Public Abstract

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Title:Using Common Formative Assessments to Promote Student Achievement: A Case Study of Practice, Leadership, and Culture

This instrumental, qualitative case study analyzed the perceptions of third, fourth, and fifth grade level teachers through six focus group discussions. In addition three leadership interviews were conducted that involved the building principal, instructional coach, and school counselor. An open-ended survey gleaned additional insights from the instructional staff at this progressive upper elementary school. Several documents pertinent to the study were analyzed. Evidence indicated the implementation of common formative assessments in this school did contribute to sustained mathematics achievement. Three major themes emerged: (a) focus and alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessments, (b) using data to drive instruction, and (c) differentiating instruction to meet student learning needs. Four predominant types of leadership facilitated the implementation and effective use of common formative assessments (a) renewal leadership, (b) moral/ethical leadership, (c) instructional leadership, and (d) distributed leadership. Cultural characteristics that emerged as having significant contributions included: (a) reculture, (b) collaboration, (c) high expectations, and (d) caring relationships. Implications for practice were discussed for each emergent theme in regard to implementation and use, leadership, and culture. This study was significant as it describes the common formative assessment practices, types of leadership, and cultural characteristics of an upper elementary school that has effectively implemented common formative assessments and has experienced a 29% gain in mathematics scores since implementation. Discussion of study findings would be useful for school leaders seeking to implement common formative assessments in efforts to increase student achievement.