

HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY OF A  
LEADERSHIP TEAM'S PROCESSES AND ACTIONS

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

University of Missouri-Columbia

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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by

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MAY 2012

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HIGH QUALITY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCHOOL:  
LEADERSHIP TEAM'S PROCESSES AND ACTIONS

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the three dearest individuals in my life: my mother, uncle and supportive husband. I am forever grateful for all the wisdom, support, and inspiration I have received from my mentor, Beccy Baldwin, and all of the talented colleagues I have had the privilege of working alongside throughout my career.

In LOVING MEMORY of my grandparents, I dedicate this accomplishment to you:

James and Louise Barnes

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reflect on this journey of obtaining a doctoral degree, I cannot help but think of the tremendous support I have received from my advisors, colleagues, and family. First, I would like to personally thank the following individuals providing profound leadership in education at Northwest Missouri State University: Dr. Carole Edmonds, Dr. Phillip Messner, and Dr. Joyce Piveral. The support you provided through your instruction, effective modeling, tools, and ongoing support is to be commended. The educators working as lead learners in this field are in good hands. I have not only appreciated the support you have provided during this pursuit, but also have enjoyed the numerous opportunities to collaborate about key issues in education.

Secondly, I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the many colleagues in which I have had the pleasure of working alongside for the past 15 years. From my early days with the King City R-I School District, the very brief but immensely valuable term spent with the St. Joseph School District, and my current fortune of working with the Northwest Regional Professional Development Center. There is not a day that goes by that I am not thankful for the knowledge and experience gained from each of these three experiences.

Most importantly, I am grateful for the secure foundation of love and support that I have been blessed with throughout my life. Education has been a top priority in my family and I have always been modeled the importance of dedication and hard work. I am forever grateful for the farm-raising values I received from my two loving grandparents. Uncle Fred, you were there to fill the void as a father figure. Mother, you have and continue to be a model educator and woman of service. You inspire me to always want to do better. Finally, to my husband, who wondered if this day would come...thank you for believing in me and loving me for who I am.

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ABSTRACT

There is a lack of information reported about the processes and actions of leadership teams responsible for leading professional development in schools, specifically schools recognized for demonstrating high quality professional development. In recent years, a sense of urgency to increase student achievement and teacher quality at high levels has led to an ever-increasing interest among schools in developing a professional learning community (PLC) model of professional development. Out of all the historical efforts at the national, state, and local levels to improve professional learning, “only a handful have had a measurable impact on teacher learning” (Sparks, 2005, p. 158).

There is information to be gleaned about leadership teams' processes and actions used when coordinating professional development for teachers. Recognizing the increased pressures associated with federal and state mandates linked to student achievement and teacher quality and the disconnect between what research has found to be effective professional development practices and what is being implemented in today's schools, there is a gap to be filled in terms of what allows schools to effectively reach adult and organizational learning through professional development. A question is raised whether this proclaimed evidence of a “knowing-doing” gap

(Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000) could be linked to a lack of schools not having a solid understanding of the leadership team's processes and actions involved in achieving exemplary status.

This descriptive case study explores a rural Missouri school recognized for its implementation of a high-quality professional development program. Using a leadership team to plan for and support professional development learning experiences, this study examines whether or not this Missouri school's leadership team's processes and actions could be potential indicators which allow some schools to be able to bridge the gap between professional development actions and adult learning.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

There is a lack of information reported about the processes and actions of leadership teams responsible for leading professional development in schools, specifically schools recognized for demonstrating high quality professional development. In recent years, a sense of urgency to increase student achievement and teacher quality at high levels has led to an ever-increasing interest among schools in developing a professional learning community (PLC) model of professional development. In addition, traditional teacher professional development practices within schools have failed to have a direct impact on student learning (Drago-Severson, 2004b; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Reeves, 2007; Schmoker, 2006; Sparks, 2005; Wiliam, 2007). Out of all the historical efforts at the national, state, and local levels to improve professional learning, “only a handful have had a measurable impact on teacher learning” (Sparks, 2005, p. 158).

This study explores a rural Missouri school recognized for its implementation of a high-quality professional development program. The school being described in the study received the Missouri Commissioner’s Award of Excellence for Professional Development and will be referred to as MCAE. Professional development will be defined 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 through a balanced focus on the context, content, and process in which the learning is taking place (National Staff Development Council, 2001, p. 2). The leadership team responsible for leading professional development processes and actions within MCAE serve as the population

studied. This team was developed, purposely, by the school to serve as lead learners and facilitators, actively seeking professional development to gain team knowledge capacity and effectively plan for school-wide learning actions among teachers. The leadership team sample includes the MCAE principal and six leadership team members. A mixed representation of leadership team members signifying a broad cross-section of the leadership roles and years the school has implemented the MCAE-recognized model, serve as participants. Leadership team members' perceptions about the processes and actions used in order to achieve recognition at the state level were examined. These perceptions were studied to provide a potential framework for future school leadership teams.

In chapter one, MCAE is described, including the eligibility criteria used to recognize the school for high quality professional development. Next, information supporting the need for the study to be conducted is outlined. This information explains the sense of urgency pressed by federal and state levels on student achievement and teacher quality resulting in increased attention towards the implementation of high quality professional development. Also, the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000) existing between proven practice in professional development and what is currently being implemented by today's schools is shared. Second, the background and conceptual underpinnings supporting the study are framed. Third, a statement of the problem, purpose, research questions, and study design will be outlined. Finally, limitations to the study are recognized, and key terms are defined.

## *MCAE*

The selected school studied, MCAE, was chosen for its ability to be recognized at the state level for implementation of high quality professional development. MCAE is a recipient of the Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development, recognized by Missouri Staff Development Council and Missouri Department of Education. The recognition of MCAE presented a unique opportunity to explore the processes and actions used by a leadership team in order to provide professional development for teachers. The small rural school's high quality professional development model has been implemented for nine consecutive years. The individuals responsible for establishing processes and actions concerning professional development are members of the leadership team, formerly referred to as the Professional Development Committee. This team meets monthly to plan for professional development experiences for certified staff. Within this specific context, certified staff members receive monthly release time to learn collaboratively. Through the recognition process, MCAE was commended for its ability to function as a PLC, in accordance to the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) standards for professional development. Each year, MCAE's professional development processes and actions are aligned to a specific focus of study determined by needs outlined in student achievement data. Professional development activities involve, but are not limited to: data collection and analysis, identifying and monitoring goals, learning research-based instructional practices, creation of common assessments, reviewing student work, and collaboratively designing lessons.

### *MCAE Award Eligibility Requirements*

Formerly titled Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development, the award recognizing schools for professional development practices has been re-titled Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Promising Practice in Professional Development. In order for a school to be recognized as a recipient of the professional development honor, the following must be demonstrated: (a) evidence of professional development practices implemented for two or more years, (b) provide a link between high quality professional development to improved student achievement, and (c) alignment of professional development processes and actions to the twelve NSDC professional development standards (Missouri Staff Development Council, 2011). Once a school has been selected as a semi-finalist, following an extensive review of the above documentation, site visits are conducted. At this stage in the review process, schools are expected to verify practices aligned to the twelve NSDC professional development standards included in the application rubric (Appendix G). In addition to alignment of professional development practices to the 12 standards, evidence of impact on teaching and learning practices is determined.

### Background

Within recent years, schools across the nation have experienced a sense of urgency to raise student achievement and look closely at the level of teacher quality. In response, heightened attention has been placed on the current reality existing in schools when it comes to the implementation of professional development. There is an abundance of research, as well as standards, to support what high quality professional development practices look like; however, there is a disconnect between best practice and actual

implementation efforts by schools (Drago-Severson, 2004b; DuFour et al., 2008; Reeves, 2007; Schmoker, 2006; Sparks, 2005; Wiliam, 2007).

