district schools, etc... was collected for each high school and district site. This was done to pre-determine what specific and relevant documents should be collected when the actual site visits were made.

During site visits, the following documents were gathered: information shared with teachers at beginning of initiative, memos from principals and central office administrators, reporting forms for continuous professional learning meetings, school and department (PLC) improvement plans, SMART goals, large and small group faculty meeting handouts, collaboration time format and expectations, and teacher leader job descriptions. Analyzing these documents was important because they “ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p. 126). Artifacts also gave the researcher hard copies of data that provides evidence of what was valued, focused on, and structured to support movement toward professional learning in each high school.

Data, Management, and Analysis

A plan for analyzing and managing the data was devised prior to collecting data because, without it, “the data can be unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed. Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating” (Merriam, 1998, p.162). The overarching goal of the data analysis for this study was to identify patterns in the data about what leaders from multiple levels in a system have done to foster a culture of continuous professional learning. Merriam (1998) stated that one way to obtain a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated is to combine observations with interviews and document analysis.

An important step in analyzing survey, interview, and document analysis data involves coding of the information gathered. The following codes were assigned to data based on the research question and survey, interview and document analysis content:

- Information about interviewee (Teacher Leader-TL, Principal-P, Central Office Administrator-CO)
- Shared and supportive leadership-SSL
- Shared values and vision-SVV
- Collective learning and application-CLA
- Shared personal practice-SPP, and
- Supportive conditions-SC

For each high school, the first step in the analysis of data was to analyze the survey data following the advice of Merriam (1998) and Patton (2002) on how to

organize and refine the data simultaneously as it is collected. The survey was monitored through the surveymonkey.com website. After each school completed the survey, the survey website was closed and the data were downloaded into a Microsoft Excel file.

Background data obtained from the survey is presented via descriptive statistics. Specifically, the mean, mode, and standard deviation were reported for each of the five dimensions found on the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) created by Oliver, Hipp, & Huffman, and (2003). Modes, means, and standard deviations for each site are reported in the survey results tables located in Appendix D and E. The open-ended questions were coded and then organized thematically. The summary of each high school's open-ended questions can be found in Chapters Four and Five.

Interviews are one of the most important sources of information for descriptive site-based studies (Merriam, 1998). Separate, but parallel interview protocols were developed for the teachers, principals, and central office administrators involved in this study. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed to create verbatim documents of the complete set of interviewee responses. Once transcribed, each interview was coded according to the main study themes (identified previously). Once patterns were identified significant categories, themes, and findings were discerned and coded such as: shared decision-making, teacher leadership, and significant events that created a reason for changes in each building were coded.

After analyzing survey and interview data a document and artifact analysis was conducted on those documents (identified previously) that were collected. After assessing the authenticity and nature of the documents obtained in this study a systematic

procedure was used to code and organize them (Merriam, 1998). During this phase of the analysis, the data obtained from documents and artifacts were coded according to the main study themes and emergent themes discerned after reviewing the survey and interview data. A great advantage in using documentary material is its stability due to the fact that the presence of an investigator does not alter what is being analyzed (Merriam, 1998).

The final intensive level of coding of the data set within each high school site was done after all of the data was collected. During this phase, all data including survey statistics, interview transcripts and notes, and an analysis of documents was compiled so that they were easily retrieved and scrutinized.

The constant comparative method for data analysis was used to search for patterns between the two high schools participating in this study. This stage of the data analysis entailed reviewing data across the two cases studies to identify key findings relevant to both sites participating in this study. The constant comparative method provides an analytical process for “generating a theory that is integrated, consistent, plausible, [and] close to data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1003). The purpose is to systematically generate a substantive theory that emerges inductively from the data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe four parts in using the constant comparative method:

- (1) The researcher will compare previously coded data at the two sites with the intent to begin to generate theoretical constructs evident across all sites;

- (2) Integrating individual site incidents with multi-site incidents with the intent of forming a substantive theory that emerges as the different categories and properties within the categories become integrated;
- (3) The delimiting of the theory where the analyst discovers underlying commonalities between categories and identifies a more focused group of higher-level conceptual categories;
- (4) When the researcher is convinced that the emerging analytic framework is complete, she forms a systematic substantive theory about the events, processes, or changes as they relate to organizations, positions, and social interactions.

After the data were analyzed, a descriptive study narrative was developed in order to offer a descriptive illumination of the successful continuous professional learning processes and leadership practices used in these cases and their uniqueness (Patton, 2002). The descriptive study was written in a manner that dedicates an individual chapter for each high school examined in this study. Chapters Four and Five will present respective findings for each of the high schools examined in this study. In addition, these chapters will describe each high school's journey, in chronological order, to becoming an organization that fosters continuous professional learning. Chapter Six summarizes the key findings across both high schools and suggests implications for practice, policy, and research.

Methodological Integrity

To have any effect on either the practice or the theory of education, studies must be rigorously conducted and must offer insights and conclusions that ring true to readers,

educators, and other researchers (Merriam, 1998). Numerous steps were taken to ensure that the research presented from this multi-site descriptive study is valid and reliable. Validity and reliability are associated with the trustworthiness of the data, which is related to the suitability of the research design, methodology, data analysis, and the logical connections that can be made between the data and the findings (Merriam, 1998).

As emphasized previously, this multi-site study involved the use of multiple sources of evidence. Triangulation of data, as defined by Merriam (1998), means “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (p. 204). Triangulation of data offers one way to enhance internal validity (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation for this study was achieved by using the three data collection methods that each drew on different data sources. The surveys yielded data from teachers and principals. The interviews drew data from key leaders. The documents drew data from many and various written sources.

External validity is concerned with the problem of knowing if the findings of one study are generalizable to other situations (Merriman, 1998; Yin, 2003). Merriam (1998) states that in “qualitative research a single case or small nonrandom sample is selected precisely *because* the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many” (p. 208). While this perspective suggests that the findings from this study cannot be generalized to a larger population of schools involved in continuous improvement, Merriam (1998) suggests the idea of reader generalizability. Reader generalizability involves “leaving the extent to which a study’s findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 211). It is the

reader of this study who will have to determine if they fit their particular high school. For example, this study represents a small sample of high school teachers and principals along with central office administrators. While I was able to develop a framework from my findings, they will not necessarily be generalizable to all situations. The findings will, however, offer a useful framework to guide decisions, determine training, and define essential skills for leaders of high schools and district in their efforts to create cultures that engage in continuous professional learning.

Reliability refers to the extent to which the findings of this study can be replicated (Merriam, 1998). Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Merriam, 1998) state that instead of focusing on the traditional definition of reliability, researchers should focus on dependability and consistency. Rather than demand that outside researchers obtain the same results, researchers should be more focused on whether or not the data collected make sense (Merriam, 1998). Triangulation of data was used to ensure that results were reliable.

Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to discover the development processes and leadership practices employed by school district and school site leaders who had been involved in the development of continuous professional learning in high schools. By implementing a multi-site descriptive study design that involved multiple data collection methods and sources the researcher gathered sufficient breadth and depth of information to yield a framework to guide the development of similar cultures in other high schools.

Chapter 4-South High School

South High School (pseudonym) was one of two sites where I conducted my research for this study. South High School is part of a public school district, which is located in a third ring semi-rural area of an upper Midwest metropolitan area. The South Public School District serves all or part of eight communities, which are a mixture and rural and suburban areas. The South Public School District is comprised of two primary schools, one middle school, and one high school, and enrolls approximately 2,250 students in kindergarten through grade twelve. The South Public School District teaching staff is highly educated and experienced, with seventy-five percent of their teachers holding at least a master's degree.

The South Public School District has been among the state's top performing school districts on standardized tests for five consecutive years. The South Public School District was one of four school districts in a large Metro county that saw 100% of its schools meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act in 2007. South Public School District student scores are among the highest on the state tests in math, reading, and writing, and they regularly earn recognition for high achievement in both academics and the arts.

South High School has a student enrollment of approximately 950 students. Of those 950 students, ninety-five percent are Caucasian, two percent are Hispanic, two percent are African-American, one percent are Asian, and less than one percent are American Indian. In addition, thirteen percent of South High School students qualify for

free and reduced price lunch, twelve percent qualify for special education services, and one percent of students are defined as limited English proficient.

South High School is a student-centered comprehensive school where high expectations are the norm and academic achievement is honored as students gain the skills they need to move on to their next stage in life, whether they choose post-secondary education or the workforce. Students who want to earn college credit while in high school can choose from seven Advanced Placement courses and a College in the Schools Spanish course. Students may also participate in the Post-Secondary Enrollment Option program, which allows students to earn college credit while continuing with high school.

In addition to administering the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) at South High School, I also interviewed: the Superintendent of South Public School District, the high school principal of South High School, the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, and five teacher leaders at South High School. The interviews were approximately an hour in length and were conducted at each individual's work site.

The interviewees

The superintendent has spent his entire thirteen year educational career in the South Public School District. He started his educational career as a middle school geography and reading teacher before becoming an intern principal at the South Public School District middle school. Soon after this intern experience the superintendent became the South Public School District middle school assistant principal and quickly moved into the South Public School District middle school principal role. After being

encouraged by his mentor, he became the South Public School District Superintendent in 2004.

The South High School Principal came to South High School sixteen years ago as a guidance counselor, teacher and coach. After being at South High School for three years, the high school principal was hired as the activities director. While performing his duties as an activities director the high school principal earned his administrative licensure that gave him the opportunity to become the South High School principal in the 2002-2003 school year. The high school principal is now in his seventh year as the South High Principal.

The Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning has been in the South Public School District since 1990, which is when he was hired as a middle school math teacher at the South Public School District middle school. After two years at the middle school, the assistant superintendent moved to South High School where he taught math for twelve years. During this time, the assistant superintendent earned his Master's Degree, which prompted him to look for learning and leadership opportunities within the South Public School District. During the assistant superintendent's last two years as a math teacher he actually taught math part-time and spent the remaining part of his day coordinating state testing, staff development, and curriculum activities for the district. The School Board then decided to create a Director of Teaching and Learning position that oversaw the areas of curriculum, staff development, testing and assessment, and title programming. In 2006, the Director of Teaching and Learning position was reclassified

as an Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning but continued to be held by the same person who is the current Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning.

I also interviewed five highly respected teacher leaders at South High School. These five teacher leaders had various teaching backgrounds but, like the North High School teacher leaders, had very similar ideology when it came to putting students first. This group of teachers lived the South High School values of respect, integrity, scholarship, tradition, and community.

The Story

South High School's journey to create a culture of continuous professional learning started in 2003. It is important to note that superintendent, the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, and the high school principal all started in their current positions during the 2003-2004 time period. In 2003, the superintendent and the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning started talking about the need to do something different in the South Public School District as continuous improvement and teacher leadership were not major parts of the culture of the district.

According to the superintendent and the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, a major reason that a shift in thinking started to occur in the South Public School District was due to the accountability of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and competition from nearby districts. The assistant superintendent for teaching and learning stated that, "if the South Public School District is going to flourish and survive, the staff needed to embrace change and believe that they could move from good to great." The assistant superintendent for teaching and learning also shared that the district was

“bouncing all over the place” when he started in his central office role. “Whatever the State handed to us...we just jumped. We jumped and jumped and jumped...”

Another key factor, according to the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, that led to a shift in the culture of the South Public School District was the fact that the Profile of Learning sent “everyone over the edge...” It was a key moment in our district’s journey because it made us say...wait a minute, we need to control our own destiny and not let the State dictate everything we do... “ The assistant superintendent for teaching and learning stated that this message from central office resonated throughout the district and was the impetus to start changing the way South High School engaged in continuous improvement. A teacher shared this same opinion and told me that the reason for change had much to do with “the frustration about mandates from the State”. This teacher leader went on to say that most staff felt as if “every day someone was telling us what to do and how to do it. We reached a point where we wanted to tell ourselves what to do. We wanted to start having conversations that revolved around what was best for students.”

It was clear during my interviews that both the superintendent and the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning shared an enthusiasm for continuous improvement. Early in my interview with the superintendent he stated that what fires him up is “figuring out how we can improve the learning process for our kids.” The superintendent purposefully created the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning position so that there was a “full time person that only focused on teaching and learning rather than a combination of teaching and learning, business, and operations.” This was

obviously a good match as the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning started out his interview by saying, “what really brings me excitement is the school improvement process and studying what successful schools look like.” This was the beginning of a five-year journey to developing a culture of continuous professional learning and improvement at South High School.

2003-2004

According to those I interviewed, one of the critical professional learning opportunities that helped set the stage for a five-year journey was a Quality Leadership by Design-Strategic, Measureable, Attainable, Research-based, Time-bound (SMART) Goal conference. This learning opportunity helped provide a framework to write goals in a systemic way across the district.

Another key step in South High School’s journey was the fact that a well-respected teacher leader was participating in an educational leadership master’s program at a local university. As a part of this teacher leader’s final project, she studied the benefits of having school improvement teams at the building level. This teacher leader set up a meeting with the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning to share her study. It was at this point when administration and teacher leaders started to partner to develop a new culture of professional learning.

A teacher leader reported that she shared her ideas about building improvement teams with the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning who responded by saying, ‘the administrative team was just discussing the idea of school improvement teams and how it relates to a national presenter’s professional learning communities

(PLC) framework.” The teacher leader then shared that she also was interested in the PLC framework as it was an integral piece of the research she had collected for her final project.

As a result of this discussion, the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning proposed that a team of people should attend a PLC Institute conference in the summer of 2004. This team was purposefully selected and included the following representatives: superintendent, director of teaching and learning, special education coordinator, and an administrator and teacher leaders from every building in the district.

According to everyone I interviewed, this PLC Institute was crucial to getting the PLC framework started. The high school principal stated, “Staff and administrators became energized and focused on the PLC model as a way to increase student achievement. In addition, staff realized that PLCs could help provide professional development, growth, and opportunities to empower staff.”

A direct result of attending this particular PLC Institute was the desire to create School Improvement Teams at each building in the district. Even though the creation of these teams was a step forward, the people I interviewed all agreed that it was challenging to share all of the information that was learned at the PLC conference with staff members who did not attend.

2005-2006

Staying focused on the PLC framework and building capacity in individual school improvement teams were the primary goals in the South Public School District for 2005-2006. The district continued to send small teams of teacher leaders to PLC Institutes

during the summer in both 2005 and 2006. In addition to these learning opportunities, the school improvement teams worked on developing school improvement plans by engaging in data analysis and asking questions like:

- What is our greatest area of need?
- How do we move forward with the PLC model?
- What should we focus on?
- How do we include people from all departments?

Things were going well during this time frame but there was a general consensus amongst administrators and teachers that “it didn’t make sense to spend funds on sending a handful of people to PLC Institutes every summer.” When talking to others about this situation, the high school principal stated, “who are we kidding? We need our whole district to hear the same PLC message. Let’s quit trying to piecemeal this...” So, administrators and teacher leaders asked the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning if it would be possible to bring the national presenter to the South Public School District.

The assistant superintendent for teaching and learning was willing to see if bringing the national presenter to the South Public School District was a possibility. After effectively communicating the necessity for this professional learning opportunity to the Board, the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning was given permission to invite the national education consultant to the South Public School District in December of 2006. The fact that the Board and central office administration supported this request was well received by administrators and

teacher leaders. The high school principal stated, “In my thirty plus years of education, having the national education consultant come and speak to the entire district was the best thing I’ve ever seen done for a district. It was powerful...it galvanized and energized our staff...it gave everybody the ability to use the same language and terminology...” A teacher leader stated, “the all-district PLC presentation helped everyone get on board... continuous improvement finally made sense to everyone. It was such a turnaround from some chaos to—yes, there is a reason for doing this and it makes sense!” Another teacher leader stated, “we all came together, listened, and worked...I think this was the first time that people really felt, as a collective group, that we had an understanding of what direction we were heading...”

2007

After the national presenter’s PLC presentation in December of 2006, the South Public School District created a PLC Taskforce that consisted of approximately twenty staff and was balanced between administration and teachers. This group was key, as they needed to maintain the momentum that was created by having the national educational consultant in the district.

According to people I interviewed, one challenge this taskforce faced early on was working with the School Board to convince them that implementing PLCs was the right direction to take, changes needed to be made to the school day, and a shift needed to occur in order to provide collaboration time for teachers during the school day. After numerous meetings and engaging stakeholders in the district, the PLC Taskforce was able

to get School Board approval to change the daily schedule so that teachers could engage in forty-five minutes of collaboration time every Tuesday morning starting in the 2007-2008 school year. Through the course of my interviews, numerous people stated that the School Board, administration, and teachers did a good job of communicating with the community in regard to the need for PLCs and the necessity to change the daily/weekly schedule to allow collaboration time for the staff.

The Last Two Years

After establishing PLCs and dedicated collaboration time at South High School, the school improvement team turned its focus to increasing student achievement. A main reason for this focus was the expectations of the superintendent, the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, and the high school principal. When talking about the vision in the South Public School District, the superintendent shared the following, “The first step in defining a vision is knowing where you want to end up. Once you have that end point...you can deliver. I think a mistake some administrators make too often is not clearly defining expectations for staff and a process to meet those expectations...this is the ‘tight’ part. Too often we don’t give the tight part and we keep it ‘loose’. When you do that, you end up with loose...and when this happens you end up with pockets of success but it’s not systemic.”

The superintendent has clearly set a vision for increasing student achievement using PLCs as a vehicle for staff to engage in powerful dialogue. The superintendent mentioned that staff can be collaborating extremely well but, without an overall vision, it doesn’t help move the district forward. He knows that organizing this work is difficult

and time-consuming work for administrators. “As an administrator, you have to be organized and you have to ‘set the table’. This is what the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning does in his role as the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning.”

It was clear when I talked with the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning that he knows it is his responsibility to help “set the table” for administrators and teachers. He stated that what he tries to do is to “set up situations for teachers to work together where there is no reason or excuse to not succeed. I attempt to provide the right data and whatever background information that is needed so they can have a productive conversation. Everything is there so they can move forward...it’s a very purposeful act on my part...”

The assistant superintendent for teaching and learning also shared that he and the high school principal work closely together. “My job is to bring important research, data, and best practice information to the high school principal and to work with him to carry out the expectations of PLCs.” The assistant superintendent for teaching and learning mentioned “there is strong administrative leadership at South High School in addition to a particularly stellar teacher leader.” According to the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, he works as a team member with the high school principal and teacher leader on “communicating clearly about the outcome of PLC collaboration time. Communicating the purpose of PLC expectations and reminding staff of the big picture is part of what all three of us do together.”

In regard to current leadership at South High School, the high school principal stated that “department and teacher leaders are a critical piece of the leadership team, not only for students, but for the welfare of our curriculum and the processes that go into creating a successful learning experience.” Teacher leaders also reported that both South High School administrators have an “open door” policy and that everyone is comfortable walking into their offices to discuss any subject. As the high school principal stated, “as administrators, we do everything we can to not say no to a good idea. Our staff knows that we are flexible, open, and willing to embrace new concepts.”

Current Continuous Improvement Process

Currently, the South High School staff use PLC collaboration time to work on department SMART goals that directly relate to school and district goals. As mentioned previously, South High School engages in PLC collaboration time for forty-five minutes every Tuesday. PLCs are given expectations on what needs to be discussed during these meetings and understand that PLC meeting notes must be turned in on a weekly basis. In addition to these expectations, all departments must submit a SMART goal that is approved by the administration.

Most recently at South High School, department PLCs have been writing common assessments and defining essential learner outcomes (ELOs) for their classes. According to the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, “the common assessment piece has pushed the high school to the next level. The success we are experiencing right now is due to the conversations taking place on why and how we are choosing to teach certain ELOs.”

These conversations about assessments and instruction were not happening prior to the PLC framework. One teacher leader stated, “As liberating as it is to be able to close your door and say ‘I am the master of my room...’ it is also pretty lonely.” The PLC framework provided the structure for staff that allowed them to start having conversations about data and instruction. One teacher leader explained just how far the Social Studies department had come in having high-level conversations: “Over the last two weeks, the Social Studies department has been discussing the fact that we have advanced classes but none of us really knew what that meant. We didn’t know what our instructional goals were. Up until the creation of PLCs, this had been left up to individual teachers to decide...”

During the teacher leader interviews, there was a general consensus in regard to the benefit of a “generational shift” that took place at South High School recently and how this shift was positively affecting the amount of dialogue taking place in the PLCs. One teacher leader shared that, “the younger generation of teachers communicate differently than the older generation. These generation x’ers and millennials want to talk...the PLC framework plays directly into the strengths of this generation.”

It was evident in my interviews that shared and supportive leadership was a key factor in the culture that exists at South High School. A teacher leader stated that, “it is such a good feeling to know you have someone to turn to. If I have a problem with my curriculum, I know I can go to any teacher to ask them for help. I’m also comfortable enough to go to any administrator and ask them what I could do differently without worrying about them judging me.” The high school principal stated that he and the

assistant principal focus on the “relationship aspect of their roles and continually strive to form positive connections with students, teachers, staff, and parents.” Furthermore, the high school principal pointed out that in addition to great teacher leaders at South High School, they “have a number of non-licensed staff and administrative assistants who have an influence on the positive culture of our building. They have input and we value and give ownership to their input because they have experience, wisdom, and insight into relationships with students and parents that some of our licensed and administrative staff don’t have.”

Findings from School-wide Survey

As part of this study, I administered a Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA), created by Oliver, Hipp and Huffman (2003), to teachers and principals through an online resource, [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). The PLCA is designed to assess perceptions about the school’s principal and staff based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community (shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions) proposed by Hord (2004). Of forty-eight possible South High School teachers and administrators, twenty responded to the survey for a 42% response rate. Participants were asked to read forty-two survey items and indicate their level of agreement with each. A five point rating scale was employed with 1 designated as “strongly disagree”, 2 as “disagree”, 3 as “neither agree or disagree”, 4 as “agree”, and 5 as “strongly agree”. Modes, means, and standard deviations are reported in the survey results table located in Appendix E.

In the area of “Shared and Supportive Leadership”, there were nine survey items, all of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range. Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 3.60 to a high mean rating of 4.05. The modal score was 4 for all items except one item had a modal score of 5. The three highest rated items were:

- The principal incorporates advice from staff to make decisions (4.05);
- Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff (4.00); and
- Decision-making takes place through committee’s and communication across grade and subject areas (4.00).

In the area of “Shared Values and Vision”, there were seven survey items, five of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range and two of which had a mean rating in the “neither agree or disagree” range. Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 3.25 to a high mean rating of 3.85. The modal score was 4 for all items. The three highest rated items were:

- The staff share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning (3.85);
- A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff (3.75);
and
- Policies and programs are aligned to the school’s vision (3.65).

In the area of “Collective Learning and Application”, there were seven survey items, five of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range and two of which had a mean rating in the “neither agree or disagree” range. Specifically, means

varied among items from a low mean of 3.35 to a high mean rating of 3.90. The modal score was 4 for all items except for one item with a modal score of 3. The four highest rated items were:

- School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning (3.90);
- Professional development focuses on teaching and learning (3.80);
- The staff works together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work (3.70); and
- Collegial relationships exist among staff that reflects commitment to school improvement efforts (3.70).

In the area of “Shared Personal Practice”, there were six survey items, three of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range and three of which had a mean rating in the “neither agree or disagree” range. Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 2.80 to a high mean rating of 4.05. The modal score was 4 for three items, 3 for two items, and one item had a modal score of 2. The three highest rated items were:

- The staff informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning (4.05);
- Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices (3.70); and
- Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring (3.45).

In the area of “Supportive Conditions” dimension (both relationships and structures), there were thirteen survey items, seven of which had mean item ratings

in the “agree” range, five of which had mean item ratings in the “neither agree or disagree range”, and one of which had mean ratings in the “disagree” range.

Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 2.30 to a high mean rating of 4.20. The modal score was 4 for all items. The five highest rated items were:

- Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect (4.20);
- A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks (4.05);
- Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work (3.80);
- The proximity of department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues (3.80); and
- Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff (3.80).

As shown in Table 4.1, there is some variation in terms of the extent of agreement with statements across the five areas in the survey, with shared and supportive leadership showing the greatest number of items in agreement, although no item means reached the point at which “strong agreement” could be claimed. Looking across ratings for all items on the survey revealed a range of 2.30 to 4.20 for average mean ratings. The highest average ratings were reported above. In fact, there were only three items with a mean average rating below 3.00. The lowest three items on the survey were in response to the following questions: (Item 35 - fiscal resources are available for professional development (2.30); Item 24 -

Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement (2.80); and Item 25 the staff provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.

Table 4.1.
Number of mean scores in each response category by survey section.

Section	Strongly Disagree(1) (1.0-1.4)	Disagree (2) (1.5-2.4)	Neutral (3) (2.5-3.4)	Agree (4) (3.5-4.4)	Strongly Agree (5) (4.5-5.0)
Shared and Supportive Leadership	0	0	0	9	0
Shared Values and Vision	0	0	2	5	0
Collective Learning and Application	0	0	2	5	0
Shared Personal Practice	0	0	3	3	0
Supportive Conditions (Relationships and Structures)	0	1	5	7	0

Overall Findings from the Interviews

As part of my interviews, I asked each individual and group what the three most powerful influences were on initiating and advancing the culture of continuous professional learning that was present at South High School. The groups had similar responses and had a hard time narrowing the list down to three things.

The high school principal shared that an administrator attempting to create this type of culture needs: (1) Teacher-leaders are the single most powerful influence on our

culture. We've been blessed—blessed with wonderful teacher-leaders, (2) Central Office leadership. They truly have to be committed, have a vision and have a passion for that vision, (3) Building level administration; we find the ways and means to support the vision and the creativity that others bring to the table. The superintendent shared the following needs that are necessary to make this type of transition to a learning environment in high schools: (1) Purpose... A purpose of, "Why are we here?" (2) Relationships, (3) Strategic planning that helps create measurable steps that allows staff to attain the vision. Teacher leaders stressed that the following were critical to their journey of becoming a high school that embraces continuous professional learning: (1) Staff buy in—you have to want to do it, (2) Giving everyone the big picture and all the different pieces from the beginning, not just little groups of people and expecting them to bring everybody else along, but making sure you start small and you explain the process as you go and build on it from there, (3) Having role models of other staff, always being a continuous learner just sets the expectation that, "Yup, that's what we do here and you're expected to do the same." It kind of gets back to that with the interview process—setting that tone, (4) The leadership is supportive, facilitating... it's not top down, (5) Teacher leader—a core group—five or six that really know a lot and continually stating "This will work." The assistant superintendent of teaching and learning stated the following when asked to list the critical things needed to create this type of culture: (1) Educating staff in whatever process you're doing...don't cheat on that. Make sure you're including all your staff in opportunities to learn about the improvement process, (2) You need effective leadership. You need leadership at the building that has a vision for the future. You have

to know where you want to land in three years, in five years, (3) Culture, culture, culture... I never thought about that ever in any of my graduate work, but now know how important it is. You have to understand the culture you're currently in and then you need to be able to know what to do to alter this culture...to transform it. Personally, if you don't have your hands around that culture piece and know what you need to do to change it, nothing's going to change. I think that's why high schools are the toughest nuts to crack with reform and transformation...because the culture of isolation is so entrenched.

Findings from Document Analysis

Finally, I analyzed the following documents at South High School: (1) memos from principals and central office administrators, (2) reporting forms for continuous professional learning meetings, (3) school improvement plans, and (4) department SMART goals. The researcher used the following codes, which were based on Hord's (2004) five dimensions of a professional learning community (shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions) to review all of the documents collected:

- Shared and supportive leadership-SSL
- Shared values and vision-SVV
- Collective learning and application-CLA
- Shared personal practice-SPP, and
- Supportive conditions-SC

After reviewing the South High School SMART (Strategic-Measurable-Attainable-Research based-Timebound) Goal template and SMART Goal examples from

South High School, the researcher was able to determine that these documents served as what a leading education consultant refers to as a “tight-loose” structure Appendix E. These documents provided the framework and expectations for everyone’s work as it related to continuous improvement and teacher collaboration. This also directly related to the assistant superintendents comments of “setting the table” for staff so that purposeful collaboration is taking place in the time provided. These specific documents were given the code of CLA-Collective learning and application. Reviewing these documents allowed the researcher to make correlations between what was found in the survey results and heard in the various interviews that were conducted.

Summary

I came away with a strong sense that the South High Staff were united and truly cared about the students and parents that called South High School home. They are still on their journey to becoming a high school that has truly changed their culture to that of one based on high levels of continuous professional learning.

Chapter 5-North High School

North High School (pseudonym) was one of two sites where I conducted my research for this study. North High is part of a public school district that is located in a first ring suburb of an upper Midwest City. The District serves 10,000 students and employs more than 1,400 staff members. The district includes six elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, one alternative school and an area learning center.

North High School has a student enrollment of approximately 1,500 students. Of those 1,500 students, eight-two percent are Caucasian, seven percent are Asian, six percent are African-American, three percent are Hispanic, and two percent are American Indian. In addition, twenty-four percent of North High School students qualify for free and reduced price lunch, ten percent qualify for special education services, and three percent of students are defined as limited English proficient.

North High School is also a Quality Compensation “Q-comp” school district as approved and designated by the State. All publicly funded school districts in the State can submit an application to receive an additional \$260 per student to implement a continuous improvement plan that meets the five components as mandated by law. Those components include: career ladder-advancement options, job-embedded professional development, teacher evaluation, performance pay, and an alternative salary schedule. School districts that qualify and are approved receive the additional funds and often referred to as Q-Comp school districts.

In addition to administering the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA) at North High, I also interviewed: the Superintendent of the School District, the Principal of the High School, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, and six teacher leaders from the High School. The interviews were approximately an hour in length and were conducted at each individual's work site. This first part of this chapter captures a chronological progressive story about how North High School became a school that created and sustained a culture of collaborative continuous learning while the second part of chapter presents findings from the school wide survey that was administered to every teacher and administrator.

The Interviewees

The superintendent's career with the North Public School District spans thirty-two years with experience at all school levels, including positions as school psychologist, special education director, executive director of curriculum, deputy superintendent, and superintendent. The superintendent served as the deputy superintendent for eight years before being named the North Public School District Superintendent in July of 2007.

The North High School Principal has spent her entire career in the North Public School District. The high school principal completed her student teaching experience in the district, which led to her being offered a special education position in the North Public School District. The high school principal served in various special education teaching roles at both the junior high and high school levels for approximately eighteen years before becoming an assistant principal at North High School. After serving as the North High assistant principal for five years, the high school principal was named the

North High principal in 1998. As recognition for her exceptional leadership as a principal, she was named the State High School Principal of the Year in 2005. This award recognizes outstanding school leaders who succeed in providing high-quality learning opportunities for students and for exemplary contributions made to the profession.

The Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the North Public School District has had many varied experiences as an educator that ground her current role in the North Public Schools. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction taught at the elementary and middle school levels in a nearby public school district for the first twenty-two years of her educational career. After this experience, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction worked for the state education agency in an upper Midwest State during the development and implementation of that State's graduation standards. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction joined the North Public School District in 1999.

I also interviewed six highly respected teacher leaders from North High School who were nominated for participation in this study by their high school peers (discussed previously in Chapter 3). These six teacher leaders had various teaching backgrounds but had very similar ideology when it came to putting students first. This group of teachers seemed to live the North High motto of "Pride in Excellence" by personalizing their instruction to meet the individual needs of their diverse student population.

The Story

North High School's journey to becoming a high school that has embedded continuous professional learning into the culture of the school started in 1998. Coincidentally, this is approximately the period of time when the superintendent became

deputy superintendent and the current high school principal was named the principal at North High School. Both the superintendent and the high school principal had been reading about the topic of professional learning communities (PLCs) and the power of teacher leadership back in 1998. Since the superintendent and the high school principal had been professional colleagues for quite some time, they were able to engage in dialogue about what they were learning about PLCs and how this concept of collaboration could change the North Public School District. It was during this time that it became clear to the superintendent that the district “needed to look at doing things in a different way.” Specifically, the superintendent stated that the district “needed to start finding a way to get teachers involved in meaningful-job related discussion about students and performance.” The foundation of the superintendent’s idea was based on the question “how do we get better on a daily basis” as professionals?

At the same time the superintendent was thinking about a new direction for the district, the high school principal was reading about and participating in professional development in regard to professional learning communities. After attending a PLC Conference that featured a leading national presenter, the high school principal knew that “this was just what her staff needed...this is just what we were trying to do...” The idea that teacher leadership was key to any change in improvement efforts at the district and building level was the first step in what turned out to be a ten-year change process for North High School.

To move the district and North High School to a model based on continuous professional learning, the superintendent knew he needed to come up with resources. The

superintendent decided that “rather than having professional development funds in all of these small little pots (scattered between schools and central office) he needed to consolidate as much of that money as possible.” Once this was accomplished, the superintendent connected with the high school principal and stated, “Ok...now where do we go from here?” After determining what resources were available to initiate the paradigm shift to becoming a district focused on continuous professional learning, the superintendent and the high school principal quickly realized that it would be difficult to make this shift without a change in the leadership structures that existed in the district.

Like many districts and high schools across the state at the time this change process started, leadership and decision-making opportunities rested in the hands of a few individuals, almost always administrators with, perhaps, a few selected teachers. One teacher leader described the nature of “teacher leadership” at the building level, prior to the paradigm shift, as having “department chairs who were responsible for ordering textbooks, making instructional choices, worrying about school climate, tardies, hats, et” Increasing student achievement and professional learning were far from the focus of the department chairs.

Knowing that this operational leadership model existed throughout the district, the superintendent decided that to move forward with a new, shared leadership model, there needed to be a “firewall between instructional leadership and operational leadership.” To this day, these two leadership groups and the decisions they make are clearly separated. The superintendent clearly defended and believes in this separation because “those operational issues about whether kids are going to wear hats or pagers drips into and

contaminates a lot of other discussions about instruction unless we have a firewall in place...”

The process of changing the leadership model was approached with a purposeful strategy to include administrators and teachers as a team. As the superintendent shared, “it [the change process] all started at the negotiation table. I can’t emphasize enough just how important and how hard we worked on having positive, constructive relationships with the teacher’s association. There is no other way around it...it is critical!” So, this process really began by sitting down at the bargaining table with the District Education Teacher’s Association.

At the bargaining table, the superintendent and the high school principal stated, “here’s the deal...we’re facing a lot of issues—very challenging issues in our district and we don’t believe that any of us will be successful if we’re going to approach this as ‘administrators think this and teachers are operating independently thinking something else’. So, here’s the money...let’s create a model that assures a long-term, sustained way of developing quality teacher leadership and, parallel to that, developing principals that have the skills to work effectively with teacher leadership.” The superintendent and the high school principal both agree that if this discussion and good faith effort at the bargaining table did not occur that the great things currently happening at North High would not have happened. The negotiated agreement was less about the negotiated agreement than it was about the relationship that was established in the development of the initial guidelines or frameworks for leadership and decision-making.

At the negotiation table, it was decided that the buildings would “break away from the department chair leadership model.” Some buildings (teachers and administrators) were more receptive than others to consider a new way to make decisions. In general, the North High School staff was more flexible and willing to adapt to this new leadership style. In the superintendent’s opinion, “The North High School Principal was ready to go...she had just started at North High and realized that her role was to influence and persuade, not to tell, not to demand, not to dictate...”

The superintendent stated that, district-wide this was a difficult and challenging time period. It was crucial to have the teacher leadership on board with this decision-making change as they could deflect some of the anger that was present in some buildings and teacher groups. Asking buildings to designate and identify teacher leaders who were really interested in instructional leadership and operating buildings in a different ways was a paradigm-shifting event. To validate both committees and honor the negotiated agreement, these leaders were paid a stipend for their roles in improving the instructional and operational processes at North High School.

One step that the superintendent took when initiating this process to make leadership and decision-making transparent was to involve an external consultant knowledgeable about governance and policy making in public and private sectors. The consultant provided professional development focused on creating leadership and decision-making processes that were clear and inclusive. Through this work, a system that enabled the building principal to be the decision maker, within certain parameters, was created. The superintendent shared that “when they first created this structure, there

were concerns that if the principal was the decision maker and had all the power that everything would be decided from a top-down perspective. The superintendent went on to share that this feeling passed “because the principal could only make a decision based on the options that the [site level] teachers and leadership teams proposed.”

After this decision-making framework was adopted, buildings were asked to identify members who would serve on either the Site Teacher Leadership Team (STLT) or the Operations Committee. Teacher leaders stated that this leadership system grew out of a need for strong teacher leadership in the area of instructional improvement. They also shared just how crucial it was to develop a leadership system that aligned all levels of the organization—district, school, departments or grade levels within schools, teachers with same assignments or shared responsibilities (i.e., “job-alikes”). Teacher leaders who were interviewed asserted that the cultural shift to instructional leaders would not have taken place with this type of vertical and horizontal systems alignment.

Changing the leadership model required professional development for those in new roles. At the onset of this new leadership structure, all of the instructional teacher leaders (i.e., STLT’s) from every school in the district attended a week-long training at a local university. The external consultant provided training on the newly created leadership and decision-making model so that everyone was clear about his/her given role in the process. In addition, a large amount of time was spent on discussing the mission and vision of the North Public School District. Student performance data also were shared as a part of this training to ground the current reality for everyone involved.

A very important product emerged during this weeklong professional development, which was the development of a job description for the instructional leaders throughout the district (see Appendix). A major part of the job description involved the analysis of data, goal setting, and how to communicate within their departments. The high school principal challenged instructional leaders at North High by stating, “If North High is going to be the kind of school where all students are successful then you need to take the lead in making that happen!” And so the journey began.

Making the Shift

The superintendent stated that the high school principal “clearly understood that her role was to influence and persuade...” The high school principal stated that when they started this paradigm shift she didn’t even start by creating a vision statement. She told me that she couldn’t even use the “v” word due to past issues at North High that revolved round this vision building process. Instead, the high school principal talked with her staff about belief statements and constantly asked her faculty, “What do you want North High School to look like for students?” The high school principal also mentioned that she followed the advice of a leading national presenter who warns administrators to not take a year to simply develop a vision statement. The high school principal knew that she needed to forge ahead with this change process.

When I asked the superintendent what he looks for in a principal he stated that he looks for “plow horses...not show horses.” He looks for people who are servant leaders...not egoless, but have the ability to understand ‘it’s not about them’. It is about the accomplishments of those with whom they work that matters.” Finally, the

superintendent stated that he looks for principals who can provide evidence of a “willingness to lead through teachers...” The superintendent shared that the high school principal made it very clear to her staff that if North High School was going to be the best they could be then it could not be “about her doing it, it wasn’t about the assistant principal doing it, it wasn’t about the superintendent doing it—it was about teacher leaders doing it!” It was at this critical juncture that the high school principal began to shine according to the superintendent. “This type of leadership was right in her wheelhouse...she had a sense of where things needed to go and what needed to happen and that’s when she began the subtle process of influencing, persuading...inch by inch, moving the group and changing the culture of the building.”

Teacher leaders described the process of aligning all levels of the organization as a key piece when North High started its cultural shift to becoming a staff who engaged in continuous improvement and learning. One teacher leader stated, “I don’t know how much of a cultural shift could have been made at the beginning of this process if leaders were not rewarded for being STLT members.” The high school principal echoed this fact when I asked about powerful influences that helped establish a culture of continuous improvement at North High. She stated that paid instructional leaders at the beginning of this shift was critical to the change process. Paying instructional leaders enabled teacher leaders to have a voice in regard to determining what type of high school North High would become.

First Steps Toward a Culture of Continuous Improvement

The first year was difficult for instructional leaders, in part, because much of their work did not pertain to instruction. Near the end of the first year, teachers on the STLT stated, “Wait a minute, we were hired to be instructional leaders and I’m sick of talking about attendance...” The high school principal remembers yelling (to herself) “yee-haw” when she realized the teacher leaders were making the decision to focus on learning and instruction.

It was at this point that the high school principal scheduled a half-day meeting with STLT members to talk about what she learned at the national professional conference the previous summer. She suggested that the STLT should be talking about essential learner outcomes (ELOs) for classes and subjects that were offered at North High. STLT members were interested in hearing more about this idea of ELOs and agreed to have representatives from STLT attend the same national professional conference during the upcoming summer (end of year one).

The superintendent and the high school principal were in constant communication and held the same beliefs in regard to a leading national consultant’s work and creating ELOs. Near the end of the first year of STLT’s being established, the superintendent decided that the entire district would engage in a curriculum audit (to determine the curriculum scope and sequence for K-12 education) during the second year of this cultural shift to becoming a district that was focused on continuous professional learning.

During year two at North High School, the school improvement plan was not about “increasing scores” because, as the high school principal stated, “we didn’t have

any scores to use as a baseline...we didn't have any information." The result of this decision meant that the school improvement plan for year two "switched to the work that teachers needed to do in order to get to the point where they'd have the information they needed to set instructional targets." The product of this school improvement process was to complete the curriculum audit by the end of year two.

The following year (year three) STLT members turned their focus to becoming instructional leaders. The STLT members learned about instructional best practices and how to embed these strategies into the classrooms. STLT members quickly came to the conclusion that they really did not have any information to tell administrators or their fellow teachers whether instructional strategies being used in North High's classrooms were working or not. The high school principal stated that having teacher leaders come to this realization was another integral piece in the development of a continuous learning culture at North High—identification and ownership of a problem.