### *Sense of Urgency*

There has been an increasing level of accountability placed on today's schools in the areas of student achievement and teacher development. Accountability measures established by the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* of 2002 have influenced national, state, and local standards for student achievement. By the year 2014, educators across the nation are expected to close the achievement gap by ensuring that all students are performing at proficient levels. Increased attention has been placed on the performance of subgroup populations, causing schools to rethink how they are educating all students. Benchmarks of performance, known as Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets, have been established at each state level. Schools unable to meet the state-level targets are accountable for enduring an intensive school improvement planning process in order to increase the levels of student achievement.

In addition to the emphasis placed on raising standards of student achievement, NCLB legislation has caused educators to look more closely at the "quality" of teachers educating students. This law has pushed for states to establish standards for teacher quality. This increased federal attention placed on teacher quality has resulted in increased funding towards state initiatives to recruit and retain highly effective teachers, including funding available for ongoing professional development (Birman et al., 2009).

Since the birth of NCLB legislation, state, school, and building-level actions to improve teacher quality have included the offering of sustained mentoring programs,

increased implementation of instructional coaching services where teachers have access to highly trained teachers who assist their own teacher development, and other professional development opportunities at the school and building levels. According to this same report, the five most used strategies to retain highly qualified teachers in 2006-2007 included: sustained mentoring programs (47 states), professional development opportunities (47 states), leadership development working conditions (39 states), career advancement opportunities (24 states), and improved teacher education programs (17 states). Additionally, schools reported a 20% increase in their offering of sustained, intensive and content-focused professional development in order to assist teacher development (Birman et al., 2009).

### *Knowing-Doing Gap*

Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) penned the term “knowing-doing gap” in their research surrounding the amount of time, energy and fiscal efforts organizations funneled towards creating positive change in practice, year after year; only to find, that minimal change or improvement resulted. The authors set out to explore why “knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fails to result in action or behavior consistent with that knowledge” in any organization (p. 4). In the educational setting, increased accountability requirements for teacher quality and student achievement continue to present a sense of urgency for school administrators to create change or improve their practices. School administrators “funnel time, energy and fiscal resources” into delivering professional development opportunities for teachers in hopes to attain highly effective teaching practices, and hence, increased student achievement. Resources to support administrators in this pursuit are abundant. Each year, “dozens, if not hundreds of research studies, reports, articles,

and books are published with the intention of improving the quality of professional learning within schools (Sparks, 2002). Scholars, practitioners, and reformers have written them for audiences as diverse as teachers, administrators, school board members, and policy makers. However, the abundance of information existing in the educational community is only producing marginal improvements in the quality of professional development in schools” (p. i-i).

Historically, professional development practices within schools have failed to have a direct impact on student learning (Drago-Severson, 2004b; DuFour et al., 2008; Reeves, 2007; Schmoker, 2006; Sparks, 2005; Wiliam, 2007). DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) acknowledge that historically, “external efforts made by policymakers to improve schools invariably focus on structural changes”...which “neither impact the practices of teachers in their classrooms nor the assumptions that drive those practices, and thus they are insufficient to improve schools” (pp. 89-90). Sparks (2005), in the same vein, acknowledges, out of all the historical efforts at the national, state, and local levels to improve professional learning, “only a handful directly affect what teachers learn” (p. 158).

Digging into historical professional development attempts, Schmoker (2006) insists, “we have relied far too much, with miserable results, on a failed model from improving instructional practice: training, in the form of workshops or staff development” (p. 108). Professional development actions have been marketed as one-shot methods of learning new knowledge in the teaching field. These methods have been limited to teachers, often in isolation, attending workshops, seminars, or advanced coursework in a specific area of study. According to Drago-Severson (2004b), these

practices are merely “informational learning” practices and, for a long period of time, have not been directly linked to long-term achievements (p. 17). Wiliam (2007) sums traditional practice best as he states, “if the research on professional development over the last 20 years has shown us anything, it is that we can change teacher thinking without changing teacher practice, and the only thing that impacts student achievement, is teacher practice” (p. 200).

Within the last ten years, national and state professional development organizations have revised and aligned standards to assist school systems in their understanding of effective professional development processes and actions, known as high-quality professional development. MCAE was recognized for its ability to align teacher learning processes and actions to such standards for professional development. In alignment to the purpose of this study, it is beneficial to understand how these organizations, National Staff Development Council (NSDC) and Missouri Staff Development Council (MSDC), define high quality professional development.

According to NSDC, the “primary purpose of professional development should be to help educators develop the insights, knowledge, and skills they need to become effective classroom and school leaders, better able to increase student learning” (NSDC, 2001, p. 2). Through their research on professional development, NSDC recognized that “sustained, intellectually rigorous professional development” is necessary for all individuals impacting student learning (p. 2). In 2001, NSDC revised standards to assist schools in the ability to deliver professional development to all individuals impacting student learning. The twelve standards, grounded in research, are organized into three overarching areas: context, process, and content. Context involves the environment in

which the learning is acquired and applied; process being the activities which increase pedagogy capacity through which content is provided; and content consisting of the deepening of understanding of subject matter and how such understanding can be applied to teaching practices (Dipaola & Hoy, p. 141). Within these three overarching areas, twelve standards are captured under the following descriptors: learning communities, leadership, resources, data-driven, evaluation, research-based, design, learning, collaboration, equity, quality teaching, and family involvement (NSDC, 2001).

Most recently, in 2008, NSDC communicated a new definition of professional development based on a continuous improvement cycle model. Stephanie Hirsch (2009), NSDC executive director, in an effort to interpret the new definition, acknowledged:

Good teaching occurs when educators on teams are involved in a cycle in which they analyze data, determine student and adult learning goals based on that analysis, design joint lessons that use evidence-based strategies, have access to coaches for support in improving their classroom instruction, and then assess how their learning and teamwork affects student achievement (p. 10).

Under Hirsch's leadership, NSDC has sought legislative amendments in order to have the new definition outlined with the reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (National Staff Development Council, 2011). The amendment would clarify what professional development processes and actions demonstrated by schools would ultimately lead to increased federal and state funding through the legislation.

At the state level, serving as an affiliate to NSDC in an effort to provide local support to schools, Missouri Staff Development Council works to assist Missouri school's in their understanding of high quality professional development practices,

specifically the practices outlined by NSDC standards. MSDC recognizes, annually, schools demonstrating processes and actions aligned to the nationally developed professional development standards. MSDC recognized MCAE with the Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development in 2006.

With the understanding of a current sense of urgency arriving from increased accountability measures for student achievement and teacher quality, coupled with the knowing-doing gap in how professional development is facilitated today versus what is communicated in current research-based standards, the need for a deeper understanding of the processes and actions used by a leadership team within a school recognized for high quality professional development is supported. The findings of this study have the potential to inform school leaders of all types, working to enhance professional development processes and actions, about the leadership practices resulting in high quality professional learning.

### Conceptual Underpinnings

The conceptual framework supporting this study is three-fold. The underlying layer consists of the principles of a professional learning community model which are embedded within the twelve NSDC standards. These principles include: ensure students learn, culture of collaboration, and a focus on results. The second layer guiding the work of the study consists of the connection between school leadership and the implementation of professional learning community principles. Leadership principles include: building leadership capacity, constructing a compelling case, communicating coherence within change, fostering interdependence among staff, and striving for sustainability. The third and final layer explores theory behind adult and organizational learning. Adult learning

theory, an understanding of how adults learn, will be reviewed through the lens of collaboration and action-orientation. Organizational learning, viewing the organization as a system, are captured in the following themes: leadership and decision making, continuous improvement, and organizational understanding. Each of these underpinnings provides a working context to be able to gain further insight of how a leadership teams' processes and actions may influence the quality of professional development.

### *Professional Learning Communities*

The MCAE leadership team was studied in order to add to the body of knowledge concerning processes and actions leadership teams use to assist efforts towards the implementation of high quality professional development. MCAE received exemplary honors for its ability to function as a professional learning community, as outlined in the NSDC standards for professional development. It is imperative for readers to understand what constitutes a professional learning community in order to have a clear understanding of the processes and actions being led by MCAE leadership team.