Given that teachers had no way of determining the impact of instructional interventions, the STLT members suggested that each teacher in every department should be involved in creating eight common assessments (combination of formative and summative assessments) during year three and four of this cultural shift to continuous professional learning. So, again, the school improvement plan was about "what teachers had to do" because a system was not yet established to determine if teachers' instructional strategies had increased student achievement or not.

After STLT members suggested this plan of action, the agreement was that every department would start the process of creating common assessments, but it was left up to

the department to determine what this process looked like. The high school principal stated that “we told everybody that they had to do this, but we let departments determine what they would do and to what extent they would do it.” In the opinion of the principal and the teacher leaders, this decision to be flexible with the timeline for creating common assessments gave departments some input and power during this time period that enabled this process to move forward.

Teacher leaders had much to say about the decision to grant flexibility in how departments approached the development of common assessments. They stated that we just could not ask faculty to “go from being isolated people in our classrooms to being totally collaborative in developing common assessments.” Teacher leaders also stated that teachers and departments “needed the room to make some bad choices on the first round of common assessments. Many departments, if not all, came to the conclusion that the data received from the first common assessments was worthless”. When the results from the first common assessments were available, teachers asked questions like “What does this information mean?” Teacher leaders went on to say that the typical response from teachers was, “I don’t know what this means...this isn’t pointing me in any direction...this data is not useful...”

After realizing that the common assessment data were not meaningful, teachers knew that they needed to do something different. At the same time, the high school principal was pushing STLT members by saying “we have to keep moving...we can’t stop here, we have to keep going”. Teacher leaders also shared that the high school principal realized and understood departments did not necessarily have to move at the

same pace. In their opinion, this decision by the high school principal was a “testimony to her leadership—her ability to differentiate throughout this process”. Another teacher leader shared that the high school principal “just wanted everybody on the train...going the same direction. She realized that some trains were going to be at different stops along the way”. It was clear to everyone that the high school principal was going to differentiate and accommodate departments and that it was permissible to be at different spots in the process of developing common assessments. The high school principal also shared that this flexibility was necessary because if she had said “all of you need to develop an end of course exam by the end of the year,” she and the STLT would have had a difficult time maintaining momentum towards their goal of becoming a culture focused on continuous improvement.

So the goal for years three and four was to have every department administer and develop at least one common assessment so that members could review the data and its implications for learning and instruction. The high school principal shared that the math and science departments jumped on board right away because “they could see a lot of things that they needed to resolve instructionally based on their data”. Other departments were making progress but at their own pace. At the end of year four, STLT members all agreed that the school improvement goal for year five would be to align the common assessments with the School Board approved outcomes. In the high school principal’s words, “we, again, had a school improvement plan based on what teachers needed to do...it is [was] a slow process”.

During year five, the high school principal shared that she had the “worst staff meeting she has ever had at North High School”. At the same time common assessment data were becoming available to departments, the high school principal engaged in a conversation with the national presenter in regard to the software program that he used to collect and analyze common assessment results. After obtaining the national presenter’s suggestions, the high school principal decided to purchase the same software program for North High School in an effort to provide teachers and departments with a technology tool that could help them evaluate common assessment data. As one teacher leader stated, “when we started down the path of data-driven decision making...I gotta tell you, data was a four-letter word in the building for awhile...”

“The Meeting”

The high school principal scheduled a staff meeting and invited a representative from the common assessment software program to display the product and its capabilities. The high school principal stated, “It was insane...the representative started to show the staff slide after slide that depicted how common assessment results could be analyzed. Staff members knew immediately that this software tool was very powerful and they were concerned about how the assessment results would be used”. The immediate questions by teachers focused on things like, “What is this data going to be used for? Who is going to have access to this information? Will the test results be used for evaluation? How much is this product costing the district?” The high school principal mentioned that many teachers who had a reason for being nervous due to their lack of interest in improving teaching were extremely angry about this new software.

In addition, a few of her excellent teachers also expressed concerns at the meeting so the high school principal found them afterwards to see what their major concerns were. After she met with this small group of teachers she realized that some staff were concerned about the software program because they thought all assessments would be reduced to multiple-choice exams. The high school principal quickly assured them by saying, “no, no no...that’s not what this is about. You can and should have students giving presentations, writing research papers...but you also should be talking about creating common rubrics for assessing these activities and exchanging work with one another to make sure you are all on the same page...” Teachers started to calm down as the high school principal made many efforts to make sure “that good people who did good work” understood what STLT members and she were proposing by using the Mastery Manager software and assessment results.

To get the entire building to accept the common assessment software program as a tool to help with improving instruction, the high school principal connected with a STLT member who was also a “spokesperson” for the teachers’ association at North High. Teacher leaders that I interviewed identified this person as one of the “good ol’ boys” at North High School.” Ironically, he agreed with the high school principal in that using the common assessment software program made sense and it was the direction the building needed to head. During this initial conversation with the STLT member, the high school principal quickly realized that he, in particular, enjoyed the awful “common assessment software program” staff meeting because it was like the old days at North High when many staff meetings turned into a “beat the principal” event. So, when he

suggested that another meeting be held to talk about the assessment software the high school principal stated, “I’m NOT doing that again...” The STLT member quickly replied to the principal by stating, “no...we need to do this”.

After this meeting with the STLT member the high school principal turned to the superintendent for advice. After a short discussion, the superintendent suggested putting together a “question and answer” presentation that would address the many questions that came up at the original meeting (Appendix H). The high school principal put this information together and then made a critical leadership decision. She chose to review the presentation with the STLT member, who suggested another meeting in the first place, to get his input on the agenda. The high school principal and the STLT/union member went back and forth with three different edits of the original presentation. The high school principal shared that “he made changes that made sense...he knew what the staff could swallow. He also took care of and addressed some of the politics, not all of the politics, but it definitely helped. I knew once I had agreement on the presentation with him that I could run with it”.

Another fortunate turn of events that was occurring simultaneously was that the elementary buildings in the district had already started down the path of looking at assessment scores and drilling down through the data. The North Public School District Teacher’s Association president happened to be an elementary teacher and understood the direction that North High was headed and knew why they needed to do it. The high school principal, the superintendent, and the North Public School District Teacher’s

Association president also sat down and made a few changes to the presentation before declaring that the presentation was appropriate.

The teacher leaders I interviewed had much to say about this turning point at North High that involved analyzing common assessment results. Teacher leaders mentioned one of the key components of making a shift to using the common assessment software program was trust. “We needed assurance that the administration was not going to use the assessment results as an evaluation tool. Trust was critical!” It was mentioned more than once during the interviews with teacher leaders that “the high school principal would come to meetings and share that she didn’t even know how to access the data...she didn’t look at the data”. One teacher leader commented on this by saying, “we knew this wasn’t true. She understood the data but she needed to make these statements to staff. I think the difference was that she wasn’t hunting through the data to look for poor performance in the sense you were going to lose your job. She was looking to help people improve their performance”. Another teacher leader stated, “the data isn’t used as part of the evaluation process at all, but it is a part of our process to evaluate whether we’re effective instructionally...so it becomes a part of that discussion. He went on to say, “The discussion is more about, what can we do that’s best for students? It isn’t about talking about getting the ax tomorrow. If a teacher in this building responds to the high school principal or the STLT by saying I’m not planning on getting better—than you have a different issue...you’re just not fitting in with the culture at North High School”.

It was during the fifth year when departments, with the addition of the common assessment software program software, knew that they needed to communicate in a way

that was much different than in the past. At this same time (according to teacher leaders, the high school principal, and the superintendent) there was a fortunate “changing of the guard” that started to occur at North High. As one teacher leader stated, “some teachers that had been here for thirty years retired and many young, energetic, idealistic teachers came here to teach. We had to incorporate them into this new leadership model instead of having them pick up the old model of doing things from veteran teachers”. One teacher leader explained what this old model looked like... “Eleven years ago I’d sit in a department meeting and wouldn’t say anything because only one person would talk, everybody else would listen, and after twenty-five minutes he’d say the meeting was over. Our department members might not see or talk to each other again for more than three months. And...I remember teachers having long-time feuds with each other that resulted in them not talking to each other for ten years or more. I can’t ever imagine going back to that kind of a culture”. Another teacher leader added, “I remember being asked to teach a class that someone else had taught for the last twenty-five years. He wouldn’t even offer me his teaching materials. I had to create all of my own material even though I was teaching the same class”. The superintendent stated he believed faculty realized how lonely it truly was working in a school with fifteen hundred students and one hundred faculty members in the old way of doing things. I don’t think anybody talked about it as being lonely but it was a very isolated kind of situation. Now, those doors have been opened, there’s more discussion, and I think it became very clear to people that this change wasn’t something to be threatened by—it was a new process that allowed a real exchange of ideas”.

The Past Five Years

After developing common assessments in every department and analyzing the results with the new common assessment software program, departments set a course for writing goals that revolved around students demonstrating increased proficiency as evidenced on summative and formative assessments. But this was not a quick journey. The high school principal shared that it took a couple of years to get to the point where common assessments were in place in every department. In fact, most departments had to re-create their common assessments two to three times in order to have them align with the district curriculum and State standards. Once departments had reliable assessments there were able to start the process of writing goals that pertained to increasing student achievement.

An invaluable resource to the teacher leaders and the high school principal was the North High School's Instructional Coach. The coach's primary responsibility is to support their colleagues in selecting and implementing instructional strategies to meet the needs of students (Appendix I). The coach also spends much of their time working with individual classroom teachers, job-alike teacher groups, departments, Site Teacher Leadership Team (STLT) and any other teacher groups at the building level to support them in implementing instructional strategies to meet the needs of students. Not only was the coach role itself important but the particular person who fulfilled that role was exceptional. The North High School Instructional Coach has walked hand-in-hand with the North High staff on this continuous improvement journey. In the high school principal words, "that woman walks on water! If she weren't at North High we would

stop dead in our tracks. The coach reviews assessment results and takes the information back to teachers. What our coach does so well is that she gives teachers the right picture of what the data is saying. She works with the teachers to show them patterns in the data and then offers suggestions and strategies on how they can address the area of concern”.

Over the next two years the STLT requested that departments have an overarching objective of setting their goals to meet the building goal. As the high school principal pointed out, “the first year some of the goals and targets were just terribly written. For instance, one department wrote a goal that stated the target was to have one hundred percent of students achieve one hundred percent on a summative assessment by the end of the year”. The department quickly realized that they would not likely meet their goal even though students learned an incredible amount during the school year.

The following school year, the high school principal spent time talking to STLT members about addressing the issue of how to write useful and accurate goals. She shared the Strategic-Measureable-Attainable-Research based-Timebound (SMART) goal framework as a way to write appropriate goals. During her discussion with STLT members the high school principal was called to the office. After returning to the meeting she realized that the STLT members had already begun creating a process sheet that could help departments assess their SMART goals to determine if they were appropriate. The high school principal was obviously happy as the STLT was becoming more and more self-directed. This accountability measure implemented by the STLT set the stage for the development of North High’s Continuous Improvement process. As the high school principal shared, “this accountability needs to be built in...the reports that

STLT gives me and my report to the superintendent and the Board is the process that keeps us all moving, honest, and focused on measurable results” (Appendix J).

It was during these two years that STLT members focused on analyzing common assessments, creating appropriate SMART goals that aligned to building and district goals, and designing the Integrated School Improvement Plan (ISIP) (Appendix K). The ISIP was an integral piece for two main reasons: (1) it gave a common goal with which everyone in the building was engaged and that directly related to the district overall goals, and (2) it allowed individual departments to work on goals that were particularly important to them. The STLT works on and creates the ISIP building goal at a summer institute and then works on individual department goals during the regular August teacher workshop. The ISIP goal must align with the strategic goals that are set and agreed upon by the school board. The superintendent stated that it was very purposeful to include and “honor the work of all departments, core and elective areas, in the ISIP process. The message is everybody is in this...this isn’t just for some...it’s for everybody”.

While this continuous improvement process was being created, a key proposal was made to provide time for teachers to meet and collaborate about data and instructional goals. Three years ago it was proposed that each department have the opportunity to collaborate for one and a half hours during the duty day once each month. This proposal was entitled the Advancing Student Achievement Program (ASAP) (Appendix L). The purpose for ASAP is threefold: (1) to progressively improve student performance/achievement; (2) to provide time for teachers to collaborate regarding best practice in curriculum and instruction; and (3) provide time for teachers to develop and

refine assessments to use data from those assessments to refine instruction. The superintendent stated that the proposal was a “litmus test as the Board had denied this same type of proposal as few years earlier. The fact that the Board agreed to implement ASAP this time sent a message to staff and administration that the Board trusted them and knew they were going to use the time to increase student achievement”.

Teacher leaders shared that implementing ASAP came at a crucial time in the evolution of the continuous improvement process at North High. One teacher leader stated, “creating time during the school day to collaborate and get some of this work done was critical. Really, you can’t expect good teachers to teach five days a week and still find time to collaborate on assessment results, write SMART goals, and change instruction”. Teacher leaders also highly respected the high school principal for her efforts in securing ASAP time. One leader stated, “It took a lot of guts for the high school principal to put her neck out there in front of the Board and community. She kept saying that teachers need this time...we can’t get to the next level with it. She was right...”

In addition to gaining ASAP time, the entire North Public School District entered in the Q-comp program that was mentioned earlier in this chapter. Every person I interviewed stated that this was also a critical piece in opening doors at North High School. The high school principal stated “Q-comp pushed the whole culture at North High to another level. In our Q-comp model, every teacher has to observe and be observed three times during the school year”. Teacher leaders and the high school principal agreed that the observers learn just as much or more than the person being observed. During this process the superintendent shared that the next phase in this

process will be to train every teacher in collegial coaching to make observations even more beneficial to all involved.

Current Culture

As the high school principal reflected on North High's journey, she stated, "it takes a long time...it took us a long time anyway". The journey to establishing a culture that promotes ongoing professional learning was neither easy nor rapid, but the results based on achievement data and teacher leader interviews are quite compelling. For instance, North High saw the following achievement results from the 2005-2006 to the 2006-2007 school year:

- Increased achievement in mathematics as measured by the State Comprehensive Assessment (SCA) exam: 40% of students proficient in 2006 to 58% proficient in 2007;
- Increased average scores on all strands of the ACT exam;
- Increased average scores on Advanced Placement exams;
- Increased fitness levels of students participating in physical education; and
- Increased achievement in reading as measured by the State Comprehensive Assessment (SCA) exam: 67% of students proficient in 2006 to 78% proficient in 2007.

Underneath the test scores and significant gains in student achievement lay the discernable positive change in the school climate and culture. Teacher leaders made several comments that provided a picture of just how substantial this change

in culture has been. Several such statements made by teacher leaders are offered here:

We work in teams and it's collaborative and not everybody is sitting in their own room and doing their own thing. In fact, I've even had a chat with a teacher who was gone for a few years on a leave of absence and returned and said, "You know, the nature of this place has changed. Let me explain to you how things are working these days. People are working in teams"—because sometimes people need to be told that straight out, otherwise they think it's just business as usual and, "I can just sit in my room and I teach what I teach and I don't need to interact with anyone else." ...that is an expectation and not an option. We're trying to make that very clear."

The movement of the school went away from, "I'm in my room and I don't listen to the administration and I don't work with other people if I don't want to." There was an attitude change, I want to learn from my colleagues and I want to be part of this team environment.

...the culture—is so totally different than when I first entered education. The isolation is gone, the working independently is gone—much more emphasis on the culture of collaboration, coordination, sharing of instructional strategies.

The culture of the organization is focused on goals, school improvement plans—and the school improvement plans are very interactive, meaning that they're not a 'one and done'. The continuous improvement model always keeps people focused on what's next? How can we get better? How can we help each other? How can we make plans that will create more effective students—more effective teachers?

This whole cultural shift has just been, from my point of view as a veteran teacher, very exciting. I see that this is the best time—the best time to be in education. I wouldn't want it any other way.

You gotta learn...we are focused on learning.

We can do better than NCLB standards... We set out to raise the standards at North High and we reset the bar. We don't say, "Met the goal... good, done. I don't need to do anything more." I just don't think that's the culture around here... There's always something else you can improve. Until we have perfect kids throughout this building, there's always a place for improvement and I can't imagine anyone could teach and not see a place where things could be improved.

I don't remember ten years ago us celebrating what we accomplished. I think part of our vision is being able to see what we just did. We've been able to win some awards here that I don't think we would have won them if we weren't trying to do what we're trying to do. That really helps us, I think, seeing that the work we're doing is valuable, not only to us and not only to our students, but other people like you that come here to ask, What is it that you're doing that's working?

I think you could come back and do a final chapter to your doctoral work and interview us in four years—with the North High principal retiring next year and seeing how the culture—how set is the culture. I think it'd take a pretty bad shift at the top (administration) to destroy the culture, but at the same time, it might become less of a truthful environment if something happens that ruins some of that trust or whatever.

These comments emphasize the importance and centrality of teacher leadership in creating this type of cultural shift. These teachers were not engaged in continuous learning, goal setting, and data analysis because they had to...they were doing this because students relied on them to create the best type of instructional environment possible to ensure student success. People often refer to successful administrators as servant leaders; certainly each and every one of these teachers fit that conception of leadership as well.

Findings from school-wide survey

In addition to interviews, staff members at North High School were involved in completing the Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA). The survey was administered on-line by means of surveymonkey.com. The PLCA is designed to determine administrator and teacher perceptions related to five dimensions of a professional learning community. Although North High School never called their subject area teams PLCs, the dimensions advanced by Hord and operationalized in the Oliver et al. survey pertain. These five dimensions are based on the work of Shirley Hord (2004) and include: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective

learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. Of seventy-nine possible North High School teachers and administrators, fifty-nine responded to the survey for a 75% response rate. Participants were asked to read forty-two survey items and indicate their level of agreement with each. All fifty-nine respondents answered every question on the survey. A five point rating scale was employed with 1 designated as “strongly disagree”, 2 as “disagree”, 3 as “neither agree or disagree”, 4 as “agree”, and 5 as “strongly agree”. Ranges, modes, means, and standard deviations are reported in the survey results table located in Appendix F.

In the area of “Shared and Supportive Leadership”, there were nine survey items, all of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range. Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 3.86 to a high mean rating of 4.27. The modal score was 4 for all items except one item had a modal score of 5. The four highest rated items were:

- The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed (4.27);
- The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions (4.20);
- The principal incorporates advice from staff to make decisions (4.05); and
- Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas (4.05).

In the area of “Shared Values and Vision”, there were seven survey items, all of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range. Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 3.46 to a high mean rating of 4.20. The modal score was 4 for all items. The four highest rated items were:

- The staff share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning (4.20);
- Decisions are made in alignment with the school’s values and vision (4.15); and
- A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff (4.0).

In the area of “Collective Learning and Application”, there were seven survey items, all of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range. Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 3.81 to a high mean rating of 4.39. The modal score was 4 for all items. The four highest rated items were:

- School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning (4.39);
- Professional development focuses on teaching and learning (4.27);
- The staff work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work (4.15); and
- Collegial relationships exist among staff that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts (4.15).

In the area of “Shared Personal Practice”, there were six survey items, four of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range and two of which had a mean rating in the “strongly agree” range. Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 3.76 to a high mean rating of 4.73. The modal score was 5 for all items except for two items with a modal score of 4. The four highest rated items were:

- Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement (4.73);
- The staff provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices (4.47);

- The staff informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning (4.31); and
- Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices (4.31).

In the area of “Supportive Conditions” dimension (both relationships and structures), there were thirteen survey items, twelve of which had mean item ratings in the “agree” range and one of which had mean ratings in the “neither agree or disagree” range. Specifically, means varied among items from a low mean of 3.41 to a high mean rating of 4.34. The modal score was 4 for all items. The three highest rated items were:

- Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect (4.34);
- Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work (4.19); and
- Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school (4.03).

As shown in Table 5.1, there was very little variation in the data, which is why I felt it was important to add a range of responses for each item. Looking across ratings for all items on the survey revealed a range of means from 3.41 to 4.73 for average ratings. The highest average ratings were reported above. In fact, there were not any items with an average rating below 3.00. The lowest two items on the survey were in response to the questions: “appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff” (3.41) and “fiscal resources are available for

professional development” (3.56). The modal score for all but five survey items was “4”.

Table 5.1
Number of mean scores in each response category by survey section.

Section	Strongly Disagree (1) (1.0-1.4)	Disagree (2) (1.5-2.4)	Neutral (3) (2.5-3.4)	Agree (4) (3.5-4.4)	Strongly Agree (5) (4.5-5.0)
Shared and Supportive Leadership	0	0	0	9	0
Shared Values and Vision	0	0	0	7	0
Collective Learning and Application	0	0	0	7	0
Shared Personal Practice	0	0	0	5	1
Supportive Conditions (Relationships and Structures)	0	0	1	12	0

The five exceptions each had a modal score of “5”, with one such item from the Shared and Supportive Leadership cluster and the remaining four items from the Shared Personal Practice cluster. In general, the survey results aligned well with findings from the interviews. There were no areas of substantial discrepancy noted. This, itself, is an important finding in that the survey results, which provided an opportunity for all staff members to respond, did not seem to differ from the interview findings. This suggests

common perspectives are shared among individuals viewed as “leaders” and those not so identified.

Overall Findings from the Interviews

Findings from the North High School interviewees will be shared in response to the question, “As you reflect on the continuous learning and improvement work in your school, what do you identify as the THREE most important factors for advancing teaching and learning to improve student achievement in high schools?” It comes as no surprise that there was much in common in responses across all interviewees and that many had difficulty narrowing their response set to just three influences.

The high school principal shared that a building principal attempting to create this type of culture requires: (1) trained instructional leaders that received a stipend for their great work; (2) A relentless focus on results; (3) alignment of leadership structure including the school board, central office administrators, buildings administrators, and teacher leaders; (4) time and structure for teacher collaboration; and (5) accountability built in to the continuous improvement process. The superintendent shared that to make the transition to a learning environment in high schools the following elements are needed: (1) It starts with a principal. If you don’t have an exceptional individual in that role, it won’t happen...it just won’t happen; (2) a positive relationship with the teachers’ association; (3) the alignment of leadership structures—from school board to superintendent to cabinet to central office to principals to teacher leaders. Teacher leaders stressed that the following were critical to their journey of becoming a high school that embraces continuous professional learning: (1) having usable data—if you don’t have

data, you won't know what you're reflecting on, (2) school leadership—we've worked with a lot of principals over these decades and, by far, The high school principal is the best principal we have ever worked for; (3) time to collaborate. We need late starts (purposeful collaboration time for teachers to review data and set SMART goals) but we also need time to go through the stages of continuous improvement...time for the dialogue.

Findings from Document Analysis

Finally, I analyzed the following documents from North High School: (1) memos from principals and central office administrators, (2) reporting forms for continuous professional learning meetings, (3) school improvement plans, (4) collaborative group SMART goals, (5) large and small group faculty meeting handouts, (6) collaboration time format and expectations, and (7) teacher leader job descriptions. The researcher used the same coding system that was employed in the South High School review of documents which used the following codes, based on Hord's (2004) five dimensions of a professional learning community (shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions) to review all of the documents collected:

- Shared and supportive leadership-SSL
- Shared values and vision-SVV
- Collective learning and application-CLA
- Shared personal practice-SPP, and
Supportive conditions-SC

The researcher specifically identified the following documents and coded them accordingly:

- Site leadership team (STLT Job description: SSL
- Questions and answers-common assessments: SVV
- Instructional coach job description: SSL
- Site teacher leadership (STLT) reports: CLA
- Integrated school improvement plan (ISIP): CLA
- Advancing student achievement program: SPP

Reviewing these documents allowed the researcher to bridge the gap between what the survey and interview data as it “operationalized” many of the elements (collaboration time, department or “job-alike” goals, roles of teacher leaders, etc...) that I saw in the survey or heard in interviews. Many of these documents also served as the accountability pieces for everyone involved in the continuous improvement process. These “deliverables” (reporting forms, SMART goals, etc.) provided a structure for the district, building, and department expectations that were clear for all staff.

Summary

The story that unfolded about the creation of North High School as a place in which continuous learning and improvement is a culture for educators, as well as students, was a poignant reminder about the power of collaboration and shared leadership. One teacher leader summed up North High School’s development process by stating, “I think the biggest piece of this—the key ingredient that is the most powerful is

the belief that all kids can learn. It's the belief that we can all be better. It's the belief that kids can improve and achievement can be increased. We believe in what we're doing and I believe in everything my colleagues are doing and I believe they can all make a difference. It's a part of the belief system and we value what each other does..." Another teacher leader shared, "When you make the commitment to actually make it a part of what you do it becomes a much more valuable experience...to quote Robert Frost, to take the road less traveled—to take the one where you don't know where you're going sometimes and you don't know where you're going to end up, but you know why you take it..."

Chapter 6- Summary and Discussion

This chapter will summarize the key findings across the two high schools that were presented in chapters four and five. Also included are implications for practice, policy, and research, as well as a conclusion.

The purpose of this study was to discover the development processes and leadership practices employed by school district and site leaders who have been involved in creating cultures of continuous professional learning in high schools. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I implemented a four stage sampling process that involved: (1) identifying potential case study sites (this was done by reviewing schools that received State Department Education grants, reviewing a list of award-winning high school principals, and seeking nominations from University of Minnesota professors), (2) narrowing and ranking the sample (the list of potential schools was narrowed by reviewing their performance on State assessments and visiting the websites the schools to look for evidence that they were involved in continuous professional learning efforts), (3) identify and contact selected sites (after narrowing the sample the building principals were contacted so that I could share the purpose of this study in order to determine if this study was appropriate for their school), and (4) within each site, identifying specific participants (staff members that were engaged in roles that were directly related to continuous professional learning and seen as district and site leaders) to participate in interviews.

Using this sampling process enabled me to select North High School and South High School as sites where a culture of professional learning had been established and in

which the seated principal had been actively involved in the establishment of the process. Both high schools engaged in processes that held staff accountable for setting goals for instructional improvement that were based on relevant assessment data with the overarching goal of raising student achievement. After engaging with key leaders and collecting the perspectives of the high school staffs in these two school districts and high schools, I was able to identify several commonalities and a few differences about ways in which a culture of continuous professional learning was established. I will now review the strategies and choices that were made at both sites in a chronological fashion.

Summary of Key Findings Across High Schools

Shared and supportive leadership, along with shared values and vision, were two critical dimensions that both sites focused on early in their journey to becoming a community focused on continuous professional learning. This aligns with Hord (2004) who stated that, “If professional learning communities provide the best hope for sustaining school improvement, and shared leadership is a crucial component of successful professional communities, then principals must be both willing to share leadership and able to develop conditions and communicate expectations that will advance shared leadership among school professionals” (p. 140). It is important to note that in both cases, the core leadership team (district and site leaders) had all been in their particular districts for several years. The administrators in the North Public School District had been in the district for more than thirty years and the administrators in the South Public School District had been in the district from thirteen to sixteen years. This longevity and tenure in these districts allowed these administrators to have a unique

understanding of the culture of their districts. In addition to serving their particular districts for a significant number of years, the majority of these district and site leaders made shifts to new leadership positions at approximately the same time their district and high schools started their journeys to create a culture of continuous professional learning.

In both cases, early in the process, there were individuals at the district and site level engaging in professional learning in the area of professional learning communities (PLCs). It is interesting to note that, of those interviewed, the leaders all stated that this professional learning in regard to PLCs provided a spark to create change. Although this learning happened in each district at the beginning of their change process it was neither collaborative nor systemic. Individual district and site leaders were either reading about or attending PLC conferences in isolation of each other. The learning became more powerful once these leaders learned that they were all shifting their thinking about how professional learning and continuous improvement could look in their district.

After engaging in professional learning about PLCs, district and site leaders in both districts realized that change needed to happen. Although both districts knew that changes needed to be made, the reason or impetus to change was slightly different. In the North Public School District, the leaders knew that the leadership structure and decision-making process needed to change to focus on and support continuous professional learning. In the South Public School District, the leaders felt pressure to meet the demands of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) as they were directly competing with neighboring school districts. These leaders knew that they would not be able to compete without engaging in a change process focused on continuous professional learning.

Although there were different reasons to initiate change, both districts and sites clearly had an internal purpose to begin their journey.

As the shift in professional learning and continuous improvement started, both districts intentionally strove to develop shared leadership focused specifically on the central role of teacher leaders. District and site leaders in the North and South Public School Districts realized that the shift to a culture of continuous improvement could not happen unless teachers and administrators were working towards the same vision for improvement. In the North Public School District, this aim of shared leadership and teacher leaders was supported by professional development (training and application of what excellence in leadership and governance should look like in public schools) and the creation of a shared decision-making model that was created collaboratively with administrators and teachers with the assistance of an outside educational consultant. In the South Public School District, teacher leaders had a seat at the table and openly collaborated with the district and site leaders in regard to the implementation plan for creating high functioning PLCs. This collaboration took the form of highly respected teacher leaders sharing thoughts and ideas with site and district leaders in regard to how the district should implement PLCs for them to be successful at the district and high school level. These activities align with current researchers who state that developing PLCs “requires the support of three major stakeholders: district-level administrators, Boards of Education, and local communities to give principals and teachers a chance to effectively implement high quality professional development activities that are generated by teachers and principals involved in continuous improvement processes (Boyd, 1992; Desimone et

al. 2002; Hord, 2004; Newman et. al., 2000). This willingness to partner and engage in discussions that included leaders from various levels was critical during this stage of implementation.

After these district and site leaders collaboratively created a common vision for change, they turned their focus to purposefully aligning resources to support district, site and teacher leaders so a culture of continuous improvement could be created in the high schools. A slight difference existed between the two districts in this area, as the North Public School District was a Quality Compensation district. This enabled them to provide stipends to instructional teacher leaders who all agreed helped to establish their present culture. The North Public School District leaders (district, site, and teacher leaders) agreed that there were various “pots of money” that existed in their districts but that the resources were not being used efficiently. They made a conscious effort to first identify these various “pots of money” and then worked together with the teachers’ union to help create a partnership for allocating these dollars in an effort to make the paradigm shift to a learning culture. This strategy aligns with Garet et al. (2001) suggestion that “funds should be focused on providing high-quality professional development experiences... which require schools and districts either to focus resources on fewer teachers, or to invest sufficient resources so that more teachers can benefit from high-quality professional development” (p. 937). Although the South Public School District did not have the additional Quality Compensation resources, they systemically gathered what resources they had and aligned them to the needs (training in the areas of SMART goals, using assessment data to inform instruction, and key dimensions of establishing effective

PLCs) of teachers and administrators. An example of this is when South Public School District leaders realized that they were not using resources efficiently by sending small groups of staff to various professional learning opportunities. Instead, they gained the support of the district and community to provide significant professional development opportunities at the district site. Gaining this type of support is supported by Boyd (1992) who stated that, “two factors beyond the school staff that can enhance a PLC are supportive community attitudes and parents and community members as partners and allies” (p. 45).

Both districts and sites focused on professional development throughout their journey but, specifically, enlisted the services of outside educational consultants early in the process. In the North Public School District, much of the professional development activities focused on excellence in leadership and governance, using assessment data (both formative and summative) to inform instruction, SMART goal training, and most recently mentoring and peer coaching. The professional development activities in the South Public School District were similar in that staff was trained in the writing of SMART goals, using assessment data (both formative and summative) to inform instruction, and establishing effective PLCs. Leaders from both high schools shared that the alignment of professional development to the overall strategic building and site goals was instrumental in promoting systemic changes in how their respective high school engaged in continuous improvement. How these two schools implemented and offered professional development opportunities aligns with current research, which states that “professional development experiences should be sustained and continuous, rather than

short-term and episodic (Newman et al., 2000) and must be coherent with other learning and development work (Garet et al., 2001).

The creation of continuous improvement structures (teacher collaboration deliverables such as norms, minutes from PLC and department meetings, alignment of SMART goals to building and district goals, and expectations to use and implement common assessments across all department) was also similar between the two high schools. Not only were these structures alike, but they also evolved at the same time in each case. After each high school understood that change was needed and professional development was focused on the needs (excellence in leadership and governance, using assessment data (both formative and summative) to inform instruction, SMART goal training, mentoring and peer coaching training, etc...) to support this change, both high schools came to the realization that structures needed to be created to organize this continuous improvement work. Both high schools created instructional leader teams, systems that enabled departments or subject area teachers to meet, and building improvement plans and SMART goals for each department. In addition to these structures, both high schools used common assessments (both formative and summative) to monitor student learning and alter instruction based on assessment data in an effort to increase student achievement. These structures were developed with the aim of increasing student achievement and holding themselves accountable for the continuous improvement initiatives supported by the high school and district. Research suggests that just having teachers working together without a common framework is not enough to increase student achievement. There must be some form of accountability for

teachers/administrators as they immerse themselves in the work of increasing student achievement scores (Lester, 2003).

Each high school realized that if they were going to achieve increased student achievement results teachers needed to be engaged in conversations about instruction with their peers. To gain this time to talk with one another, each high school and district created a set time for teacher collaboration so that they could engage in continuous improvement work (meeting in teacher teams using assessment data to inform their instruction and then agreeing on strategies to use in their classrooms in an effort to increase student achievement). Both districts shared that it was a struggle to convince their school boards and communities that this time was necessary but, eventually, late starts were built into the schedule of both schools. This enabled teachers to have deeper conversations about data and instruction. Hord (2004) stated that, “it is no surprise that time is a significant issue for faculties that wish to work together collegially. It has been cited as both a barrier (when it is not available) and a supportive factor (when it is present) by staffs engaging in school improvement (p. 10).

Another aspect that was similar at both high schools was that there was a person who “set the table” for high-level discussions to take place during teacher collaboration time. This person in each district helped create a focus for teachers by providing purposeful and accurate data along with reflective questions that helped teachers engage in discussions about instruction and changes that could be made to increase student achievement. The key difference between the two districts in this regard was that a

building staff member (teacher leader) served in this role at North High School and a central office administrator was in this role in the South Public School District.

Finally, the last key similarity between these two high school was the fact that the district, site, and teacher leaders interviewed stated a “changing of the guard” [veteran teachers retiring and new, younger teachers being hired] was viewed as significant to both of their schools success in making a paradigm shift to becoming a school focused on continuous professional learning. Both high school staff members interviewed stated that, in their opinion, the new generation of teachers has an innate need to communicate and engage in dialogue that is different than the majority of veteran teachers.

Leadership Roles and Impact

The roles and critical staff in both high schools and districts were similar. Both districts had strong superintendents, high school principals, and teacher leaders that collaboratively partnered to move the high schools to a new culture of professional learning. As mentioned previously, the North High School instructional coach and the central office administrator for the South Public School District played key roles in providing data and a framework for high-level discussions to take place during teacher collaboration time. It was clear in both high school settings that the work and shift to a culture focused on continuous professional learning would not have taken place without the teamwork and partnering that existed with these particular staff members.

The superintendents in each of these districts were focused on instructional leadership and increasing student achievement. They realized that in their role they had many areas (budget, referendums, contract negotiations, etc.) that the school board

expected them to manage and lead. However, both superintendents were able to find a balance that enabled them to engage in conversations with other central office and site leaders (principals and teachers) so that district staff members truly felt as if they were partners with district administration. High school principals and teachers interviewed as part of this study all indicated they felt a great amount of support from their superintendents. The findings of this study align with that of Desimone et al. (2002) in that they assert that district leadership can have a strong influence on teaching and learning through high quality professional development.

“Top district leaders set the direction for the reform effort and the direction for professional development, although a mix of top-down and bottom-up elements is usually present” (Marsh, 2002, p. 29). The role of the central office administrators interviewed as part of this study played different roles in their particular districts that align with Marsh’s (2002) research. The North Public School District’s Curriculum Director provided support in all areas of curriculum for North High School but did not engage directly with continuous improvement work that was ongoing at the school. This person’s role was important to establishing and maintaining a guaranteed and viable curriculum but that was the extent of the involvement with North High School. In the South Public School District the assistant superintendent of teaching and learning engaged in numerous activities (researching current best practices in instruction, analyzing assessment data, providing and researching professional development activities for staff, and “setting the table” for PLCs at the high school by providing relevant data so that teachers could have purposeful PLC meetings) to assist the high school principal and individual PLCs.

Defining him as a catalyst for effective PLC meetings is appropriate in that he attempted to provide site leaders and PLCs with all the information they needed in order to set effective goals for student learning.

Heck, Larsen and Marcoulides (1990) found that one of the strongest predictors of increased student achievement was the ability of the principal to establish a strong school climate and the ability to effectively organize a system for instruction. They also found a direct correlation between high-achieving schools and the amount of teacher involvement in instructional decision-making. The high school principals involved in this study were well respected at each school and it was evident during my interviews with teacher leaders and central office staff that they critical to establishing a culture of continuous professional learning at their particular school. The North High School principal was truly a pioneer in moving North High School to this new learning culture. She would be the first to admit that she was just one piece of the team that was necessary to establish this new culture, but it was clearly evident that she was the impetus for change in this particular school and district. Her beliefs in shared decision making and increasing student achievement for all students clearly were noticed by teacher leaders. By partnering with teachers throughout this process, she was able to lead North High School to a new culture. The South High School principal was also respected and would also be quick to admit that a team of staff was necessary to shift this school's culture to one that is focused on continuous professional learning. In contrast to the North High principal, the South High School principal was not the driving force behind changing the culture of the school. In this particular district, the central office and teacher leaders initiated the

need to change and then, collaboratively, this team (district, site, and teacher leaders) helped change the culture to one focused on continuous professional learning.

Finally, teacher leaders played a critical role in both districts by partnering with district leaders and their principals in an effort to move their schools to a new culture. Marks and Louis (1999) suggest that “a unified organizational culture built around ongoing inquiry into the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning depends on the collective influence of teachers who function as empowered professionals” (p. 708). Teachers in both districts felt as if they were partners with administrators and were respected as professionals. Teachers knew what the expectations were for collaborating about instruction and assessment and held each other accountable for meeting these expectations. A specific teacher leader and instructional coach at North High School played a pivotal role in assisting teachers and the principal by providing purposeful data and instructional strategies for department and subject area teams. Those interviewed for this study all agreed that the shift that occurred at North High School could not have happened without this support from this particular teacher leader.

Conceptual Framework for Creating a Culture of Continuous Learning

As I reflect on the similarities of both high schools, I realize that there were key strategies and essential steps, implemented at critical times, which made the transition to a culture of professional continuous learning possible. The five dimensions of professional learning communities advanced by Hord (2004) serve as an effective organizing structure. Her five dimensions are (1) shared and supportive relationships, (2) shared values and vision, (3) collective learning and application, (4) shared personal

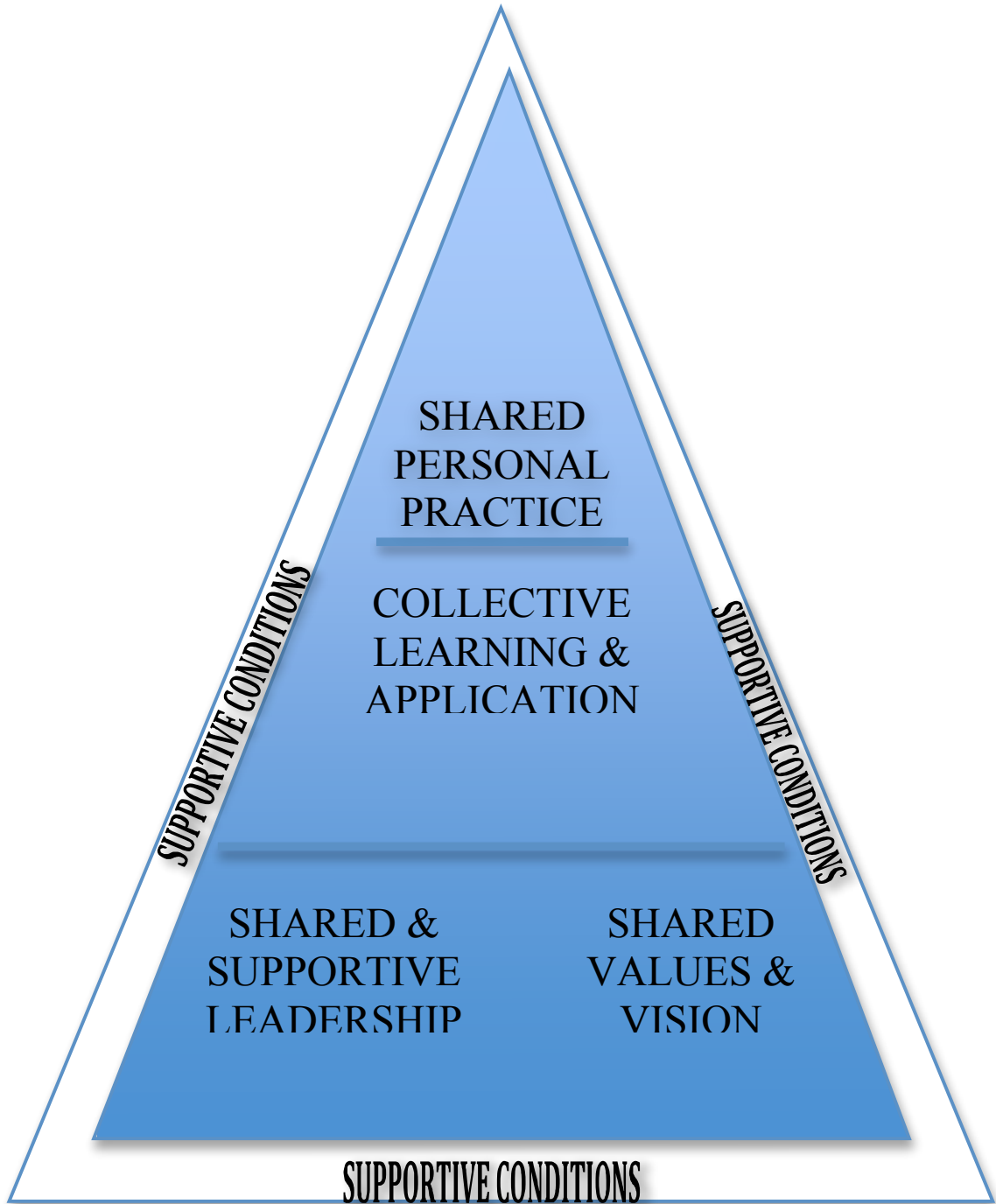
practice, and (5) supportive conditions (both relationships and structures). In the present study Hord's dimensions became apparent in a chronological order, reflected here in stages. Figure 6.1 shows the three stages that these two high schools went through in their journey to becoming schools that created a culture of continuous improvement and professional learning embedded into the fabric of the school.