School organizations learn when involved in deep forms of networking which is purposeful and oriented to targeted learning outcomes (Halbert & Kaser, 2009). DuFour et al. (2008) acknowledge that:

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has changed the conversation about education in America. Questions regarding how to assess the quality of a school, what learning is most essential, and how to monitor the proficiency of each student are much more a part of the dialogue both inside and outside of the educational community than they have been in the past (p. 44).

For the last decade, the concept of professional learning communities has been an evolving phenomenon gaining ever-increasing attention within the elementary and secondary education context. In 1998, the concept of professional learning communities became more explicit when Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker published, “Professional Learning Communities At Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement.” DuFour and Eaker (1998), in a two-fold approach, set out to evaluate what was working effectively in school environments that were proving to achieve results in student achievement. On the contrary, they looked at two decades of failed attempts at school reform resulting in no improvement in student achievement. In their comparison, both landed on the following principles, or three big ideas (DuFour, 2004), which constitute the foundation of the PLC model for professional development:

1. *Ensure that students can learn.* Professional development actions are aligned to three critical questions: (a) what do we want each student to learn, (b) how will we know when each student has learned, and (c) how will we respond when a student is not learning?
2. *Culture of collaboration.* Teachers participate in professional development experiences, collectively, rather than in isolation. Professional learning is accomplished through a systematic process, where teachers work together to analyze and improve classroom practice.
3. *Focus on results.* Professional development actions are informed by results determined by specific data collected by the teachers and administrators involved.

In their most recent research in 2008, ten years following their initial sharing with educators about the essential elements of a PLC, DuFour et al. (2008) acknowledge the following processes as being critical to the success of a professional learning community at work: (a) action orientated learning, (b) access and use of relevant and timely information to inform learning, and (c) collaboration about learning. Aside from this acknowledgement, DuFour (2004) also recognizes a gap that exists in schools' understanding of what constitutes a learning community, which runs the risk of schools becoming immersed in the "all-too-familiar cycle" of school reform efforts (p. 6). The author describes this cycle as one in which high levels of interest and enthusiasm leads to misunderstanding about the "fundamental concepts driving the initiative, followed by inevitable implementation problems, the conclusion that the reform has failed to bring about the desired results, abandonment of the reform, and the launch of a new search for the next promising initiative" (p. 6). It is important to recognize what researchers have found to be barriers contributing to this cycle.

Sparks (2005) refers to three fundamental barriers impacting PLC implementation in today's organizations: (a) a lack of clarity regarding values, intentions, and beliefs, (b) dependence on those outside of school for solutions to problems, and (c) a sense of resignation that robs educators of the energy that is essential to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning in schools. First, according to Sparks, teachers are more apt to move towards what is clear to them, rather than be able to create what they cannot describe to others in detail. Secondly, teachers have been conditioned to depend on outsiders such as policymakers, researchers, and consultants in their decision-making or actions. Finally, a sense of resignation in teachers exists when their intellectual and

emotional state reflects their belief that individual or collective actions will have little to no impact on the concerns at large. Similar, the three barriers Sparks (2005) outlined above correlate to what DuFour et al. (2008), in their research, found to be contributing to the historical failure of school reform efforts. The authors conclude that the following characteristics hindered the actuality of historically intended improvements: unrealistic expectations, complexity of changes, misplaced focus, lack of clarity on intended results, lack of perseverance, and a failure to appreciate and attend to the change process (pp. 62-66).

### *Leadership*

The purpose of conducting this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of a leadership team's processes and actions during the implementation of high quality professional development. This study looks specifically at the leadership associated with MCAE's exemplary and sustainable status, as recognized by the Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development. Leadership, for the purpose of this study, will include not only the building-level principal, but also teacher leaders working in a leadership capacity towards the implementation of professional development.

According to Sparks (2005), "the quality of teaching, learning, and relationships in professional learning communities depends on the quality of leadership provided by principals and teachers" (pp. 156-157). DuFour et al. (2008) reflect on the importance of widespread leadership. Widespread leadership is "based on the premise that expertise is widely distributed throughout a school rather than invested in an individual person or position" (p. 310). The authors recognize that today's school leaders must understand

their role in building the capacity of their teachers in order for leadership, as well as knowledge, to be shared more effectively.

Leadership can be considered a predictor of success behind a PLC at work. Leadership found within a PLC is characterized by their ability to: (a) develop collective leadership capacity among staff which is dispersed widely, (b) build a compelling case for the necessity of change, (c) bring coherence to the multitude of variables impacting change, (d) foster collaborative interdependence among staff in order to achieve intended outcomes effectively, and (e) sustain change over time regardless of administrator mobility (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Blankstein, 2004; Gorton, Alston, & Snowden, 2007; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Katzenbach & Smith, 2003; Lambert, 2003; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Northouse, 2007; Reeves, 2006; Sparks, 2005; Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2004).

One method of building leadership capacity involves the development of a leadership team, which Marzano (2003) refers to as a small group of educators with the principal serving as a cohesive force. This is a common means used by school leaders to share leadership. DuFour et al. (2008) acknowledge that one must go beyond the leadership team and understand how to create structures which foster widely dispersed leadership throughout the school system. The authors advocate identifying levels of expertise and structuring this expertise, accordingly, in areas necessary for system-wide improvement. Similar to the school principal needing to possess specific skill sets in order to lead change successfully, teacher leaders developed within a staff must also possess specific knowledge and skills. Reeves (2006) suggests identifying staff members who have high levels of understanding in data analysis, staff motivation, and school

communication while structuring for dispersed leadership. In addition to these skills, Lambert (2003) communicates that individuals involved in the steering of professional development should understand how to: (a) develop shared visions, (b) facilitate group processes, (c) reflect on practice, (d) inquire about issues confronting the school community, (e) engage in collaborative planning, (f) manage conflict among adults, (g) challenge beliefs and assumptions, (h) manage change, and (i) develop constructivist learning designs.

### *Adult Learning*

Research indicates, historically, professional development actions within schools have failed to have a direct impact on teacher learning (Drago-Severson, 2004b; DuFour et al., 2008; Reeves, 2007; Schmoker, 2006; Sparks, 2005; Wiliam, 2007). This study explores whether or not leadership could be a determining factor that allows some schools to be able to bridge the gap between professional development actions and adult learning. MCAE used a leadership team to plan for and support professional development learning experiences. This study examines their processes and actions which may contribute to successful adult learning.

Lezotte (2005), acknowledges that, often times, the capacity to learn as professionals resides directly within the walls of the school itself. Rather than relying, solely, on external resources typically referred to as experts or consultants, research suggests that adult learning, in terms of professional development, can be achieved through collaborative processes where teams of teachers engage themselves in constructive dialogue, goal setting, reflective inquiry, and learning practices which are action oriented (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; DuFour et al., 2008; Gregory & Kuzmich, 2007;

Kohm & Nance, 2007; O'Neill & Conzemius, 2006; Zepeda, 2007). Moreso, Sparks (2002) touches upon the concept of empowerment through self-created learning, recognizing:

People feel most alive and committed to significant change when they create, particularly when they deeply care about the things they create. Ownership and sustained energy during the change process come from meaningful participation in creating that which would not exist without the intention of the creators (p. 14-2).

Traditionally, the “workshop model of professional development falls short, where all responsibility for figuring out how to apply new information to the classroom, all experimentation, critiquing, and revision are left up to the individual, with little to no time or support for implementation” (Chappuis, Stiggins, Arter, & Chappuis, 2004, p. 20). Merely learning “new” information will have little impact in transforming classroom practice; rather, adult learners need to be offered opportunities for implementation inside the classroom, along with the time to reflect on results of what was implemented. Gregory and Kuzmich (2007) express that “without the opportunity for reflective practices such as metacognition, questioning, analysis, reaction, and goal setting, learners are unable to sustain new learning” (p. xv).

DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2005) insist leadership teams be purposeful in how they design conditions for adult learning. These conditions are to be designed to assist teachers in accomplishing collective goals, versus attacking personal interests and agendas, and the leaders involved are cognizant of the “training and support” teachers may need in order to be effective collaborators. Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2004), when

describing adult learning practices, reflect on the idea of constructivism. The authors describe constructivism as the “shift from the nature of learners as passive receivers of information to one in which learners are actively involved in making sense of their own meaning” (p. 189). Similar to Ubben et al. (2004) interest in constructivist adult learning methods, DuFour et al. (2008), relay that “learning occurs in a context of taking action, and where adults value engagement and experience as the most effective strategies for deep learning, with inquiry serving as the catalyst” (p. 4). The authors advocate that educators become involved in such inquiry practices through the use of what they refer to as the “continuous improvement cycle” where teachers gather evidence of current levels of student learning, develop and implement strategies in order to improve learning needs, identify, analyze and reflect upon the impact of those strategies, and finally, make decisions based on such analysis (p. 95).

### *Organizational Learning*

In addition to a leadership team’s understanding of how to best facilitate adult learning, the ability to ensure adult learning impacts the entire organization, requires a team’s working knowledge of how an organization learns as a system (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Schein, 1992; Ubben et al., 2004). Sparks (2002) points out “school leaders who are successful in moving schools to high levels of learning for students and staff members alike see themselves as ‘system designers,’ inventors of new processes and structures to improve student learning and models of career-long learning” (p. 2-3).

A system is a “set of interrelated elements that function as a unit for a specific purpose” (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008, p. 28). This way of thinking acknowledges that

organizations receive inputs, undergo a transformation process in order to process inputs, and then ultimately produce outputs or products. The “systems-thinking” process is cyclical as the organization interprets feedback information obtained during the output stage. Finally, the external environment consisting of social, political, and economical conditions impacts each stage within the process. In a school system, inputs may include, but are not limited to, federal and state mandates, local governments, personnel, and financing. Outputs could involve the following: teacher performance, student achievement, student and/or teacher absenteeism, student and/or staff attitudes towards school, and school-community relations (p. 32). Following the receiving of inputs and prior to producing outputs, a system undergoes the transformation process where the following become indicators of success: structure, culture, motivation, leadership, communication, change, and improving teaching.

Organizational learning requires members to “see” their organization as an open system. Leaders have the responsibility of making decisions based on the “whole” system and its integrated parts. Leadership must create a continuous improvement process for decision-making. DuFour et al. (2008) describe this improvement process as a process which bleeds a “persistent disquiet with the status quo and a constant search for a better way to achieve goals,” challenging it’s members to become engaged in systematic processes involving: gathering evidence, developing strategies, implementing strategies, analyzing the impact of strategies, and finally applying this new knowledge to the next cycle of improvement (p. 17). Such a process fosters an in-depth understanding of how the organization is functioning and the specific interventions needed. Organizational learning depends on the ability of all organizational members to be system-thinkers.

With the assumption that the professional learning community model of professional development, grounded in adult and organizational learning theory and supported by a leadership is proven to effectively influence teacher development, and ultimately student achievement, what can be learned from a school recognized for achieving a status of sustainability? This study focuses on one small rural school leadership team's processes and actions used to implement a professional learning community model of professional development. By exploring the work of the MCAE leadership team, findings can support the body of work related to school leadership and professional development of educators.

#### Statement of the Problem

While the Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development recognizes a school, at large, for school-wide professional development processes and actions, there is a lack of knowledge about the specific leadership team processes and actions experienced by schools identified as exemplary examples. There is information to be gleaned about leadership teams' processes and actions used when coordinating professional development for teachers. Recognizing the increased pressures associated with federal and state mandates linked to student achievement and teacher quality and the disconnect between what research has found to be effective professional development practices and what is being implemented in today's schools, there is a gap to be filled in terms of what allows schools to effectively reach adult and organizational learning through professional development. A question is raised whether this proclaimed evidence of a "knowing-doing" gap could be linked to a lack of schools not having a

solid understanding of the leadership team's processes and actions involved in achieving exemplary status.

### Purpose of Study

The purpose of this descriptive case study is to add to the body of knowledge concerning the processes and actions deemed effective by these groups, specifically the processes and actions of the leadership team responsible for professional development of teachers. MCAE has been implementing a professional learning community, a NSDC standards-aligned model of professional development, for nine years. MCAE's leadership team was selected for an in- depth study using individual interviews and document analysis reflecting the processes and actions contributing to recognition. The researcher explores leadership team members' perceptions of the processes and actions used to achieve success. In addition, the researcher explores documents reflecting the processes and actions shared by team members.

### Grand Tour Research Question

What are the processes and actions used by the MCAE leadership team to achieve the school's state recognition for high quality professional development?

### Study Design

This descriptive case study focuses on a leadership team responsible for planning for professional development in a small, rural school in the state of Missouri. The leadership team has guided and facilitated the processes and actions of the PLC model of professional development for nine years. MCAE was selected based on its ability to achieve state-level recognition for implementing high quality professional development. Individual interviews were conducted with leadership team members, including teacher

leaders and the principal. Individual leadership team members were selected based on their willingness to participate and represented a broad cross-section of the leadership roles within the nine years the school has implemented the PLC model of professional development. The researcher analyzed responses to interview questions and reviewed emerging patterns within the data. Furthermore, additional data in the form of artifacts that depict evidence of the leadership team's processes and actions were reviewed.

#### Limitations and Assumptions

This study is based on the assumption that MCAE, undergoing its ninth year of implementation and receiving state level recognition concerning professional development, has a high level of efficacy and fidelity regarding its ability to implement high quality professional development. The ability to focus on one select school allows for in-depth analysis of the work of the leadership team. Merriam (2002) recognizes that because qualitative inquiry “seeks to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants, it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned...a purposeful sample” (p. 12). In the same vein, one must recognize the limitation involved with only one school being studied. With qualitative studies, case studies in particular, the issue of generalizability becomes a challenge. As Merriam (2002) suggests, “if one thinks of what can be learned from an in-depth analysis of a particular situation or incident and how that knowledge can be transferred to another situation, generalizability becomes possible” (p. 28). In this specific case, the perspectives, processes, and actions used by the MCAE leadership team has potential to impact the processes and actions of other school leadership teams working toward school improvement through the act of professional learning, as suggested by Merriam (2002).

Finally, as with any qualitative study, one must recognize the impossibility of freeing themselves of bias (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While the researcher of this study, in previous years, was the MCAE building principal and a member of the MCAE leadership team, methods were chosen and used to break through any potential of these biases being represented in the findings.

### Definitions

*Action-Orientation.* The act of learning by doing, gaining and transferring knowledge through action.

*Adult Learning Theory.* The rationale that adults learn knowledge and skills through a collaborative process involving reflective inquiry and a hands-on approach.

*Collaborative Culture.* A collaborative context where individuals work together, interdependently, in order to learn and refine professional practice.

*Collective Inquiry.* The process of constructing knowledge together through defining system problems, outlining action steps to resolve the problem, and reflecting on outcomes of identified actions.

*Content.* Content refers to the “what” of professional development. Content decisions begin with an examination of what students must know and be able to do. Professional development content addresses the knowledge and skills that ensure all students are successful.

*Context.* Context standards address the organization, system, and culture in which the new learning will be implemented.

*Continuous Improvement Cycle.* The continuous cycle of planning for, acting upon, and reflecting upon organizational actions towards improvement.

*Knowing-Doing Gap.* The concept describing how organizations can fail to transfer knowledge into action, after investing resources into learning new knowledge.

*Leadership team.* A team of administrators and teacher leaders representatives responsible for developing knowledge and skills on how to effectively lead school-wide professional development.

*Leadership team member.* Administrator or teacher leaders serving as members of a leadership team.