Movement toward becoming a high school focused on a culture of continuous professional learning started with explicit attention to developing shared and supportive leadership structures that, in turn, provided the opportunity for district and site leaders to engage in discussions about the values and vision everyone had for their district and school. From that base, internal efforts were focused on creating the conditions necessary for all staff to deepen their understanding about high quality instruction by means of collective learning and application. Finally, only after these steps were taken, staff at both high schools moved to the final dimension, which involved teachers engaging in conversations and goal setting that only occurred because they were willing to share information with one another about their own practice and student achievement results. Based on this information, the researcher proposes that this shift to a culture of continuous professional learning happened in the following three stages.

Figure 6.1

Conceptual Framework for Creating a Culture of Continuous Professional

Learning in High Schools (Components from Hord, 2004)



Stage 1

In both high schools, a great amount of effort was expended and focused on creating shared and supportive relationships along with creating shared values and vision. Site leaders knew that this work could only be accomplished if all levels of leadership felt engaged and respected. Although both districts had differing factors that compelled them to look at changing “how they did business”, they knew that creating a common vision that valued every leader in the district was necessary to start working together collaboratively. Hord and Sommers (2008) talked about the importance of everyone in the building contributing to a shared decision-making model and development of vision. “The contribution is based on sharing decision making with all professionals in the school, realizing that there are boundaries that reserve some decisions for the singular attention of the principal. This means that boundaries should be determined and shared early on so that the staff understands the parameters within which they can make decisions” (p. 11).

Stage 2

Although supportive conditions are and were necessary throughout the high school’s journeys, the next stage of development can be characterized by collective learning and application. After site leaders created the shared leadership structure and culture that exist in their high schools and a clear vision was agreed to, both high schools were able to focus their efforts on collective learning and application. This took the form of numerous professional development activities that enabled site leaders to look at data and instruction with “new eyes”. It would have been difficult to engage in collective

learning and application without taking the necessary time to first create the shared leadership, values, and vision collectively.

“The significant factor here is that the learning and reflection of the professionals is continuous and focuses on students ...(Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 12). What occurred in both high schools during this stage was the fact that staff were able to come together to examine student achievement data with the belief that they could change results by changing their own instructional practices. Hord and Sommers (2008) stated that the conversation and learning during this stage “is ultimately initiated by staff investigating student performance data to ascertain where students have accomplished well and where keener attention needs to be given. Identifying student needs and areas for attention indicate to staff where they need to learn new content or instructional strategies so that they become more effective teachers and administrators” (p. 13).

Stage 3

The final stage of the journey to becoming a high school focused on continuous professional learning is to engage in shared personal practice. Site leaders at both high schools mentioned that they knew they finally “arrived” when teachers were collaborating about their own students’ achievement data in an open and trusting environment. It was evident that there was a large step from learning collectively and applying that learning (stage 2) to the creation of an environment that allowed for discussion where teachers could openly share their own student achievement data with one another to alter instruction as a team rather than making decisions in isolation. Hord and Sommers (2008) shared that teachers reviewing each others practice and instructional

behaviors should be the norm but the skills to do these types of observations need to be developed through professional development activities supported by the building principal.

At the base of this process, significant time was spent on creating a culture that focused on building a collaborative team of teacher leaders and site/district administrators. Without shared leadership and vision this researcher believes, based on comments made by those interviewed, that these schools would not have been able to move to the second stage-collective learning and application.

Establishing shared leadership and vision enabled staff to engage in learning collectively so that everyone in the school used the same terminology and consistent frameworks. This allowed staff to focus on processes based on best practice research rather than basing their learning and structures on personal opinion or belief system. Establishing this core knowledge base and building capacity in the staff helped and pushed the staff to the third stage of engaging in shared personal practice.

The movement to the shared personal practice was the most for both high schools as it created the need for teachers to share their own personal success and failure in regard to student achievement data. Although it was the most difficult stage to get to in both high schools, it was also the most rewarding. Leaders at both high schools stated that the creation and sharing of common assessment data was a critical step in allowing their buildings to move to this third and critical stage. In the words of the North High School Principal, “It takes a long time to develop a culture where staff openly share their

data with one another...sometimes I wonder if we could have moved faster if I could do it all over again, but I don't think we could have. It just takes time..."

Implications for Practice

Examining the development processes and leadership practices employed by the school district and site leaders of these two high schools (in regard to how they created cultures of continuous professional learning in high schools) enabled the researcher to identify some significant areas of practice that would be beneficial for administrators in the field to review and consider if they are planning on taking a similar journey to create such a culture. Shared and supportive leadership, the importance of professional development, a framework for support and accountability, and school change will be discussed in the following section.

Shared and Supportive Leadership

1. Partnerships between and among leaders at all levels: Emerging in nearly every facet of the high schools and districts that were part of this study was the fact that shared decision making was central to their efforts to work together to increase student achievement. Partnerships with district and site leaders (administrator and teacher leaders) were crucial when these high schools collaboratively defined a vision for continuous improvement and collaboration. The superintendents and principals of these schools realized at the beginning of the process that they could not do this difficult work alone. These leaders decisions followed the words of advice that Scribner et al. (1999) suggested when they stated that leaders should tap into existing and new resources both inside and outside of the district. One of the most untapped resources is that of strong

teacher leaders. The leaders of these districts were able to work together as partners to create their current positive cultures.

2. Continuity of leadership: It was clear that both of these schools and districts were at an advantage given the fact that so many of the leaders had been in their districts for several years. Spillane et al. (2001) shared the importance of principal succession and distributed leadership by stating that, “One way for leaders to leave a lasting legacy is to ensure it is developed with and shared by others. Leadership succession therefore means more than grooming principals’ successors. It means distributing leadership throughout the school’s professional community - so it can carry the torch once the principal has gone, and soften the blow of principal succession”. Hargraves and Fink (2003) shared that “sustainable leadership certainly needs to become a commitment of all school leaders. If change is to matter, spread and last, sustainable leadership must also be a fundamental priority of the systems in which leaders do their work” (p. 9). The implication is that districts need to develop and plan for leadership succession at all levels in order to keep change efforts and student achievement gains at the forefront of their work.

Professional development

1. Professional development aligned with the needs of classroom teachers: There were numerous examples in both districts that showed professional development activities were linked to teachers' experiences, aligned with the school’s reform efforts, and integrated into the daily life of the school which allowed teachers to be engaged in leadership roles (Garet et al., 2001). Leaders in these districts made great efforts to provide professional learning opportunities that aligned and supported the work of

teacher collaborative teams in an effort to “set the table” for dialogue to take place about student learning.

2. Professional development that enables teachers to alter their instruction to meet the needs of their students: Not only were professional development activities relevant to teachers’ needs in the districts studied, they also provided opportunities for teachers to directly relate their own learning into actionable and purposeful changes in instruction to meet the needs of their students based on data. Teachers need to be able to not only learn new strategies and ideas but also actually take it to the next level, which is changing and adapting what they teach based on the student information they are receiving. An unknown author once summarized this process of applying what educators learn through professional development opportunities by stating, “did you show up to learn or did you show up to change?”

Structure, support and accountability

1. Creation of structures and processes that help maintain focus on district and school goals: Both high schools and districts involved in this study went to great lengths to create structures and processes to maintain a laser like focus on district and school goals. Research supports this idea as it has been found that PLCs are more successful if schools have (1) some autonomy in setting improvement goals based on overarching district goals and (2) district and site leaders work diligently to remove bureaucratic constraints that get in the way of the core concepts of PLCs (Hord, 2004; Louis & Kruse, 1995; Newman et al., 2000). Specifically, educational leaders who are attempting to develop cultures of

continuous professional learning should focus on the following when planning for this type of implementation:

- a) Determine and define how teachers will meet in collaborative groups (i.e., educational department teams, course-by-course teams, grade level teams, etc.).
- b) Create clearly identified expectations and norms for teacher collaborative teams (identify group norms, maintain and collect meeting minutes, identify collaborative team goals and vision, and develop a communication plan in an effort to engage in dialogue with other collaborative teams, etc.)

2. “Setting the Table”—Support (time, data, and frameworks) given to leaders at crucial periods of the change process: A term or strategy that evolved during the study of these two high schools was “setting the table” for teacher collaborative teams. Whether these teams were called PLCs or “course collaborative teams” great efforts were made by leaders to set the table for the work of the PLCs. Using data to inform teacher practice is a critical step in preparing for professional learning communities (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Hord and Sommers (2008) shared that if principals “cannot help staff use data effectively, they should find someone who can. We believe staff members want to improve. They will use data to inform their professional practice, but they have to know how” (p. 71). Setting the table can be described by doing the following:

- a) Providing purposeful and meaningful data (in a timely manner) that allows teachers to make instructional decisions;
- b) Creating processes (data review protocols) that allow teacher collaborative teams to review data in a systemic fashion which leads to systemic change;

- c) Implementing systemic goal writing (SMART goals) strategies and frameworks that are used building and district-wide;
- d) Clearly identifying a vision for continuous professional learning as it relates to the building and district goals (i.e. the use of formative and summative assessments to inform instruction); and
- e) Establishing and creating blocks of collaboration time so that teachers can engage in continuous improvement work without interruption or distraction.

3. Accountability to each other and the school/district: The term “tight-loose” management is frequently mentioned when it comes to PLCs and teacher collaborative teams in regard to holding leaders accountable for learning and continuous improvement expectations. “Tight” refers to a tightly defined vision and mission that everyone supports and “loose” refers to the flexible design and organizational processes created to attain the mission and vision. Hord and Sommers (2008) talked extensively about keeping the focus on learning and the contributions that all professional staff needed to make to do this. These researchers contend that “one of the first steps in building capacity for learning is a ruthless assessment of reality” as it pertains to student achievement data (p. 86). Sharing student achievement data and talking about how to respond to the results helps staff members take responsibility for the results they are currently getting at both the school and district level (Hord & Sommers, 2008). The following are three suggestions for practice for leaders who are focused on the creation of an accountability process for their building and district:

a) Deliverables: Leaders should define what the “work” (determining essential learner outcomes, creating formative assessments, setting of SMART goals, etc.) of the teacher collaborative teams will be at the beginning of every school year as it relates to the overall building and district goals. These deliverables provide the weekly/monthly/yearly roadmap of expectations that collaborative teams need to focus on for that given school year.

b) Goal Writing: Buildings and districts should clearly define and provide professional development in writing instructional goals so that the goals are written in a systemic way across all departments, buildings, and district collaborative teams.

c) Summary of teacher and building collaborative work: A process for reporting the work of collaborative teams to the superintendent and school board should be established so that the work of buildings is clear and transparent. This strategy holds everyone accountable for learning work and also is one approach to showcase the hard work of teacher collaborative teams to the school board and community.

School Change

As Hord describes it, “Changing schools is highly challenging, complex, and messy work—and change is rarely welcomed” (Hord, 2004, p. 3). As building and district leaders look to implement this type of systemic change at the high school level it is important to note that change takes time. This is especially true of change at the high school level when you consider that many high schools have been historically isolated

organizations with little collaborative work being done in a systemic way. Therefore, it is recommended that leaders keep in mind the following when considering this type of philosophical change:

a) Leaders need to support and create a multi-year implementation plan: Both of these high schools were at various stages in their continuous improvement process but leaders agreed in both districts that this type of change (collaboratively using data to inform instruction) takes several years to implement. For example, it took the North High School team approximately three years to establish quality assessments before they could effectively write instructional goals to increase student achievement. This obviously took great support from central office leaders and school board members in a time period where state mandated test and immediate improvement are critical to parents and community members.

b) Creation of a vision based that is supported by all stakeholders: Both high schools and districts involved in this study had a “significant reason or impetus for change” (i.e. shared leadership needs and NCLB/district competition) that led them into their systemic change to becoming schools that focused on continuous professional learning. Leaders should be aware of and strive to find the “unifying” force or reason for change that will allow all stakeholders to support and engage in this difficult work and change process. Engaging in dialogue and being willing to engage all leaders in these discussions at the “front end” of this movement is critical.

Implications for Policy

“Principals play a vital and multifaceted role in setting the direction for schools that are positive and productive workplaces for teachers and vibrant learning environments for children, but existing knowledge on the best ways to develop these effective leaders is insufficient. Growing consensus on the attributes of effective school principals shows that successful school leaders influence student achievement through two important pathways — the support and development of effective teachers and the implementation of effective organizational processes. This consensus is increasingly reflected in preparation and licensing requirements...” (Davis et al., 2005, p.1).

In the Davis et al. (2005) study, it was reported that there are now three aspects of a principal’s job that research suggest are critical to creating a culture that influences student achievement. They are: (1) developing a deep understanding of how to support teachers, (2) managing the curriculum in ways that promote student learning and (3) developing the ability to transform schools into more effective organizations that foster powerful teaching and learning for all students. Educators and professionals who are familiar with the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards realize that the above three areas are reflected in those standards. But, as Hallinger and McCary (1992) state, “It is not enough for principals to have a repertoire of behaviors; they must know how and when to use them, and they must be careful to monitor their effects on student learning (p. 45).”

When considering policy implications, Fullan (2003) warns that “historically, few

governments have got it right... However, lasting school improvement cannot occur if the “system” is not helping. All people, at all levels, need to work on building learning organizations (p.14).” Fullan (2003) was clear in what he felt happened in the past when government and policy makers attempted to impact learning. He warned that governments that rely on accountability measures, pressure, and support to change schools would not be able to create deep and lasting change without engaging in capacity building at the district level. He went on to say that:

Structural changes, curriculum and accountability measures, popular world-wide in the 90s, create overload and have done little to change the quality of teaching and learning. Accountability schemes can never work because they cannot create the beliefs and behaviors necessary for success. Too often curriculum innovations have side effects worse than the cure. It takes a courageous principal to act flexibly in such situations. Leaders with 'capacity' are less likely to 'toe the line' and will adapt innovation to suit their own purposes. For many principals it is easier to comply with imposed demands and in the process 'get better at a bad game' (p. 48).

Fullan (2003) believes that building and district leaders need to first develop standards, set expectations and then move into developing a culture that develops schools as professional learning communities. Given this information and correlating it to what I observed in the two high schools and districts involved in this study, I recommend that policymakers (collaborating with secondary and higher educational institutions and leaders) in this state base future efforts for policy changes on the three principles that are

currently being studied by Davis et al. (2005) in regard to identifying effective leadership development programs:

- 1) **Leadership Skills:** What knowledge and skills should be developed to create effective leaders?
- 2) **Program elements:** What program features are essential in the development of effective school leaders? What standards should institutions follow?
- 3) **Financing:** What policy and fiscal structures and strategies are most likely to support effective principal preparation and inservice programs, and are there models of excellence that can be replicated?

I will now relate my findings in this study to the three principles that are currently being used to produce high quality leadership development programs.

Leadership Skills

Given the conceptual framework that was created as part of this study, a critical component of any leadership program would need to stress the importance of shared leadership and the positive effects this strategy can have when attempting to create a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools. Hord and Sommers (2008) stated that the sharing of power and authority can be difficult for the principal and staff during the implementation of PLCs. “The PLC structure in a school is one of continuous adult learning, strong collaboration, democratic participation, and consensus about the school environment and culture” (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 10). It is this researcher’s recommendation that leadership programs should require instruction in shared leadership skills and theories. As part of this requirement, future leaders should be trained and exposed to several types of professional development opportunities that will allow them to determine their particular staff needs to implement this change in decision making at a building and district level.

Another area that was identified in this study that seems essential to future and current leader development is that of strategic planning. It was previously mentioned that creating a high school that embeds continuous professional learning as a norm takes time. Due to the fact that this is a multi-year process, having the skills to strategically and systemically create a long-term plan for implementation is critical for educational leaders. Strategic planning should also be a requirement for any future educational leadership development programs.

Program elements

Mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards are an important base for all educational leaders and should be embedded in leadership programming development. In addition, based on what was found in this study, I recommend that training and proven application of the following areas, theories, and strategies be incorporated in future leadership development programs:

- Shared decision-making theories and practice
- Five dimensions of professional learning communities
- Effective practices (SMART goals, building improvement plans, using data to inform instructions, etc...) for results-driven accountability
- Development of a strategic plan to achieve district and building goals
- Development of a systemic accountability system as it relates to the district vision and mission.

These five areas, in addition to the base principles that are included in the ISLLC, standards, reflect the training and development needed to implement and be successful at moving a high school to a culture of continuous profession learning.

Financing

This may be the most limiting factor given the constraints of state, district, and building budgets. States and districts across our country must allocate and disperse funds for education leadership programs so that we can aspire to developing the types of schools that we know benefit students and their achievement. This researcher believes that, in addition to creating effective leadership programs, we should also monetarily reward educational leaders for attending current and future training opportunities in the above mentioned leadership and program areas. A state program, similar to many pay for performance initiatives, should be created in an effort to encourage current educational leaders to receive and become adept at these important skills and strategies. Since many states already have various pay for performance initiatives or grants available for several other areas in education, this would simply be a shift of resources and focus that may or may not have an adverse effect on state and district budgets.

In summary, although research on effective leadership programs, licensure and development is inconclusive at this time, it is generally believed that “program content should be delivered through a variety of methods to best meet the needs of adult learners and to allow principals or aspiring principals to apply the curricular content in authentic settings and toward the resolution of real-world problems and dilemmas. There is

therefore the need to create real and simulated leadership experiences for participants in preparation programs who would otherwise lack the experiential base” (p. 9).

Implications for Future Research

This descriptive study of two high schools in which high quality continuous professional learning is the norm will add to the research base in regard to the effective practices of high school principals and central office administrators use to create such cultures. Findings from this study will provide high school and district administrators with strategies that will support their efforts to develop a learning and development plan to address needs in their own districts.

The results of this study indicate that further research would be beneficial in the following areas: Hord’s framework, transformational principals, learning organizations, and strategic planning. Specific research implications in each of these areas are described below.

Conceptual Framework based on Hord’s (2004) Dimensions

It is recommended that the conceptual framework, along with the seven critical dimensions identified later in this chapter, be studied further using a larger sample of high schools that have successfully created a culture of continuous professional learning. In this way the chronological framework proposed in this study can become more generalizable to more educational settings

Transformational principals

Huffman and Hipp (2003) shared that “transformational principals can make a difference in student learning by influencing internal school process, providing support,

engaging teachers to fully participate in decision-making, and developing a shared sense of responsibility (p. 150).” This seems to be at the core of what was witnessed and described in the journeys of the two high schools in this study. More in-depth research in regard to the transformational leadership styles of principals and how it relates to PLC implementation and teacher collaboration could deepen the research base about how principals and teachers can work together to create this positive learning culture. As previously mentioned, the high schools involved in this study relied heavily on principals and district leaders that believed shared decision-making was at the core of creating their present positive learning cultures.

Learning organizations

“Organizations learn only through individuals who learn” (Senge, 1990, p. 139). “School leaders must establish conditions that encourage new ways of thinking and interacting to build capacity and school-wide commitment to a shared vision. Learning evolves and must engage and nurture interdependent thinking in an environment where all people are connected and valued” (Hipp & Huffman, 2003, p.150). “The organization that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people’s commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization” (Senge, 1990, p.4).

Further research in the area of organizational learning as it relates to PLC implementation and overall learning by all members of the organization would also benefit leaders in the field who are in the midst of this change process. Clearly, the two

high schools involved in this study were embedding the idea and strategies that involve all stakeholders in learning conversations in an effort to learn as an organization.

Strategic planning

During the course of this study, it became clear to this researcher that educational leaders need to have the skills to create and sustain a long-term strategic plan. Although this study focused on high schools, a future study of successful districts that used strategic planning principles, theories, and strategies to create change across an entire district would be beneficial to educators in the field. Discovering the critical choices and plans that district leaders make in an effort to create an environment focused on continuous professional learning in every school in the district versus creating a change in one school would be helpful. Educators are increasingly turning their focus to systemic changes that can benefit all students in the district given the current reality of high stakes testing that all educators are faced with.