*Organizational Learning.* When organizations construct knowledge, as a system, by reconstructing existing perspectives.

*Process.* Process refers to the “how” of professional development. It describes the learning processes used in the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

*Professional development.* The means in which teachers and administrators gain knowledge and skills to improve professional practice.

*Professional Development Committee.* A committee of educators in Missouri public schools whose role is to plan, guide, and support building and school-wide professional development.

*Professional learning community.* Educators working together, collaboratively, towards school improvement. Adult learning in a professional learning community is action-oriented and centered on collective inquiry processes.

*SMART Goals.* Specific, measurable, achievable goals that have a particular timeframe and are results-oriented.

## Summary

In this chapter, information was introduced about a descriptive case study that explores one school's leadership team's processes and actions used to support a professional learning community model of professional development. In addition, background information, conceptual underpinnings, methodology, and key term definitions serving as a foundation to the study were illustrated. Chapter two provides an in-depth review of the related literature aligned to the topic of the study. Chapter three outlines the methodology used in order to conduct the study. Chapter four relays the results of the study, derived from the themes which emerged from the data collected and analyzed, while chapter five offers a discussion of the findings and conclusions. It is intended that this study will add to the body of knowledge available to the education community wishing to learn from practices of schools identified as exemplary. Finally, it is the desire that the findings of the study will assist school leadership in their efforts to build effective processes and actions leading to sustainable professional learning.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The purpose of this descriptive case study is to add to the body of knowledge concerning the processes and actions deemed effective by the Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence (MCAE) leadership team, specifically the processes and actions of the leadership team responsible for professional development of teachers. MCAE has been implementing a professional learning community (PLC), a National Staff Development Council (NSDC) standards-aligned model of professional development, for nine years. MCAE's leadership team was selected for an in-depth study using individual interviews and document analysis reflecting the processes and actions contributing to recognition. The researcher will explore leadership team members' perceptions of the processes and actions used to achieve success. In addition, the researcher will explore documents reflecting the processes and actions shared by team members.

The literature supporting the framework of this study is three-fold. The underlying layer consists of the principles of a professional learning community model which are embedded within the twelve NSDC standards used to recognize Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence (MCAE) School. These principles include: ensure students learn, culture of collaboration, and a focus on results. The second layer guiding the work of the study consists of the connection between school leadership and the implementation of PLC principles. Leadership principles include: building leadership capacity, constructing a compelling case, communicating coherence within change, fostering interdependence among staff, and striving for sustainability. The third and final

layer will explore theory behind adult and organizational learning. Adult learning theory, an understanding of how adults learn, will be reviewed through the lens of collaboration and action-orientation. Organizational learning, viewing the organization as a system, will be captured in the following themes: leadership and decision making, continuous improvement, and organizational understanding. Each of these underpinnings provides a working context to be able to gain further insight of how a leadership teams' processes and actions may influence the quality of professional development.

### Professional Learning Communities

Sparks (2005) acknowledges, “well implemented professional learning communities are a powerful means of seamlessly blending teaching and professional learning in ways that produce complex, intelligent behavior in all teachers.” A PLC is a framework where “teachers create knowledge about teaching and learning, communicate it to one another, organize it within themselves and for others to make it more meaningful and accessible, and act on that knowledge for the purpose of improving student learning” (p. 156). Using a continuum to illustrate the work of PLC, Sparks (2005) places federal, state, and local policies working to impact professional development on the far left side. Within the middle of the continuum, the structural changes, planning decisions, and resources allocated in order to support the learning are placed. On the far right, what Sparks refers to as the “final two percent” of the components within the professional development continuum resembling PLC, are “the cluster of experiences that literally change the brains of teachers and administrators.” According to Sparks, educators have these experiences when they “read, write, observe, use various thinking strategies, listen, speak, and practice new behaviors in ways that deepen understanding, affect beliefs,

produce new habits of mind and behavior, and are combined in ways that alter practice” (p. 159).

Similar to the way in which Sparks (2005) organizes the concept of PLCs, DuFour et al. (2008) “cluster” the work of a PLC by referring to three big ideas:

1. *Ensure that students can learn.* Professional development actions are aligned to three critical questions: (a) what do we want each student to learn, (b) how will we know when each student has learned, and (c) how will we respond when a student is not learning?
2. *Culture of collaboration.* Teachers participate in professional development experiences, collectively, rather than in isolation. Professional learning is accomplished through a systematic process, where teachers work together to analyze and improve classroom practice.
3. *Focus on results.* Professional development actions are informed by results determined by specific data collected by the teachers and administrators involved.

(DuFour, 2004)

### *Ensure Students Learn*

Ensuring students learn has been considered the fundamental purpose of a PLC. DuFour et al. (2008) advocate “there must be no ambiguity or hedging regarding this commitment to learning, and schools must align all practices, procedures, and policies in light of that fundamental purpose” (p. 18). In the context of a PLC, teachers clearly understand each of the following: (a) what essential skills students should be able to know, (b) how they are going to assess whether or not students learn these skills, and (c)

how they will respond when students do not learn the identified skills (DuFour et al., 2008). These objectives provide direction for all PLC efforts put forth by its members.

Traditionally, schools have approached these three objectives differently than what research supports as effective practice. First, in alignment to question one, what do we want students to know, Schmoker (2006) reveals that schools have long been guilty of what is referred to as “curricular chaos,” where a wide discrepancy exists between the intended curriculum and the taught curriculum (p. 37). The author explains how teachers have, for a long time, made individual decisions on what has been taught, causing high levels of “redundancy and inconsistency” in student learning (p. 36). Reeves (2005) communicating how PLCs pull together standards, assessment, and accountability, points out “standards in their present form are inadequate as a foundation for improved achievement...school systems must translate standards into a set of rational, relevant, and above all focused expectations” (p. 46). Marzano (2003) refers to this translation process as the first of five action steps to achieving a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” (p. 25). In regards to question two, how we know when students have learned, Stiggins (2005) acknowledges, “traditionally, we have used assessments to discover how much our students have learned up to a particular point in time”...referred to as “assessment of learning” (or summative assessment). Within a PLC, assessment of learning is of importance to determine whether or not a student is learning specific standards; however, “assessment for learning” (or formative assessment) is as equally important where teachers use assessment to determine “whether students are making progress towards meeting those standards” (p. 70). Third and finally, in terms of responding when students are not learning, DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2004) in their findings, claim

that traditionally, “throughout North America, schools that pledge their allegiance to the mission of learning for all have no plan for responding”...in a PLC, the staff “addresses this discrepancy by designing systems and processes to ensure that students who experience difficulty receive additional time and support for their learning” (p. 41).

### *Culture of Collaboration*

DuFour et al. (2008) acknowledge the following collaborative processes as being critical to the success of a professional learning community at work: (a) action orientated learning, (b) access and use of relevant and timely information to inform learning, and (c) deep conversation about learning. First, the authors emphasize that such a community should be characterized by action orientation. The authors define action-orientation as “a predisposition to learn by doing; moving quickly to turn aspirations into actions and visions into realities” (p. 463). Teachers working within a PLC recognize that learning results within the context of taking action, valuing engagement and experimentation as the most effective strategies for deep learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, p. 4). Secondly, teacher learning should stem from their access and use of relevant and timely information. DuFour et al. (2008) note that “improving teacher practice requires informed and precise conversation about effective techniques and the best way to provide teachers with the tools for that conversation is to ensure each receives frequent and timely information regarding the achievement of his or her students” (p. 27). Third, the authors call attention to the importance of guiding the work in a collaborative context such as collaborative teams, defining collaboration as “a systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results (p. 464). Educators working within a

PLC collectively inquire about the following: “(a) best practices about teaching and learning, (b) candid clarifications of their current practices, and (c) honest assessing of their students’ current levels of learning” (p. 16). While it is recognized that individual growth is essential for organizational growth, only the building of collective capacity through collective inquiry will ensure such growth (DuFour et al., 2004).

### *Focus on Results*

DuFour et al. (2008) claims, “collaboration does not lead to improved results unless people are focused on the right issues” (p. 15). Likewise, Martin and Brown (2007) reveal that “there are far too many schools working much harder than they need to because they are not accustomed to using readily available and important information to direct their journey” (p. 103). O’Neill and Conzemius (2006), in their research on effective school improvement processes, suggests, “if we are truly going to transform our schools into places where each and every student is meeting and exceeding standards, we will first need to shift our thinking to focus on the results we want, a concept that is quite foreign for most educators” (p. 9). Schmoker (1999) goes as far to say that it is imperative that the educational community take the time to “redefine” results, claiming:

Results should take us beyond the exclusive use of such annual indicators as test scores and dropout rates. If we want these to improve, we need to focus on the short-term results and feedback that tell us how we are doing in reaching short-term and long-term goals (p. 77).

Members of a PLC embrace the idea of developing a shared purpose or mission for their work. In doing so, members take the time to develop a clear and compelling vision of the direction in which their school needs to take, arrive at collective

commitments outlining what each member will be responsible for during the PLC journey, and finally, develop results-oriented goals to mark the progress of their work (DuFour et al., 2008). In other words, the work of PLCs is articulated on the basis of clearly identified priorities, explicit goals, and indicators of progress in meeting goals. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) conclude that “one of the most powerful strategies for building the capacity of teachers to work effectively in collaborative teams is to create the conditions that require them to work together to accomplish a specific goal” (p. 126). Tools and resources available to schools working to establish PLC processes guide them towards the development of SMART goals. SMART goals are “specific, measurable, achievable goals that have a particular timeframe” (O’Neill & Conzemius, 2006, p. 13)

### Leadership

The pursuit of implementing systemic change relies on the leadership characteristics found within an organization. Organizational change which occurs during a school’s mission to build a PLC is dependent on the quality of leadership capable of steering change (DuFour et al., 2008). Leadership within a PLC is characterized by a leader’s ability to: (a) develop collective leadership capacity among staff which is dispersed widely, (b) build a compelling case for the necessity of change, (c) bring coherence to the multitude of variables impacting change, (d) foster collaborative interdependence among staff in order to achieve intended outcomes effectively, and (e) sustain change over time regardless of administrator mobility (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Blankstein, 2004; DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Gorton et al., 2007; Hoy & Miskel,

2005; Katzenbach & Smith, 2003; Lambert, 2003; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Northouse, 2007; Reeves, 2006; Sparks, 2005; Ubben et al., 2004).

### *Leadership Capacity*

DuFour et al. (2008) outline two common leadership strategies which hinder the success of implementing a PLC: (a) their attempt at leading change is leading in isolation and (b) they pool opinions rather than build shared knowledge. In contrast, leaders of successful PLCs build capacity by sharing power, inspiring others to lead, and encouraging participation and involvement of all members in executing the school's purpose (Lambert, 1998; Ubben et al., 2004). Fullan (2005), in his work surrounding leadership and sustainability, references the concept of "building capacity" as the act of "constantly developing leadership for the future." In his most recent research, Fullan (2010) relays "leaders developing leaders multiplies their effects" (p. 75). Through his research, he found that schools able to sustain successful school reform were intentionally fostering the act of leaders developing other leaders.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) validate that "it would be rare, indeed, to find a single individual who has the capacity or will to master the complex array of skills" required in a sole leader working to transform a school (p. 99). In order to develop the necessary capacity within a staff to lead school improvement effectively, a comprehensive set of skills and dispositions are required of the leader. One form of capacity building commonly used by school leaders is the development of a leadership team, which Marzano (2003) refers to as a small group of educators with the principal serving as a cohesive force to guide change. Dolan (1994) views the leadership team as the "over-site committee," advocating that without such a committee, or leadership team,

there is nowhere that the system as a whole can learn. He advises that a leadership team is “where a system ‘as a system’ can stop, look at itself, and work on healing itself” (p. 112). Further, DuFour et al. (2008) advise school principals must go beyond the leadership team and understand how to create structures which foster widely dispersed leadership throughout the school system. The authors advocate identifying levels of expertise and structure this expertise, accordingly, in areas necessary for system-wide improvement.

Similar to the PLC leader needing to possess specific skill sets in order to lead change successfully, the teacher leaders developed within a staff must also possess specific knowledge and skills (Lambert, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Reeves, 2006). Marzano et al. (2005) found in his research that school leadership team members must have a firm knowledge of : (a) curriculum, instruction, and assessment, (b) research surrounding school improvement, (c) change theory, and (d) program monitoring and evaluating methods. In the same regard, Reeves (2006) expresses that such members should possess high levels of understanding in data analysis, staff motivation, and school communication while structuring for dispersed leadership. More explicitly and with commonalities, Lambert (2003) communicates that individuals involved in the steering of professional development should understand how to: (a) develop shared visions, (b) facilitate group processes, (c) reflect on practice, (d) inquire about issues confronting the school community, (e) engage in collaborative planning, (f) manage conflict among adults, (g) challenge beliefs and assumptions, (h) manage change, and (i) develop constructivist learning designs. Staff members with these skill sets may already exist

within the school system; however, it is advised that the leadership understand how to develop new knowledge and skill within staff.

### *Compelling Case*

Marzano et al. (2005) describe PLC leaders as leaders who are able to assist staff members in their thinking about “old problems in new ways” (p 15). Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) add that such a leader must be capable of increasing followers’ “levels of consciousness about importance and value of designated outcomes and ways to reach them, get followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team, and raise followers’ need levels to the higher-order needs such as self-actualization” (p. 151). In order for this raised self and organizational awareness to develop, leaders are challenged with the task of building a compelling case for the need to change.

Fullan (2005), in an effort to describe effective leadership states, “ deep school reform requires leaders at or near the top who understand the direction in which the school needs to go and are sophisticated about how to get there by leading with a compelling, driving conceptualization” (p. 67). Sergiovanni (as cited in Ubben et al., 2004) refers to this compelling case as the “why”, rather than only the “what” and “how” when communicating the need or plans for change (p. 18). In their professional resource for practitioners working to implement a PLC model of professional development, DuFour et al. (2008) describe the action of building a compelling case as an effective change process where leaders acknowledge the potentially negative assumptions, beliefs, or values among staff members while developing a compelling purpose. Sparks (2005) refers to this acknowledgement as taking the time to reflect and proactively act upon the common barriers of PLC: clarity, dependence, and resignation (p. 162). Howard Gardner

(as cited in DuFour et al., 2008) insists that leaders fluid with building compelling reasons for change apply the following strategies: (a) reasoning and rationale thinking, (b) research relevant to the change initiative, (c) resonance, (d) representation in the form of numbers, (e) rewards and resources, (f) real-world events, and (g) require or accountability (pp. 348-349). Likewise, Katzenbach and Smith (2003), in their research on high performing teams found that performance challenges infuse teams and no team arises without a performance challenge that is meaningful to those involved. A compelling circumstance that a group considers important to achieve will lead, most of the time, to both performance and team.

### *Coherence*

In addition to the understanding of why a school system would need to change practices, staff members look for clarity and coherence in understanding “how” the system will go about changing. Katzenbach and Smith (2003) found this to be certain when studying collaborative teams. The authors found that high performing teams understand and articulate the purpose of the team’s work in the same way, are able to define such a purpose with outsiders, and commonly refer back to the purpose and its importance. Similarly, DuFour et al. (2008) point out PLC leaders must be able to “bring coherence, no ambiguity, to the complexities of schooling by aligning the structure and culture of the school with its core mission” (p. 317). To achieve this level of coherence, and following their understanding of the compelling purpose for change,

Members of a PLC create and are guided by a clear and compelling vision of what their schools must become to help all students learn. They make collective commitments that clarify what each member will do to contribute to creating

such organizations, and they use results-oriented goals to mark their progress (p. 15).