Conclusion

This study was designed to discover the ways that central office and school level leaders initiate and advance a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools. Through a descriptive study of two high schools, leadership practices were identified that allowed and fostered this identified culture. These are as follows.

1. Define a reason for change. Each high school and district experienced an event or issue that initiated a reason to change how they engaged in continuous professional work. This event was a starting point for leaders at all levels to engage in conversations about envisioning a new reality for their school.

2. Align resources to the mission and vision. Both high schools, after understanding that change needed to occur, made great efforts to align resources to the newly adopted mission and vision for change. This was a symbolic gesture in both districts and allowed the change process to begin as it gave leaders at all levels new resources to change their current culture and reality.

3. Establish shared decision making that is accepted and practiced by all. Both districts and high schools initiated a shared decision-making process that was clearly understood by staff. Power and lines of authority were clear and fully explained so that the focus of the high school was directed on improvement and instruction.

4. Provide high quality professional development. The professional development activities and opportunities in each high school were aligned and directly related to the district and building goals. These opportunities were also provided in a timely manner, as staff needed different skills and strategies as they changed the learning culture in their school.

5. Foster teacher leadership. It goes without saying that the continuous improvement work that occurred at each high school could not have been done without teacher leaders. In fact, building principals and district leaders said that the change in their learning culture would not have happened had it not been for incredible teacher leaders moving this process.

6. Create and implement structures for accountability and reflection. Supportive conditions such as time for teachers to collaborate and reflect were critical to each high school's change process. In addition, structures to report and guide the work (district and

school goals, department SMART goals, and use of collaboration time) of collaborative teams at each high school were seen as critical dimensions for their success.

7. Set the “data” table to focus the development. Unequivocally, this researcher found that a main reason that each high school had success with focusing collaborative teams on the mission and vision of the district was the fact that each school had a person that helped them focus their time and learning on appropriate and purposeful data. Each school accomplished this in a different manner, but it was key to the success of collaborative teams.

Despite the differences in high schools and their leaders, each school was able to create a culture of continuous professional learning by implementing these seven dimensions at critical periods during their journey. These critical elements and the chronological order in which they happened were similar at each high school and are defined in the conceptual framework discussed in this chapter (Figure 6.1). Although the paths to creating this environment were similar, it is also important to note that there was a driving force and passion that existed in both high schools that clearly suggested that success for all students was held in high regard and the primary focus of why they do what they do. This driving force and passion clearly made these schools successful and is the “magic” that so many leaders strive to attain in their journey to creating a culture for continuous professional learning that ultimately results in success for all students.

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Appendix A

Participant Consent Forms

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHERS: SURVEYS

In what ways do central office and school level leaders, both administrators and teachers, contribute to and influence the establishment of professional learning communities in high schools?

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study concerning the establishment of continuous professional learning communities in high schools. You were selected as a possible participant due to your involvement and participation in a structured continuous learning community. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth investigation to determine the strategies, skills and practices used by central office administrators and school level leaders, both administrators and teachers, which influence and foster the establishment of continuous professional learning in high schools. Findings from the study will be used to inform others about effective practices and suggestions for improving the implementation of professional learning communities in high schools.

This study is being conducted by Bruce Borchers, a graduate student at the University of Minnesota, as part of his graduate work, under the advisement of Dr. Jennifer York-Barr, Professor in the Department of Educational Policy and Administration at the University of Minnesota.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be participating by taking a survey that will be administered online. All licensed teachers and administrators will be invited to complete this survey. This online survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The results will only be available to Bruce Borchers and Dr. Jennifer York-Barr. No one else will have access to the data and your responses will be kept anonymous.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

As indicated above, the information you provide will only be available to Bruce Borchers and Dr. Jennifer York-Barr. The information will be analyzed to determine your perceptions and experiences, and findings will be written up in a formal report. Your responses are anonymous and your school would not be identified by any written reports. The only potential for risk involves the reality that other schools or personnel in the

district may learn of your involvement in this study and would know that reports or findings are about your school.

The benefits to participation are the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and offer your views about creating, changing, and sustaining school improvement practices. This would be of great assistance in advancing the knowledge base about change and improvement in schools.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written products or presentations prepared for dissemination purposes would not include information that would make it possible to identify an individual participant. Research records will be stored securely and only Bruce Borchers and Dr. York-Barr will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota, your school district, or your school. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The primary researcher conducting this study is Bruce Borchers, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact him at 507-420-6541.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may contact Dr. Jennifer York-Barr (yorkx001@umn.edu; 612.625.6387), Professor in Educational Policy and Administration and doctoral advisor of Bruce Borchers. You may also contact, at any time, the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____
I also give my consent to be audiotaped during the interview and understand that a written transcript will be developed.

CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER INTERVIEWS

In what ways do central office and school level leaders, both administrators and teachers, contribute to and influence the establishment of professional learning communities in high schools?

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study concerning the establishment of continuous professional learning communities in high schools. You were selected as a possible participant due to your involvement and participation in a structured continuous learning community. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth investigation to determine the strategies, skills and practices used by central office administrators and school level leaders, both administrators and teachers, which influence and foster the establishment of continuous professional learning in high schools. Findings from the study will be used to inform others about effective practices and suggestions for improving the implementation of professional learning communities in high schools.

This study is being conducted by Bruce Borchers, a student at the University of Minnesota, as part of his graduate work, under the advisement of Dr. Jennifer York-Barr, Professor in the Department of Educational Policy and Administration at the University of Minnesota.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you would be observed in an open-ended manner during your professional learning community meeting time. In particular, the observations would document what takes place during the professional learning community meetings. If you agree to participate, nothing beyond your normal participation in the learning community meetings would be required of you. Any notes taken by Bruce Borchers during the observations would be anonymous, both in terms of individual people involved and in terms of identifying a specific professional learning community.

If you agree to be in this study, you would also be asked to participate in an interview which may take 60 minutes. Bruce Borchers would conduct your interview. It is desirable to audiotape the interview in order to be most precise about your comments. The audiotape would be transcribed to provide an accurate and comprehensive document of the interview. The data and your responses will be kept anonymous. The transcripts will only be available to Bruce Borchers and Dr. York-Barr.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

As indicated above, the information you provide will only be available to Bruce Borchers and Dr. York-Barr. The information will be analyzed to determine your perceptions and experiences, and finds will be written up in a formal report. While this study does not have any significant risks, you should be aware of the following. Although your responses are anonymous (meaning, your name would never be used), responses that emerge from your interview may be identified as having come from a teacher leader. While it is useful for researchers and readers of a study to understand whether different points of view exist among varied respondent groups, this does run the risk of you being associated with a majority view of your respondent group (your respondent group would be “teacher leaders”). The risk incurred with role identification is that local readers of a report that emerges from this study may know that you are a member of a particular role group and, therefore, may assume you subscribe to the majority view in that group.

The benefits to participation are the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and offer your views about creating, changing, and sustaining school improvement practices. This would be of great assistance in advancing the knowledge base about change and improvement in schools.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written products or presentations prepared for dissemination purposes would not include information that would make it possible to identify an individual participant. Research records will be stored securely and only Bruce Borchers and Dr. York-Barr will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota, your school district, or your school. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The primary researcher conducting this study is Bruce Borchers, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact him at 507-420-6541.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may contact Dr. Jennifer York-Barr (yorkx001@umn.edu; 612.625.6387), Professor in Educational Policy and Administration and doctoral advisor of Bruce Borchers. You may also contact, at any

time, the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

I also give my consent to be audiotaped during the interview and understand that a written transcript will be developed.

CONSENT FORM FOR PRINCIPAL AND SUPERINTENDENT/ CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS

In what ways do central office and school level leaders, both administrators and teachers, contribute to and influence the establishment of professional learning communities in high schools?

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study concerning the establishment of continuous professional learning communities in high schools. You were selected as a possible participant due to your work as the principal/superintendent/central office administrator in this school/district and are directly involved in creating a structure for professional learning communities. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth investigation to determine the strategies, skills and practices used by central office administrators and school level leaders, both administrators and teachers, which influence and foster the establishment of continuous professional learning in high schools. Findings from the study will be used to inform others about effective practices and suggestions for improving the implementation of professional learning communities in high schools.

This study is being conducted by Bruce Borchers, a student at the University of Minnesota, as part of his graduate work, under the advisement of Dr. Jennifer York-Barr, Professor in the Department of Educational Policy and Administration at the University of Minnesota.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you would be asked to participate in an interview which may take 60 minutes. Bruce Borchers would conduct your interview. It is desirable to audiotape the interview in order to be most precise about your comments. The audiotape would be transcribed to provide an accurate and comprehensive document of the interview. The data and your responses will be kept anonymous. The transcripts will only be available to Bruce Borchers and Dr. York-Barr.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

While this study does not have any significant risks, you should be aware of the following. Although your responses are anonymous (meaning, your name would never be used), responses that emerge from your interview may be identified as having come from

a principal/central office administrator. While it is useful for the researchers to understand whether different points of view exist among varied respondent groups, this does run the risk of you being associated with a majority view of your respondent group. The risk incurred with role identification is that local readers of a report that emerges from this study may know that you are a member of a particular role group and, therefore, may assume you subscribe to the majority view in that group.

The benefits to participation are the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and offer your views about creating, changing, and sustaining school improvement practices. This would be of great assistance in advancing the knowledge base about change and improvement in schools.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written products or presentations prepared for dissemination purposes would not include information that would make it possible to identify an individual participant. Research records will be stored securely and only Bruce Borchers and Dr. York-Barr will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota, your school district, or your school. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting your relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The primary researcher conducting this study is Bruce Borchers, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact him at 507-420-6541.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may contact Dr. Jennifer York-Barr (yorkx001@umn.edu; 612.625.6387), Professor in Educational Policy and Administration and doctoral advisor of Bruce Borchers. You may also contact, at any time, the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

I also give my consent to be audiotaped during the interview and understand that a written transcript will be developed.

Appendix B

Survey Protocol and Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA)

Appendix B

Professional Learning Communities Assessment (PLCA)

Professional Learning Communities Assessment (PLCA)

Directions:

This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. There are no right or wrong responses. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices, which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement.

Key Terms:

Principal = Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal

Staff = All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students.

Scale: Strongly Disagree (SD)

Disagree (D)

Neutral (N)

Agree (A)

Strongly Agree (SA)

Professional Learning Communities Assessment (PLCA)	Strongly Disagree (SD)	Disagree (D)	Neutral (N)	Agree (A)	Strongly Agree (SA)
Shared and Supportive Leadership					
Professional Learning Communities Assessment (PLCA)	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
1. The staff is consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
2. The principal incorporates advice from staff to make decisions.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
3. The staff have accessibility to key information.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
4. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
5. Opportunities are provided for staff to initiate change.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
6. The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
7. The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)

among staff.					
9. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
Shared Values and Vision					
10. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
11. Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
12. The staff share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
13. Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
14. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
15. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
16. Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
Collective Learning and Application					
17. The staff work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
18. Collegial relationships exist among staff that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
19. The staff plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
20. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
21. The staff engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
22. Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
23. School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
Shared Personal Practice					
24. Opportunities exist for staff to	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)

observe peers and offer encouragement.					
25. The staff provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
26. The staff informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
27. The staff collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
28. Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
29. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
Supportive Conditions—Relationships					
30. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
31. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
32. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
33. School staff exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
Supportive Conditions—Structures					
34. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
35. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
36. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
37. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
38. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
39. The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
40. The proximity of department personnel allows for ease in	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)

collaborating with colleagues.					
41. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)
42. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	(SD)	(D)	(N)	(A)	(SA)

*This survey was modified slightly from Oliver, Hipp, & Huffman, (2003). The Oliver et al. (2003) survey was constructed based on the work of Hord (2004).

43. Indicate how long you have been working at this school.

- This is my first year at the school
- 2-4 years
- 5-10 years
- More than 10 years

45. Including this year, indicate about how many years you have been an educator in K-12 schools.

- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 15 years

In the space that remains here, please offer your views in response the following questions:

As you reflect on the continuous learning and improvement work in your school, what do you identify as the three most important factors for advancing teaching and learning to improve student achievement in high schools? And, why do you view these as the most important?

Appendix C:

Interview protocols (including size page map for participants and comprehensive script for interviewer) for the teachers, principals, and superintendent/central office administrator interview.

Teacher Interview Map

About you...

- Coming to this school
- Interest in teaching
- Choosing a subject/grade
- Enjoyment about teaching

Getting Started in Professional Learning...

- Learning about the Continuous Professional Learning model
- First perceptions
- Initial benefits/drawbacks
- Highlights/low points

The Professional Learning process...

- How did you get “here”
- How meetings went/what group did
- Useful parts/not useful parts
- Perceptions of the Learning group (size, by department/grade level, frequency, length)
- District’s/School’s expectations for teaching

Leadership...

- How did this “all” start
- Who led this initiative
- Professional development received to foster continuous professional learning
- What are the critical strategies and skills needed to develop a continuous professional learning model
- Who keeps the learning community going/What keeps the learning community going

Supportive conditions for professional learning...

- What type of professional learning structure exists in this school
- What structures/systems had to change to engage in this “work”
- What has changed to make this work easier/What hasn’t changed and needs to
- Critical components of a professional development plan to foster continuous professional learning
- What factors influence the establishment of continuous professional learning

Closing...

- Anything else I should know
- Summarize this journey in a few words
- May I contact you with additional questions

In what ways do central office and school level leaders initiate and advance a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools?

- a) **What are key targets of central and site level development work to create a culture of continuous professional learning?**
- b) **What development processes and practices are employed by central and site leaders to foster a culture of continuous professional learning?**
- c) **How do central and site leaders interact with one another and with other school personnel to align, connect?**

Teacher Interview Guide

GETTING STARTED (background, purpose, overview, use, permission)

1. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me!
2. The purpose of this study is to determine the strategies, skills and practices used at your high school to effectively foster an environment of continuous professional learning.
3. I will be asking you to reflect today about your journey in becoming a school that values continuous professional learning.
4. The purpose of my work today is to learn more about teachers' perspectives of the critical strategies and skills needed to foster an environment of continuous professional learning in a high school.
5. Your responses will be anonymous. If I write anything about what you say, your name will never be used; instead, you will be given a pseudonym.
6. I would like to ask you to consider allowing me to audiotape this interview for two reasons. First, it allows me to focus more fully on what is being said without having to worry about taking copious notes. Second, a transcript is a more complete record of your thoughts and more accurate in capturing your words exactly. I am the only person who will have access to the transcripts, and they will only be used for my work at the university.
7. I am required to obtain your informed consent. Please read, ask any questions you have and decide if you want to sign or not. If you decide to not participate, there will be no repercussions by the U of M, the school district, or anywhere else. (PROVIDE CONSENT FORM. ALLOW PARTICIPANT TO READ AND SIGN).

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Please tell me a little about yourself...

1. How was it that you began teaching at this school?
2. When and how did you become interested in being a teacher?
3. What made you choose your subject area and grade level?
4. What do you enjoy most about teaching right now?

Getting Started in Professional Learning...

5. When and how did you learn about the continuous professional learning model currently being used at your school?
6. What were your first thoughts about the continuous professional learning model? Tell me about your first perceptions of the theory behind the model?
7. Early on, what did you think the benefits of the continuous professional learning model would be? What did you think the drawbacks would be?
8. Looking back, what were the highlights of your continuous professional learning group? What were the low points?

The Professional Learning process...

9. How did your school get “here”?
10. In general, how do you operate your group meetings? What does your group do?
11. Of all the different things your professional learning group does during meeting time (sharing, discussing, teaching, etc.), what do you find most useful for you as a professional? What has not been useful?
12. What are your perceptions about the continuous professional learning groups themselves? The size? The mixture of staff (job-alike, departments, grade levels, etc.)?, The amount of time your group meets? The frequency with which the group meets?
13. What are the district’s/school’s expectations for teaching? As principal, what are you held accountable for? Who are you held accountable to?

Leadership...

14. How did the continuous professional learning model get created in your school?
15. Who led the initiative to start this continuous professional learning program?
16. Tell me about the professional development you have participated in over the past year or so. How do you decide to attend what you do? Did you have a choice of what to attend? How are professional development decisions made at this school (By the district? By individual teachers?)? Has it changed/improved the way that you teach?
17. What critical strategies and skills need to be used by leaders to successfully foster the development of a continuous professional learning model?
18. Who keeps the continuous professional learning program going at your school? What keeps the continuous professional learning program going?

Supportive conditions for professional learning...

19. What type of structure do you use in this school to foster continuous professional learning? What does it look like? How is it organized? What do you discuss? Is it useful?
20. What structures/systems had to change to engage in this “work”?
21. What has changed to make this work easier? What hasn’t changed and needs to?
22. What are the critical components of a professional development plan that are needed to foster a continuous professional learning model?
23. What factors, within or outside the school, influence your ability to establish continuous professional learning in your high school?

Closing...

Thank you very much for your time and insights. I appreciate you sharing your experiences with me!

24. Is there anything else you think I should know to help me more fully understand your perceptions and experiences about the continuous professional learning model in your school?
25. In a few words, how would you summarize your school's journey in becoming a culture that values continuous professional learning?

Follow up...

26. As I review my notes, if I were to need clarification, would it be OK to contact you?

I HAVE ENJOYED LEARNING WITH YOU AND OTHERS AT YOUR SCHOOL. I WILL BE WRITING UP WHAT I HAVE LEARNED AND WILL SHARE IT WITH YOU IN THE FUTURE!

Principal Interview Map

About you...

- Coming to this school
- Interest in being principal
- Enjoyment about being a principal

Getting Started in Professional Learning...

- Past knowledge about the Continuous Professional Learning model
- First thoughts about this model
- Initial benefits/drawbacks
- Highlights/low points

The Professional Learning process...

- Behind the scenes
- Perceptions of how professional learning groups were organized (size, by department/grade level, frequency, length)
- Impact of teachers being away from classrooms
- What procedures would you recommend to other administrators
- What procedures would you change/avoid if you started this model at another school
- District's/School's expectations for teaching

Leadership...

- How did this “all” start
- Who led this initiative
- Professional development received to foster continuous professional learning
- What are the critical strategies and skills needed to develop a continuous professional learning model
- Who keeps the learning community going/What keeps the learning community going

Supportive conditions for professional learning...

- What type of professional learning structure exists in this school
- What structures/systems had to change to engage in this “work”
- What has changed to make this work easier/What hasn't changed and needs to
- Critical components of a professional development plan to foster continuous professional learning
- What strategies did you use to implement these changes
- What factors influence the establishment of continuous professional learning

Closing...

- Anything else I should know
- Summarize this journey in a few words

- May I contact you with additional questions

In what ways do central office and school level leaders initiate and advance a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools?

- What are key targets of central and site level development work to create a culture of continuous professional learning?**
- What development processes and practices are employed by central and site leaders to foster a culture of continuous professional learning?**
- How do central and site leaders interact with one another and with other school personnel to align, connect?**

Principal Interview Guide

GETTING STARTED (background, purpose, overview, use, permission)

1. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me!
2. The purpose of this study is to determine the strategies, skills and practices used at your high school to effectively foster an environment of continuous professional learning.
3. I will be asking you to reflect today about your journey in becoming a school that values continuous professional learning.
4. The purpose of my work today is to learn more about the principal's perspective of the critical strategies and skills needed to foster an environment of continuous professional learning in a high school.
5. Your responses will be anonymous. If I write anything about what you say, your name will never be used; instead, you will be given a pseudonym.
6. I would like to ask you to consider allowing me to audiotape this interview for two reasons. First, it allows me to focus more fully on what is being said without having to worry about taking copious notes. Second, a transcript is a more complete record of your thoughts and more accurate in capturing your words exactly. I am the only person who will have access to the transcripts, and they will only be used for my work at the university.
7. I am required to obtain your informed consent. Please read, ask any questions you have and decide if you want to sign or not. If you decide to not participate, there will be no repercussions by the U of M, the school district, or anywhere else. (PROVIDE CONSENT FORM. ALLOW PARTICIPANT TO READ AND SIGN).

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Please tell me a little about yourself...

1. How was it that you came to be the principal at this school?
2. When and how did you become interested in being a principal?
3. What do you enjoy most about being principal right now?

Getting Started in Professional Learning...

4. When and how did you learn about the continuous professional learning model currently being used at your school?
5. What were your first thoughts about implementing this continuous professional learning model? Tell me about your first perceptions of the theory behind the model?
6. Early on, what did you think the benefits of the continuous professional learning model would be? What did you think the drawbacks would be?
7. From what you have seen and heard, what have been the highlights of the continuous professional learning model? What have been the low points?

The Professional Learning process...

8. A lot of things had to come together for this program to take place. What happened behind the scenes to allow this continuous professional learning model to be implemented?
9. What is your perception about how the continuous professional learning groups are organized? The size? The mixture of staff (job-alike, departments, grade levels, etc.)?, The amount of time your group meets? The frequency with which the group meets?
10. What has been the impact of teachers being out of their classrooms to meet with their continuous professional learning groups?
11. Having lived through this process, what procedures would you recommend to other administrators that are thinking about implementing a continuous professional learning model such as yours?
12. What procedures would you change/avoid if you started this model in another high school?
13. What are the district's/school's expectations for teaching? As principal, what are you held accountable for? Who are you held accountable to?

Leadership...

14. How did the continuous professional learning model get created in your school?
15. Who led the initiative to start this continuous professional learning program?
16. Tell me about the professional development you have designed over the past year or so. What type of professional development have you received regarding the creation of a continuous professional learning program? How did you decide what training to offer teachers? Did teachers have a choice of what to attend? How are professional development decisions made at this school (By you? By the district? By individual teachers?)? Has it changed/improved the way teachers teach?
17. What critical strategies and skills need to be used by principals to successfully foster the development of a continuous professional learning model?
18. Who keeps the continuous professional learning program going at your school? What keeps the continuous professional learning program going?

Supportive conditions for professional learning...

19. What type of structure do you use in this school to foster continuous professional learning? What does it look like? How is it organized? What is discussed? Is it useful?

20. What structures/systems had to change to engage in this “work”?
21. What has changed to make this work easier? What hasn’t changed and needs to?
22. What are the critical components of a professional development plan that are needed to foster a continuous professional learning model?
23. What factors, within or outside the school, influence your ability to establish continuous professional learning in your high school?

Closing...

Thank you very much for your time and insights. I appreciate you sharing your experiences with me!

24. Is there anything else you think I should know to help me more fully understand your perceptions and experiences about the continuous professional learning model in your school?
25. In a few words, how would you summarize your school’s journey in becoming a culture that values continuous professional learning?

Follow up...

26. As I review my notes, if I were to need clarification, would it be OK to contact you?

I HAVE ENJOYED LEARNING WITH YOU AND OTHERS AT YOUR SCHOOL. I WILL BE WRITING UP WHAT I HAVE LEARNED AND WILL SHARE IT WITH YOU IN THE FUTURE!

Superintendent/Central Office Administrator Interview Map

About you...

- Coming to this district
- Interest in being a superintendent/central office administrator
- Enjoyment about being a superintendent/central office administrator

Getting Started in Professional Learning...

- Past knowledge about the Continuous Professional Learning model use at the high school
- First thoughts about this model
- Initial benefits/drawbacks
- Highlights/low points

The Professional Learning process...

- Behind the scenes (influencing key stakeholders)
- Perceptions of how professional learning groups at the high schools were organized (size, by department/grade level, frequency, length)
- Impact of teachers being away from classrooms
- What procedures would you recommend to other superintendent/central office administrator
- What procedures would you change/avoid if you started this model in another district
- District's/School's expectations for teaching

Leadership...

- How did this “all” start
- Who led this initiative
- Professional development received to foster continuous professional learning
- What are the critical strategies and skills needed to develop a continuous professional learning model
- Who keeps the learning community going/What keeps the learning community going

Supportive conditions for professional learning...

- What type of professional learning structure exists in this school
- What structures/systems had to change to engage in this “work”
- What has changed to make this work easier/What hasn't changed and needs to
- Critical components of a professional development plan to foster continuous professional learning
- What strategies did you use to implement these changes
- What factors influence the establishment of continuous professional learning

Closing...

- Anything else I should know
- Summarize this journey in a few words
- May I contact you with additional questions

In what ways do central office and school level leaders initiate and advance a culture of continuous professional learning in high schools?

- a) What are key targets of central and site level development work to create a culture of continuous professional learning?**
- b) What development processes and practices are employed by central and site leaders to foster a culture of continuous professional learning?**
- c) How do central and site leaders interact with one another and with other school personnel to align, connect?**

Superintendent/Central Office Administrator Interview Guide

GETTING STARTED (background, purpose, overview, use, permission)

1. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me!
2. The purpose of this study is to determine the strategies, skills and practices used at the high school to effectively foster an environment of continuous professional learning.
3. I will be asking you to reflect today about your journey in becoming a school district that values continuous professional learning.
4. The purpose of my work today is to learn more about central office administrator's perspectives of the critical strategies and skills needed to foster an environment of continuous professional learning in a high school.
5. Your responses will be anonymous. If I write anything about what you say, your name will never be used; instead, you will be given a pseudonym.
6. I would like to ask you to consider allowing me to audiotape this interview for two reasons. First, it allows me to focus more fully on what is being said without having to worry about taking copious notes. Second, a transcript is a more complete record of your thoughts and more accurate in capturing your words exactly. I am the only person who will have access to the transcripts, and they will only be used for my work at the university.
7. I am required to obtain your informed consent. Please read, ask any questions you have and decide if you want to sign or not. If you decide to not participate, there will be no repercussions by the U of M, the school district, or anywhere else. (PROVIDE CONSENT FORM. ALLOW PARTICIPANT TO READ AND SIGN).

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Please tell me a little about yourself..

1. How was it that you came to be a central office administrator in this school district?
2. When and how did you become interested in being a central office administrator?
3. What do you enjoy most about being a central office administrator right now?

Getting Started in Professional Learning...

4. When and how did you learn about the continuous professional learning model currently being used at the high school?
5. What were your first thoughts about implementing this continuous professional learning model? Tell me about your first perceptions of the theory behind the model?
6. Early on, what did you think the benefits of the continuous professional learning model would be? What did you think the drawbacks would be?
7. From what you have seen and heard, what have been the highlights of the continuous professional learning model? What have been the low points?

The Professional Learning process...

8. A lot of things had to come together for this program to take place. What happened behind the scenes to allow this continuous professional learning model to be implemented?
9. What is your perception about how the continuous professional learning groups are organized? The size? The mixture of staff (job-alike, departments, grade levels, etc.)?, The amount of time your group meets? The frequency with which the group meets?
10. What has been the impact of teachers being out of their classrooms to meet with their continuous professional learning groups?
11. Having lived through this process, what procedures would you recommend to other central office administrators that are thinking about implementing a continuous professional learning model such as yours?
12. What procedures would you change/avoid if you started this model in another district?
13. What are the district's/school's expectations for teaching? As a central office administrator, what are you held accountable for? Who are you held accountable to?

Leadership...

14. How did the continuous professional learning model get created in the high school?
15. Who led the initiative to start this continuous professional learning program?
16. Tell me about the professional development you have designed over the past year or so. What type of professional development have you received regarding the creation of a continuous professional learning program? How did you decide what training to offer teachers/principals? Did teachers/principals have a choice of what to attend? How are professional development decisions made in this district (By you? By the principal? By individual teachers?)? Has it changed/improved the way teachers teach?
17. What critical strategies and skills need to be used by central office administrator to successfully foster the development of a continuous professional learning model in high schools?
18. Who keeps the continuous professional learning program going at the high school? What keeps the continuous professional learning program going at the high school?

Supportive conditions for professional learning...

19. What types of structures are used at this high school to foster continuous professional learning? What does it look like? How is it organized? What is discussed? Is it useful?
20. What structures/systems had to change to engage in this “work”?
21. What has changed to make this work easier? What hasn’t changed and needs to?
22. What are the critical components of a professional development plan that are needed to foster a continuous professional learning model?
23. What factors, within or outside the high school, influence your ability to establish continuous professional learning in this high school?

Closing...

Thank you very much for your time and insights. I appreciate you sharing your experiences with me!

24. Is there anything else you think I should know to help me more fully understand your perceptions and experiences about the continuous professional learning model in the high school?
25. In a few words, how would you summarize this school’s/district’s journey in becoming a culture that values continuous professional learning?

Follow up...

26. As I review my notes, if I were to need clarification, would it be OK to contact you?

I HAVE ENJOYED LEARNING WITH YOU AND OTHERS AT YOUR SCHOOL. I WILL BE WRITING UP WHAT I HAVE LEARNED AND WILL SHARE IT WITH YOU IN THE FUTURE!

Appendix D

Professional Learning Communities Assessment Results-South High School (PLCA)

Professional Learning Communities Assessment Results-South High School (PLCA)

Shared and Supportive Leadership	Frequency	Mean	Mode	SD
1. The staff is consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	20	3.65	4	.75
2. The principal incorporates advice from staff to make decisions.	20	4.05	4	.76
3. The staff have accessibility to key information.	20	3.90	4	.72
4. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	20	3.95	4	.89
5. Opportunities are provided for staff to initiate change.	20	3.6	4	.75
6. The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	20	3.95	3	.83
7. The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	20	3.9	4	.79
8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff.	20	4	4	.79
9. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	20	4	4	.56

Shared Values and Vision	Frequency	Mean	Mode	SD
10. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	20	3.40	4	.88
11. Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	20	3.60	4	.88
12. The staff share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	20	3.85	4	.81
13. Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	20	3.55	4	.83
14. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	20	3.75	4	.71
15. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	20	3.25	4	1.16
16. Policies and programs are aligned to	20	3.65	4	.86

the school's vision.				
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Collective Learning and Application	Frequency	Mean	Mode	SD
17. The staff work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	20	3.70	4	.66
18. Collegial relationships exist among staff that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	20	3.70	4	.86
19. The staff plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	20	3.35	3	.88
20. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	20	3.55	4	.69
21. The staff engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	20	3.37	4	.83
22. Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	20	3.80	4	.70
23. School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning.	20	3.90	4	.72

Shared Personal Practice	Frequency	Mean	Mode	SD
24. Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement.	20	2.80	2	1.20
25. The staff provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	20	2.80	3	1.20
26. The staff informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	20	4.05	4	.75
27. The staff collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	20	3.15	3	1.09
28. Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	20	3.45	4	1.15
29. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	20	3.70	4	.65

Supportive Conditions—	Frequency	Mean	Mode	SD
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Relationships				
30. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	20	4.20	5	.89
31. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	20	4.05	4	.83
32. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	20	3.60	4	1.14
33. School staff exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	20	3.40	3	.75
Supportive Conditions—Structures	Frequency	Mean	Mode	SD
34. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	20	3.80	4	.70
35. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	20	3.30	4	1.03
36. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	20	2.30	2	.86
37. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	20	3.30	3	.80
38. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	20	3.10	3	.64
39. The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	20	3.40	4	.88
40. The proximity of department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	20	3.80	4	.97
41. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff.	20	3.80	4	.52
42. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	20	3.55	4	.89

Appendix E

South High School SMART Goal Template and Example

COURSE/DEPARTMENT: SOCIAL STUDIES EXAMPLE

SMART GOAL:

By November 12, 2008, 85% of students will score at a 70% rate or higher on the Comprehension Response questions embedded in the Quarter One summative assessment in American History 8.

INDICATOR	MEASURE	TARGET	INTERVENTION
<p>2007 MCA II Reading 7 Comprehension scores (<i>This is a data point to use as a reference and justifies why there is a SMART Goal in Comprehension.</i>)</p> <p><i>Comprehension Concepts</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Author Point of View</i> b. <i>Compare and Contrast</i> 	<p>Formative and Summative Comprehension Response Assessments</p>	<p>85% of students will earn score at 70% or higher on the Formative and Comprehension Response Assessments.</p>	<p>Beginning Sept. 21, 2009, all classes will practice Comprehension Response questions weekly.</p>

SMART GOAL TEMPLATE '07

Appendix F

Professional Learning Communities Assessment Results-North High School (PLCA)

Professional Learning Communities Assessment Results-North High School (PLCA)

Shared and Supportive Leadership	Mean	Mode	SD
1. The staff is consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	3.93	4	.93
2. The principal incorporates advice from staff to make decisions.	4.05	4	.88
3. The staff have accessibility to key information.	3.86	4	.86
4. The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	4.27	4	.72
5. Opportunities are provided for staff to initiate change.	3.98	4	.73
6. The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	4.20	5	.89
7. The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	3.90	4	.86
8. Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff.	3.97	4	.87
9. Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	4.05	4	.73

Shared Values and Vision	Mean	Mode	SD
10. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	3.98	4	.75
11. Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	3.81	4	.75
12. The staff share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	4.20	4	.55
13. Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	4.15	4	.55
14. A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	4	4	.55
15. School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	3.46	4	1.05
16. Policies and programs are aligned to	3.98	4	.60

the school's vision.			
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Collective Learning and Application	Mean	Mode	SD
17. The staff work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	4.15	4	.61
18. Collegial relationships exist among staff that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	4.15	4	.71
19. The staff plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	4.05	4	.81
20. A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	3.81	4	.73
21. The staff engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	3.95	4	.63
22. Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	4.27	4	.69
23. School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning.	4.39	4	.53

Shared Personal Practice	Mean	Mode	SD
24. Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement.	4.73	5	.45
25. The staff provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	4.47	5	.65
26. The staff informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	4.31	5	.77
27. The staff collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	3.83	4	1.01
28. Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	4.29	5	.79
29. Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	4.31	4	.59

Supportive Conditions— Relationships	Mean	Mode	SD
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30. Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	4.34	4	.63
31. A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	3.76	4	.86
32. Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	4.03	4	.91
33. School staff exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	3.80	4	.74
Supportive Conditions—Structures	Mean	Mode	SD
34. Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	4.19	4	.80
35. The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	3.78	4	.89
36. Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	3.56	4	.77
37. Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	3.41	4	.97
38. Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	3.98	4	.92
39. The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	3.73	4	.94
40. The proximity of department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	3.83	4	.89
41. Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff.	3.76	4	.86
42. Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	3.73	4	.74

Appendix G

Site Teacher Leadership Team (STLT) Job Description

Site Teacher Leadership Team (STLT) Job Description

The following issues have been agreed to for the 2007-09 collective bargaining agreement.

The District and School Board agree to the following duties and compensation of the Site Teacher Leadership Team (STLT's) for the 2007-09 school year:

- The STLT members will be responsible for the following work:
 - Work with department/grade level/job alike members to identify concerns regarding:
 - Curriculum
 - Interventions
 - Instructional strategies
 - Learner outcomes
 - Content standards
 - Scheduling concerns
 - Student assessments
 - Options to resolve issues
 - Review and facilitate the development of the Building Improvement and Innovation Plans, as per ISIP guidelines, including programming changes, and course offerings.
 - Support building colleagues in the implementation of all School Board approved curricula, participating as a resource to new teachers.
 - Plan the portion of staff development days that relate to ISIP goals and participate in managing the ISIP budget.
 - Attend the Leadership Institute in August.
- Committee will meet outside of the school day.
- All 6 elementary schools will have 7 STLTS. 3 from K-2 or special ed, 3 from 3-5 or special ed, and 1 specialist.
- All 3 middle schools will have 8 STLTS at large, but preferably from different departments.
- Each high school will have 10 STLTS, preferably from different departments.
- The Area Learning Center will have 3 STLTS (1 advisor position and 2 classroom teacher positions).
- Not every grade level or department might be represented however no grade level or department may have more than 2 people on the STLT team.
- The STLT members will be responsible for guiding all aspects of the District Teacher Professional Pay System (MAPS) process:
 - Support team members in developing annual goals
 - Collaborate with team members, fellow STLT members and the building principal to facilitate team meetings and classroom/worksite observations
 - Train team members in the MAPS observation system

- Monitor the progress of their grade level or department team in meeting the requirements of the (MAPS) process
- Participate in managing the MAPS building budget
- Each building will have a MAPS Building Coordinator selected from the STLT team. The responsibilities of this position are:
 - To coordinate all STLT MAPS activities, and be first in line to deal with concerns the STLTs have with the MAPS process.
 - To serve as the primary contact between their building and the MAPS Coordinating Council to resolve MAPS issues.
 - Have quarterly meetings with the Coordinating Council to discuss issues and maintain consistency throughout the district.
 - Oversee the MAPS budget.
- STLTs will be paid the stipend either in December or January at the choice of the STLT member.

STLT Stipends

- STLTs that develop and work with ISIPP goals and MAPS will receive \$4,000.
- Teacher leaders from ECSE, ELL, OT-PT-Adaptive P.E., TOSA, EIA, School psychologists and School nurses that work only on facilitating only the MVTPPS process will receive \$2,000.
- Teacher leaders that work in the hourly rate programs, ABE and ECFE, will receive \$50/per hour to a maximum of 40 hours per year to facilitate the MAPS process.

STLT Selection Process:

- In April and May, all building staff will be notified of the number of positions to be filled and the desired composition of the team.
- Interested staff members should review the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which describes the duties, job description, and time commitment in order to have a clear understanding of the expectations of the position. If staff members have questions they should talk to current or previous STLT members and/or their principal.
- Teachers including current STLTs who wish to become a STLT for the 2007-09 contract years need to fill out the application form in the online job postings.
- Prospective STLTs will be interviewed by a district team comprised of several MAPS Coordinating Council members.
- Final selection of all STLTs, district wide, will be made by the MAPS Coordinating Council.

- If the principal and/or department team/grade level believes the STLT is not fulfilling the duties described above. The following progressive interventions may be implemented for individual teachers who have a demonstrated pattern of failing to adhere to these general guidelines and expectations:
 - Administrators and a Representative of the Association will review the MOU individually with any staff member who the administration believes need additional clarification of these expectations;
 - Should this pattern of behavior continue, an administrator will meet with the individual and provide written notice that STLT expectations are not being met;
 - Should this pattern continue after the above step, an administrator may have the STLT resign the position.

STLT Evaluation:

- STLT teams and individual STLT members will be evaluated on an annual basis.
- Each STLT member will complete a self-evaluation;
- STLT teams will complete a team evaluation;
- STLT constituents will complete an online evaluation of their individual STLT representative.
- Group results and anonymous aggregate results may be shared with MAPS Coordinating Council and/or the State Department of Education.
- Individual results will be shared only with the Principal and the individual.

Appendix H

Questions and Answers Regarding Common Assessments

Questions and Answers Regarding Common Assessments

Background/Introduction

We are involved in a curriculum process consisting of the following steps:

1. Define outcomes
2. Design assessments aligned with those outcomes
3. Analyze data from those assessments
4. Refine instruction based on that data

The work being done this year at both North High Public Schools and North High School in the area of assessments, is the logical next step in a curriculum process that was begun a couple of years ago. The first step in this process was the identification of learner outcomes. This discussion took place during school year 01-02, when departments discussed the Board approved outcomes that had been defined by Curriculum Committees.

In the curriculum process, once outcomes are identified, the next logical step is to align assessments with those outcomes. We can most effectively measure achievement through this type of process. Once teachers have identified outcomes, and have designed assessments to measure whether or not students have met those outcomes, they can use the data from those assessments to set targets for enhancing achievement. Our job this year is to complete the discussions regarding outcomes, and to begin the process of designing and administering assessments that are aligned with those outcomes. It makes sense to have 'job-alikes' work collaboratively to design and administer those assessments, and to analyze the data.

Once assessments are aligned with outcomes, future discussions would revolve around instructional strategies. Data from assessments would enhance discussions concerning what appears to have the biggest positive impact on learning.

Questions and Answers Regarding Common Assessments

Question:

With the budget the way it is, how can this effort be afforded?

Answer:

School Improvement resources from district and building budgets, and some supply budget resources were used to purchase the software and associated training. Although department budgets have been used historically for scantrons, department budgets were not used to purchase the new scantrons. For now, money for scantrons will continue to

come from school improvement, and building supply budgets. Long term, this may be a topic of discussion in the budget committee. We need additional tools at the high school for measuring student achievement; both high school Principals felt that this was a necessary expenditure at this time.

There aren't any resources to pay for additional clerical time, so this job was added to the current jobs of our clerical staff. To date, the clerks responsible for this have said that the use of this new software has not been a burden. We'll have to continue to monitor the amount of time/effort it takes.

Question:

How will this data be used?

Answer:

This is about teachers identifying what outcomes are most important, what assessments will most effectively measure what has been identified as most important, and what the data means for their classroom practice. Data is intended to be used by teachers. It should be used to:

- assess test effectiveness, i.e. does the test assess the outcomes we've defined, are the test items well-written, etc.,
- identify student instructional needs
- provide teachers with the information needed to make informed decisions regarding classroom practice, i.e. are there outcomes/objectives we're missing, is this working better for one of my colleagues – if so what ideas can I gather from others and vice versa
- identify most effective instructional strategies
- provide a base for setting goals/targets for improvement – to enhance achievement

Many teachers with common preps have already been involved in some of these collaborative efforts. Teachers can begin this process by reviewing their assessments and making sure they are aligned with the defined outcomes. They may want to start with a unit or chapter test. Data from common assessments will provide teachers with another tool for measuring instructional effectiveness.

Question:

Will this data be used to evaluate me?

Answer:

NO! This data is intended for teachers to evaluate their own efforts with students.

The data teachers gather when they administer a common assessment will not be used for evaluation and teachers will only see their own data in comparison to the total group, not to other individual teachers. Administrators will expect to discuss the teacher's (teachers') use of student data as it relates to improving instruction and student

achievement. Specifically, they will be interested in how teachers use data generated in this process, to refine practice and enhance achievement.