Reeves (2006) refers to the leader of an organization, as architect, able to make connections among all the participants and the mission of an organization seeking improvement (p. 29). Reeves uses a comprehensive accountability system, a cyclical process, as a means to communicate a coherent system of improvement. The author found that school systems, guided by leadership, able to collectively perform each of the following steps are able to act on school improvement in a clear, coherent fashion: (a) collect and chart data, (b) analyze data into clear targets for growth, set measurable goals, (c) align strategies for improvement, (d) determine results indicators, and (e) monitor and evaluate the progress or lack of in order to more effectively continue to cycle of improvement.

### *Interdependence*

In addition to sharing leadership power and inspiring others to act or lead, a PLC leader encourages participation and involvement of all members in executing the school's purpose (Ubben et al., 2004, p. 12). Katzenbach and Smith (2003) found that in order to meet any challenge at a high level, teams needed a mix of skills, experience, expertise, and the ability to be mutually accountable to one another. The authors define mutual accountability when team members are able to acknowledge their joint accountability towards a common purpose as well as their respective individual obligations to their roles.

According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), PLC leaders are able to use "creative deployment of self through positive self-regard" (p. 187). In other words, these leaders

encompass a high level of self-awareness where they understand their strengths, as well as weaknesses, in order to successfully supersede weaknesses that may otherwise hinder change progress. Likewise, Cunningham and Gresso (1993) recognize in their research that leaders of effective organizations understand how to foster self-awareness in their members in order to move forward on the mutual interests of an organization. These leaders encourage and assist members in identifying specific strengths and skills they have to offer to a common purpose. The authors refer to this encouraging act as empowerment, “enabling us to achieve our potential, but actually helping us to discover and develop it” (p. 199). What they found, in their research on leadership and culture is that the task of developing member’s self-awareness is not always easy. The authors assert that, traditionally, the maturation process of members was one described as being “under the watchful and carefully controlling eye of others,” in a culture where it was encouraged to “look externally for direction” (p. 199).

### *Sustainability*

The potential for sustainability in an organization relies on the skills of PLC leaders. Sparks (2005) recognizes that a leader capable of the implementation and sustainability of a PLC requires a high level of understanding about the “complex issues related to professional learning communities, beliefs that are aligned with quality teaching and high levels of learning for all students, and ‘next action thinking’ that moves learning into action and sustains the momentum of change over time” (p. 157). With a similar view, Blankstein (2004) recognizes a leader must possess “a long-term view of sustainability so that internal capacity will continually thrive and enhance student outcomes, even in the face of external threats or their own departure” (p. 194). When this

leadership perspective does not exist and school systems experience high levels of mobility, followers begin to lack the necessary trust towards change efforts.

Historically, according to Blankstein (2004), school leaders and their systems have focused attention on “inbound knowledge, the knowledge needed to change a school, improve it, make one’s mark on it, turn it around ‘versus’ outbound knowledge, knowledge needed to preserve past successes, or keep initiatives going once the originating leader has left, also known as sustainability” (p. 211). In describing a sustaining organization, Blankstein describes it as having the ability to “cultivate and recreate its own environment, at the same time, possess the capacity to stimulate ongoing improvement on a broad front...being able to adapt to and prosper in their increasingly complex environment” (p. 201).

DuFour et al. (2008), in their research on schools implementing a PLC model of professional development emphasize the importance of “breaking long journeys into incremental steps and then recognizing and celebrating the completion of those steps, also termed as short –term wins” in their potential for sustainable school improvement (p. 424). In analyzing school organization’s ability to sustain the implementation of the PLC model, they found that often times, when organizations were unable to sustain the journey of improvement, they found themselves taking one or more of the following five “dangerous detours”: (a) believing they needed more training before they could begin implementation, (b) attempting to shortcut through key processes deemed essential for implementing the model, (c) developing a mindset that “someone else needs to do it,” (d) picking and choosing programs rather than work at comprehensive cultural change, and (e) quitting when the going gets tough (pp. 413-420).

In contrast, the authors discovered that when school organizations created a continuous improvement process or cycle, similar to the process outlined by Reeves (2006), consisting of “planning, doing, checking, and acting” supporting individual and organizational learning, sustainability resulted.

### Adult Learning

Leaders which are able to reach sustainable, systemic change within an organization understand how adults learn. Lezotte (2005) acknowledges that often the capacity to improve resides directly within the walls of the school itself. Rather than relying, solely, on external resources typically referred to as experts or consultants, research suggests that adult learning, in terms of professional development, can be achieved through collaborative processes where teams of teachers engage themselves in constructive dialogue, goal setting, reflective inquiry, and learning practices which are action oriented (Chappius, Stiggins, Arter, & Chappius, 2004; DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Drago-Severson, 2004a; Drago-Severson, 2004b; DuFour et al., 2008; Gregory & Kuzmich, 2007; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Kohm & Nance, 2007; Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006; Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003; O’Neill & Conzemius, 2006; Reeves, 2006; Schmoker, 1999; Ubben et al., 2004; Zepeda, 2007).

### *Collaboration*

Despite the abundance of evidence that suggests a collaborative school culture, where teams of teachers work collectively towards common goals, positively correlates to increased performance in organizations, today’s schools continue to struggle in their

understanding of what constitutes collaboration (DuFour, 2005; Schmoker, 1999). According to Schmoker (2006), traditional practice has contributed to this struggle. He notes that “by elevating privacy and isolation in the name of professionalism, we have allowed teaching to acquire an outsized aura of mystique and complexity, a sense that effective teaching is primarily personal and therefore beyond scrutiny” (p. 25). Likewise, DuFour et al. (2005) confront the reality that it has historically been the acceptable norm for teachers in North America to work in isolation, like independent subcontractors.

DuFour et al. (2008) define collaboration as a “systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results” (p. 464). The authors provide explicit examples found in schools where the understanding of collaboration is vague. For example, the authors contend: (a) Bringing a group of teachers together on a regular basis, or (b) merely asking a group of teachers to work on the same task or goal, does not make them a collaborative team. Schools must be skilled in their ability to distinguish between “effective collaboration” and “teamwork” (Schmoker, 1999, p.17). Katzenbach and Smith (2005) in an effort to share research on what comprises a high performing team within an organization, distinguishes between five types of groups or teams and how they differ on the high performing scale:

*Working group:* no significant performance need, where members share information and delegate tasks

*Pseudo-team:* could be a significant performance need, where members are not focused on collective performance with no common purpose or goals

*Potential team:* a significant performance need, where clarity about purpose is needed, and members have discipline on a common working approach

*Real team:* members consist of a small number of people with complementary skills, having a common purpose and goals, with a working approach in which they hold themselves mutually accountable

*High performance team:* holds characteristics of “real team,” in addition to members holding a deep commitment to each other’s personal growth and success, and ultimately out performs all reasonable expectations given its membership (pp. 91-92).

Research surrounding PLCs and the implementation of high quality staff development, as defined by National Staff Development Council (NSDC) Standards, reveals a common thread in terms of what allows collaboration to be impactful in learning organizations (National Staff Development Council, 2001). This thread involves the purposeful actions behind the planning for collaborative work. DuFour et al. (2005) illustrate cases where the leadership teams in professional learning communities are purposeful in how they design the conditions that enable teachers to learn from one another. These conditions are designed to assist teachers in accomplishing collective goals, versus attack personal interests and agendas, and the leaders involved are cognizant of the “training and support” teachers may need in order to be effective collaborators. Martin and Brown (2007) reinforce that a purposefully-oriented team understands the vitality in the involvement of key stakeholders, supported by appropriate knowledge, who are “charged with the task of making informed decisions that promote continuous improvement” (p. 73). Blankstein (2004) adds that stakeholders working from

a purposeful framework understand the importance of defined roles, clear decision-making processes, communication protocols, and methods to monitor and evaluate the progress of the collaborative efforts when structuring for collaborative work. More explicitly, Katzenbach and Smith (2005) advocate for eight approaches to being purposeful about structuring for high performing collaborative work: (a) establish urgency and direction, (b) select members based on skill, (c) pay particular attention to first meetings and actions, (d) set clear rules for behavior, (e) set and seize upon a few immediate performance-oriented tasks and goals, (f) challenge team members regularly with fresh information, (g) provide time, and (h) exploit the power of positive feedback, recognition, and reward (p. 4).