Question:

How am I going to find the time to do all of this?

Answer:

There will be continued discussions in:

STLT meetings, department meetings, and school-wide staff development time.

Teachers may want to share parts of the work with other teachers. Also, if a PLC wanted to form a study group to work on such a project, the teachers in that group could earn Enriched District Credit. Teachers who are finding it difficult to come up with the time to collaborate should see their building Principal.

Question:

Do I have to change all of my assessments to multiple choice and short answer items to use the Assessor Software?

Answer:

No. With the assessor software, you can enter rubric scores for performance items, as well as the items more typically scored on a scantron form.

Question:

How do I do this with everything else I have to do?

Answer:

Don't panic; this will be a long-term process. Start by making sure that the outcomes identified for the course you are teaching are truly being covered. Once the outcomes are clearly defined for students, begin your work with assessment by making sure that the outcomes and the assessment are clearly aligned. You may already be doing some things in common. If so, talk about whether or not it makes sense to do a common assessment for a unit or chapter, and if so, you may want to use the Assessor Software. The Assessor Software is very fast, and may even save you some time.

Appendix I

North High School Instructional Coach – Job Description

INSTRUCTIONAL COACH – Job Description

- Instructional Coach’s primary responsibility is to support their colleagues in selecting and implementing instructional strategies to meet the needs of students.
- Work with individual classroom teachers, job-alike teacher groups, departments, Site Teacher Leadership Team (STLT) and any other teacher groups at the building level to support them in implementing instructional strategies to meet the needs of students.
- Be knowledgeable of current building initiatives and be aware of available strategies that will support teachers’ efforts in meeting diverse student needs.
- Provide support for individual teachers, groups of teachers and the STLT in developing effective instructional strategies to differentiate curricula.
- Work with district content area resource teachers to provide additional building based support for the work of the STLT members and the curriculum review committees.
- Support teachers in identifying site professional development needs by assisting with data analysis of student performance and providing reports and / or summaries of pertinent research information in areas such as curriculum differentiation, curriculum integration, instructional strategies, student assessment and instructional delivery models.
- Participate in STLT meetings. Ex-Officio
- Initiate discussion sessions for groups of teachers on topics of interest, as requested, by building staff members.
- Provide mentoring support to teachers as needed.
- Provide assistance to building principal and staff in data analysis and setting achievement goals.
- Serve as a resource to the STLT in development and monitoring of ISIP goals.

Requirements

- Requires a minimum of 5 years of successful elementary teaching experience
- Understanding of the components of the Data Driven Decision Making Model
- Knowledge of research and best practices in instructional design and differentiating instruction
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills
- Demonstrated ability to work effectively as part of a team

- Effective group presentation skills
- Flexibility
- Effective problem solving skills

Appendix J

Site Teacher Leadership Team (STLT) Reports

Site Teacher Leadership Team (STLT) Reports

STLT Fall Report-Out

For reporting out, consider the following format (this sets the context for current goals):

1. What were the results of your work last year for:
 - MAPS
 - ISIP

(Please be specific)

2. Based on that, what is your **SMART** objective (s) for this year (some of you have multiple job-alike teams, each having their own SMART objectives)
 - MAPS
 - ISIP
3. What activities/strategies/interventions are you using to reach the objective (s)?
4. What efforts is your department involved in around Content Area Reading/Writing Strategies?
5. How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your goal?
6. What training/support do you need from building and/or district staff to help achieve your objectives?

**End-Of-Year Summary for STLT
2005-06
North High School**

Department:

Job-Alike Team Members:

1. Your SMART Goal for the ISIP Goal #1:
 - a. Progress toward goal:
 - b. What did you learn?
 - c. What would you have done differently?
 - d. Implications for your work in 2006-2007:

**End-Of-Year Summary for STLT
2005-06
North High School**

Department:

Job-Alike Team Members:

Your MAPS Goal for Word Meaning?:

- a. Did you meet it?
- b. What did you learn?
- c. What would you have done differently?
- d. Implications for work with word meaning in 2006-2007?

Appendix K

Integrated School Improvement Plan (ISIP)

INTEGRATED SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (ISIP)

SCHOOL: North High

DATE: 10/1/07

PROCESS SUMMARY: In August 2007, the STLT group met, reviewed progress made in 06-07, and decided to keep our first goal as written; we have continued work to do in this area. A great deal of time was spent on how to write SMART objectives toward this goal that were based on level of proficiency, and during workshop week all departments worked on developing those for 07-08.

GOAL #1

Background: Our efforts at North High have been focused the last few years on developing tools that will allow teachers to measure increased achievement at the classroom level, and to use data from those assessments to design instruction. Teachers have worked collaboratively to identify learner outcomes, to design common assessments, and to use data from those assessments to identify next steps in instruction. Departments are in different stages of this process, but almost all have data that they can use to set measurable targets.

For school year 07-08, teachers will continue this process. Everyone is involved in designing and administering assessments aligned with learner outcomes, and in the development of their SMART objectives toward our goal of measuring increased achievement at the classroom level.

Rationale: The curriculum process involves identifying outcomes, designing assessments that measure achievement on those defined outcomes, and using data from those assessments to design instruction. Also, with the demand for accountability, SCA tests for assessing State standards, and NCLB, we need to develop some benchmarks for assessing progress in skill development necessary for AYP targets.

Goal Statement: North High students will demonstrate increased achievement as measured by summative and/or formative assessments. (Each job-alike will develop a SMART objective toward this goal)

Assessments: STLT reps will discuss progress at monthly meetings and ASAP meetings, and will keep those discussions focused on assessments and results. The instructional coach will include discussions of this work and the impact it has on their teaching, as we meet with individuals and small groups. STLT reps will turn in a summary report at the end of the year. We will review basic skills data and SCA data, and job-alikes will continue to analyze data from their common assessments to see if they are meeting their objectives.

Frequency of Monitoring: Formal monitoring will be done on a monthly basis at STLT meetings and at ASAP meetings. Informal monitoring will happen throughout the year.

List specific strategies that will be utilized/implemented to address this goal. Also, specify for each strategy the professional development activities that will be needed to support staff in implementation.

****Strategies**

1. All teachers will work in job-alikes and by June of 2008, North High School teachers will submit a “process summary,” data analysis for common assessments and implications for future practice.
2. STLT reps will work with department members in development of a measurable objective statement toward reaching this goal
Strategies for this goal will depend on department objectives.
 1. Work during Leadership Institute to hone skills in writing SMART objectives toward proficiency levels.
 2. Monthly department meetings to assess progress, refine efforts.

3. Subs or stipends provided for job-alike work done during or after the school day.
4. Individual and small group training on use of Common assessment software program and Click Away.

GOAL #2

ID students will demonstrate increased achievement in Reading and Math as measured on SCA exams:

62% of grade 11 students who participate in the SCA-II for Mathematics will meet or exceed the standards (proficient). (ID 2007 = 58%)

80% of the grade 10 students who participate in the SCA-II for Reading will meet or exceed the standards (proficient). (ID 2008 = 78%)

Strategies

Math teachers will continue to analyze results of common assessments and refine efforts. (See math job-alike SMART goals).

Special Ed staff will continue to review RIT scores and DesCartes continuum to individualize efforts to meet targeted growth.

Ninth and tenth grade English teachers will use newly developed curriculum plan and benchmarks to meet outcomes/expectations of SCA exam.

All staff will continue to focus on CARS; 07-08 focus is on integration of reading and writing to increase comprehension skills, i.e. constructed response, questioning strategies, graphic organizers

All job-alikes will incorporate reading or math strategies into their efforts to reach their

SMART objectives:

Fine Arts

- Art:** In the color theory assignment (Art I and Senior Art), 90% of students will meet proficiency level of 87% or higher.
- Choir:** By May 30 2008, 75% of Varsity Choir students will score 75% or higher on Level 3 sight reading.
- Band:** By May 30 2008, 90% of Freshmen Band Students will score 100% on music scales in Bb, Eb, Ab and F Major
- Orchestra:** By May 2008, 90% of Varsity Orchestra violin, viola and cello students will play from memory 3 octave major scales in four keys in quarter notes at MM=90 with 85% accuracy. Bass students will play their scales in 2 octaves only.

Social Studies

- Grade 9A:** 1.) The percentage of students who are proficient (70% or better) or partially proficient (55% - 69%) on the 9A semester exam will increase by 54 % from 12 % on the September 2007 pre-test to 66 % on the January, 2008 post-test. (Proficiency) AND
1a.) By January 2008, 80% of the students who did not achieve partial proficiency will demonstrate at least one year's growth (25% increase on pre- to post-test score) on the 9A exam as measured by pre- and post-test data. (Growth)
- Grade 9B:** 2.) The percentage of students who are proficient (75% or better) or partially proficient (60%-74%) on the 9B semester exam will increase by ___% from ___% on the January, 2008 pre-test to ___% on the June, 2008 post-test. (Proficiency) AND
2a.) By June 2008, 80% of students who did not achieve partial proficiency will demonstrate at least one year's growth (25% increase on pre- to post-test score) on the 9B exam as measured by pre- and post-test data.
- Grade 10** 1.) By January 2008, we will increase the number of students who score at a proficient level (30 or above out of 50) on the U.S. History A Test from 1 % on the pre-test to 50 % on the post-test at the end of the semester. (Proficiency)
1a.) By January 2008, 80% of students who did not achieve proficiency will show at least one year's growth (22% increase on pre-to-post test score) on the U.S. History A Test as measured by pre- and post-test data. (Growth)
2.) By June 2008, we will increase the number of students who score at a proficient level (30 or above out of 50) on the U.S. History B Test from

__% on the pre-test to __% on the post-test __% given at the end of the semester. (Proficiency)

2a.) By June 2008, 80% of students who did not achieve proficiency will show at least one year's growth (22% increase on pre- to post-test score) on the U. S. History B Test as measure by pre- and post-test data.

Grade 11:

1.) By January 2008, the percentage of World History/Geography A students who score at a proficient level (at least 70%) on WH/G A common assessments will increase from 3 % on the pre-test given during the first week of the semester to at least 70% on the post-test given at the end of the semester.

1a.) By June 2008, the percentage of world History/Geography B students who score at a proficient level (at least 70%) on WH/G B common assessments will increase from __% on the pre-test given during the first week of the semester to at least 70% on the post-test given at the end of the semester.

English

Grade 9:

The mean score on the 9th grade State writing exam will increase from 3.8 in Spring 2007, to 4.03 in Spring 2008.

Grade 10:

The mean score on the 10th grade SCA reading exam will increase from 1059.1 in Spring 2007, to 1062.7 in Spring 2008.

Electives:

Through the use of a common rubric, students in H Brit Lit, World Lit, College Eng, Topics in Lit, Poetry, AP Lit, CIS Comp, CIS Lit will score an average of 2.5 out of 4 in their literary analysis assignment by the end of the unit.

Science

Grade 9:

Increase the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency (60% correct) level from 40% to 41% on the semester I final and from 35% to 36% on the semester 2 final for the 2007-2008 school year.

Biology:

50% of Biology students will be proficient (70% or better) or exceed proficiency as measured by semester final exams. 2007-2008 scores to be used as baseline data for future reference.

Chemistry:

By June 2008, the average percentage of chemistry students proficient on all outcomes will increase from 57% to 70% as measured by semester final exams.

Physics:

By June 2008, 54% of regular physics students and 71% of honors physics students will achieve a score greater than or equal to 18 out of 30 (60% threshold for Newtonian understanding) on the Force Concept Inventory.

Mathematics

Algebra I:

By the end of second semester, 90% of Algebra I students will have tested at the proficient level of at least 85% on the lines and slopes benchmark.

- Algebra II:** By the end of second semester, 80% of Algebra II students will have tested at the proficient level of at least 8 of 10 on the lines and slopes benchmark.
- Geometry:** By the end of second semester, 85% of Geometry students will test at the proficient level of at least 80% on the lines and slopes benchmark.
- AP Calc I:** By the end of first semester, 95% of Calc I students will have passed the “Transformation of Functions” benchmark with a proficient score of at least 31 of 36 points.

World Languages

- German:** By June 2008, 80% of students in Level I German will demonstrate reading comprehension level of at least 65% on the final exam for Arma Anna
- Spanish II:** By June 2008, Spanish II students will demonstrate at least a 6% increase in average proficiency on the semester II comprehensive final exam, increasing from 64% in 2007, to 70% in 2008.
- Spanish I:** By January 2008 and June 2008, 80% of Spanish I students will achieve at least 75% proficiency on the semester I and semester II comprehensive finals.
- Spanish III:** By June 2008, Level 3 Spanish students will be proficient on all outcomes and will increase from 73% in 2007 to 75% as measured by semester II final exam
- French** French III students will demonstrate increased achievement in the area of word meaning (false cognates) as evidenced by an average increase of 30% from a pre-test in the fall to a post-test in Spring 2008. This would be a 5% increase over performance last year.
- ASL** By Feb 2008, level I students will score 2% higher on their written semester exam on deaf culture than the students did last year.

Student Services

By June 2008, students in Category 4 with a cumulative GPA of 7.0 or less will have completed an Individual Learning Plan, which will include a defined post-high school plan and strategies for increasing cumulative GPA.

- PE:**
- 1.) By the end of each semester (07-08), 70% of Fitness For Life students will achieve proficiency at or above the 50th percentile in all Presidential Fitness Test categories.
 - 2.) By the end of each semester (07-08), 80% of all Fitness for Life students will achieve proficiency at or above 70% on the written common assessment.
 - 3.) By the end of each semester (07-08), 80% of strength/conditioning and dance students will achieve proficiency at or above 70% on the written final test.

- Health:**
- 1.) By the end of each semester, all Health I students will receive a proficient score of 80% or higher on the CPR quiz and receive certification.
 - 2.) By the end of each semester, 80% of Health I students will receive 74% or higher on the cumulative final exam.

Special Ed By June 2008, 48% of ninth graders with an IEP reading goal, and/or who are not proficient on the reading NWEA test, will receive a RIT score of 225 or higher

By June 2008, 40% of ninth graders with an IEP math goal, and/or who are not proficient on the math NWEA test, will receive a RIT score of 239 or higher.

By June 2008, 39% of tenth graders with an IEP reading goal, and/or who are not proficient on the reading NWEA test, will receive a RIT score of 227 or higher.

By June 2008, 46% of tenth graders with an IEP math goal, and/or who are not proficient on the math NWEA test, will receive a RIT score of 240 or higher.

CTE

Pers Finance: In comparing achievement between students taking the end of course assessment in Personal Finance in June 2008 to those who took it in 2007, there will be an increase of 10% in the number of students scoring at a proficiency score of 75% or more on that assessment.

Small Eng: In comparing achievement between students taking the end of course assessment in Small Engines in 2008 to those who took it in 2007, there will be an increase of 10% in students scoring 75% or more on that assessment.

Foods: In comparing achievement between students taking the end of course assessment in Foods A in January 2008 to those who took it in 2007, there will be an increase of 10% in students scoring 75% or more on that assessment.

Career Ed: By May 2008, 80% of Career Ed students will demonstrate proficiency in all 14 areas of the training evaluation with proficiency defined as 6 on a 10 point rubric.

Woods: In comparing achievement between students taking the end of course assessment in Basic Woods in Jan. 08, to those who took it in 2007, there will be an increase of 10% in students scoring 75% or more on that assessment.

Appendix L

Advancing Student Achievement Program (ASAP)

ASAP – Advancing Student Achievement Program; a Cooperative Effort to Increase Achievement at the Classroom Level

Purpose

The purpose for ASAP is:

1. To progressively improve student performance/achievement
2. For teachers to collaborate regarding best practice in curriculum and instruction
3. For teachers to develop and refine assessments and to use data from those assessments to refine instruction

Rationale

At the high school level, we have a few standardized tools available for measuring achievement: *ACT*, *SAT*, *PSAT*, *Advanced Placement* exam scores, and *State BST* and *SCA* scores. Measuring achievement in the classroom has been more difficult. The only measure we've had to date is letter grades.

In order to change that, and to develop tools that would allow us to measure achievement in the classroom, teachers have been working collaboratively to agree on standard outcomes, and to develop common assessments that are aligned with those outcomes. Teachers then work in job-alikes to review data from those assessments, i.e. all ninth grade Social Studies teachers give the same end of semester or end of course assessment, and use the data to identify best practice. This cooperative effort results in refinement of assessments, and ultimately in refinement of instruction.

Over the past few years, teachers have completed this work during the District curriculum days, during teacher workshop days, and when we have provided substitute teachers for them to be out of the classroom. They have also met together before, during, and after school, as time has allowed.

Research is clear – a collaborative, cooperative effort focused on results is the only way we will truly accomplish reform at the high school level (see attachments). Research is also clear that this type of practice needs to be an integral part of our work. If teachers meet regularly to review assessment data, set targets for improvement, and continually review and refine their efforts, we will see increased achievement. We are beginning to see this with our first efforts in this process. Examples include increase in achievement on *SCA* math exams from 2003 to 2004, and increase in *AP Calc* scores from 2003 to 2004.

Implementation of ASAP

To make this practice integral to what we do, to speed the process of development of common assessments, and to use the data from those assessments to refine our efforts, we are proposing that we set aside time on a more frequent basis for teachers to collaborate.

The first phase of implementation would be to set aside ***1½ hours each month*** for

teachers to meet in ‘job-alikes,’ and to move this curriculum and instruction process along. All teachers would meet from 7:00 a.m. to 8:20 a.m., and students would begin first hour at 8:30 a.m. These meetings would take place November through May. Having a month between each meeting would allow time for feedback, and for adjustments to be made to meet concerns.

Students, staff, and parents would be surveyed in May to evaluate the effectiveness of the effort, and the information from that survey would be shared with the Board, prior to any further work.

The next phase of implementation depends on the results of our efforts. We will evaluate survey results and products from the collaborative groups, and decide on next steps. We may find that 1½ hours per month is sufficient for what we are doing, we may find the effort to be so beneficial and successful that we want to extend it to twice per month, or we may want to review how we schedule our curriculum and instruction time in this district. This is yet to be determined, and it will depend on our results.

Student Opportunities During ASAP Time

Because classes would not begin until 8:30 a.m. on ASAP days, students would be allowed to arrive at school in time for their first hour, or they could come to school on their regularly scheduled busses, and we will provide supervision for studying and/or work completion. We would provide supervised quiet study in the cafeteria, supervised open computer labs and Media Center for project completion, and the Student Services and Career Center offices would be open for student and/or parent appointments.

Special Education paras would be available to work with their students. Administrative Paras, and Hall Paras would be available to assist with supervision. Parent volunteers would also be recruited to assist during this time.

Communication Plan

July/August:

- Meet with a focus group of parents on August 15, 2005, to elicit questions/concerns and address those.
- Meet with the Board on August 4 to review information to date and respond to concerns
- Meet with STLT reps Aug 15 and 16 to review process and concerns and to identify their questions, etc.
- Meet with teachers during workshop week to review process and concerns and to identify their questions, etc.

September:

- Possibly meet with Board at Work Session on Sep 8 to discuss concerns and to define what will be taken to parents and students.
- Meet publicly with Board on September 12 before taking this to parents.

- Send letter to all parents with proposal and invite to a public meeting to be held the week of September 19 to discuss issues/concerns
- Teachers talk at Open House about their collaborative efforts
- If necessary, present proposal at public Board meeting on Sep 27.

October:

- Final information to parents and Board
- Teachers submit map of their work for November through May

April:

- Survey parents, students, staff

May:

- Results of survey to Board
- Discussion for future direction

Regular updates of information in electronic newsletters

Regular updates from STLT reps at meetings

Templates

(See attached)

Indicators of Progress –

By June of 2006:

- Team forms completed and turned in
- End of course and/or end of semester common assessments, aligned with outcomes, are developed in all core areas where there are common sections
- End of course and/or end of semester assessments, aligned with outcomes, are developed in all elective areas
- Each teacher will have a minimum of 1 set of assessment data and reflections for implications for future practice
- Where common assessments have been developed, teams will define measurable goals for increasing achievement
- Student, staff, and parent surveys will be completed and data will be collated
- Results of parent surveys will indicate satisfaction with ASAP schedule and understanding of ASAP goals
- Results of staff surveys will indicate satisfaction and professional growth with ASAP efforts

By June of 2007

- All assessments will be aligned with outcomes

By June of 2008

- Job-alikes in core areas will have evidence of improved achievement

Roadmap to Progress

Teachers would agree on outcomes, and would design assessments based on those outcomes and state and national standards. Data from those assessments would be used to:

- refine assessments
- review curricular focus and pacing
- identify most effective instructional strategies, materials and resources
- identify students who are not being successful and create appropriate intervention strategies for them
- set targets for increased achievement

Ultimately, the practice of working collaboratively to design and use assessments for learning, would result in increased achievement.