All of these purposeful actions depend on a collaborative culture, one where collegiality is fostered and cultivated in order to problem solve (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993). Collegiality is a closeness that develops from an “understanding and caring for one another, resulting in group members getting to know one another better, wanting to listen to one another, being interested in one another’s values, and perhaps most important, wanting to be together” (p. 99). Little’s research (as cited in Schmoker, 1999) on the relationship between the right kind of collaborative collegiality and improvements for teachers and students, outlined that if the correct actions to ensure collaboration among members of an organization are taken, ultimately they would realize the remarkable benefits.

These benefits include: (a) remarkable gains in achievement, (b) higher quality solutions to problems, (c) increased confidence among all school community members, (d) teachers’ abilities to support one another’s

strengths and to accommodate weaknesses, ability to examine and test new ideas, methods, and materials, and (e) expanded pool of ideas, materials, and methods (p. 12).

### *Action and Reflection-Oriented Professional Development*

Traditionally, the “workshop model of professional development falls short, where all responsibility for figuring out how to apply new information to the classroom, all experimentation, critiquing, and revision are left up to the individual, with little to no time or support for implementation” (Guskey, 2007, p. 20). Merely learning “new” information will have little impact in transforming classroom practice; rather, adult learners need to be offered opportunities for implementation inside the classroom, along with the time to reflect on results of what was implemented. Hewitt and Little (2005) emphasize:

Teachers and administrators are being challenged to collaboratively investigate the effectiveness of research-based instructional practices currently used in classrooms to improve student learning. Current accountability mandates, such as those through the No Child Left Behind legislation, highlight the goals of high-quality implementation of research-based instructional practices and techniques to ensure success for all students. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on and analyze student data on a consistent and collaborative basis to ensure success for all students. In order to meet the challenges being faced, schools are encouraged to restructure their professional development system providing faculty members with opportunities for collaborative

inquiry, reflection, and dialogue what is driven by student data (p. 1).

Hewitt and Little (2005) communicate a desired mode for adult learning by using the study of classroom assessment as an example. The example involves teachers “thinking about classroom assessment, reading and reflecting on new classroom assessment strategies, shaping the strategies into applications, trying application, reflecting and summarizing learning and conclusions, sharing those reflections, and, finally, problem solving with team members” (p. 22). Ubben et al. (2004) describe this form of learning as constructivism. The authors describe constructivism as the “shift from the nature of learners as passive receivers of information to one in which learners are actively involved in making sense of their own meaning” (p. 189). Further, they suggest that when adult learners are immersed in a constructivist approach to learning, where they are collaborating with others in order to share knowledge and construct new knowledge based on collective understanding, a high level of learning occurs.

Professional development experiences which are collaborative and action-oriented require adequate reflection opportunity in order for learning to be transformed by the learner (Langer et al., 2003). Gregory and Kuzmich (2007) acknowledge that “without the opportunity for reflective practices such as metacognition, questioning, analysis, reaction, and goal setting, learners are unable to sustain new learning” (p. xv). This understanding has resulted in educators desiring to learn more on how to structure professional development which supports the practice of reflective inquiry. Drago-Severson (2004b) defines reflective inquiry as “shared dialogue in a reflective context that involves reflecting on one’s assumptions, convictions, and values as part of the learning process” which ultimately leads to a structure for “reflection, problem-solving,

decision-making, and development” (p. 18). DuFour et al. (2008), in describing a PLC organization, point out that “learning occurs in a context of taking action, and where adults value engagement and experience as the most effective strategies for deep learning, with inquiry serving as the catalyst” (p. 4). The authors offer that educators become involved in such inquiry practices through the use of what they refer to as the “continuous improvement cycle” where teachers gather evidence of current levels of student learning, develop and implement strategies in order to improve learning needs identified, analyze and reflect upon the impact of those strategies, and finally, make decisions based on such analysis (p. 95).

Action research, comparable to the continuous improvement cycle, has gained the attention of staff developers in their pursuit to provide structure to professional development experiences. Action research is a “model of professional development that promotes collaborative inquiry, reflection, and dialogue” (Hewitt & Little, 2005, p. 1). Action research ultimately becomes a decision-making model for individual teachers, classrooms, and throughout an entire learning organization. Schmoker (1999) describes action research as being “effective” collaboration, where teams of adult learners reflect upon the following questions: (a) were we able to successfully implement the strategy our team decided upon, (b) what was the impact of the strategy, (c) what difficulties did we encounter during our experiences, and (d) what will the team do as a result of what was learned (pp. 17-18). Erkens, Jakicic, Jessie, and King (2008), describes action research as:

A powerful model for professional development that allows teachers to learn from concrete, local evidence, of what works and what does not

work in their classrooms. A teacher willing to invest in the process of action research to test a new classroom strategy, for example, will always move beyond the surface level understanding that he might gain during a staff in-service. Because he monitors the effectiveness of the practice by collecting evidence from his classroom, he practices and refines the strategy over time, leading to deep implementation of any strategy that works (p. 20).

Action research is a purposeful approach to professional development which has the capability of impacting every level of an organization. Ferrance (2000) distinguishes between four types of action research.

These four types involve: (a) individual teacher research focusing on a problem or issue within a single classroom, (b) collaborative action research focusing on studying a problem or issue within one or more classrooms, (c) school-wide action research involving the study of a specific issue identified from school data, and (d) school-wide research where issues are organizational and performance-based. (p. 6)

When educators are involved in this form of constructive learning, and leadership ensures that the work is job-embedded, such as the process found within an action research model, mutual benefits of teacher and student learning will emerge. Learning which “enhances reflection, promotes collegiality, increases transfer of newly learned skills, supports the ongoing refinement of practice, and fosters a common lexicon that facilitates dialogue and improvement” (Zepeda, 2007, p. 354) provides teachers a sense of purpose and empowerment in their work. According to Gregory and Kuzmich (2007),

adults discover meaning in their work when they are empowered to find or create solutions to problems and situations that are relevant to them.

### Organizational Learning

Organizations are able to effectively learn when viewed as open systems (Hoy & Miskel, 2005, Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Schein, 1992; Ubben et al., 2004).

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) define a system as a “set of interrelated elements that function as a unit for a specific purpose” (p. 28). According to Hoy and Miskel (2005), the idea of viewing organizations as open-systems arrived when research began to surface the idea that organizational operations could not be isolated from external forces. Schein (1992) acknowledges that organizations often fall short in their ability to view themselves as a system. This shortfall is due to their thinking in a simple linear causal fashion, where a specific action will cause a specific, aligned response. The author identifies, through his research, that organizations, specifically the leaders, must have the knowledge and skills to identify and interpret the multiple, interdependent causal forces of the system at large.

Ubben et al. (2004) reference this linear causal versus systemic field logic forms of thinking as single-loop learning and double-loop learning. Single-loop is best described when a norm, or standard way of operation is established. Monitoring occurs only to determine if any discrepancies exist between current conditions and the norm which has been established. Ultimately, corrective action is only taken to ensure that conditions return to being congruent with previously established norms. In contrast, double-loop learning which is aligned to the “open-systems” way of viewing organizations, involves members of organizations asking themselves “why” when current conditions do not match previously established norms. Rather than immediately working

to bring conditions back to established norms of operation, members participate in a reflective process where they begin to think about how forces are interconnected and determine if pre-established norms are either effective or ineffective means for operation.

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) outline a process to convey an open-systems understanding of organizations. This process acknowledges that organizations receive inputs, undergo a transformation process in order to process inputs, and then ultimately produce outputs or products. The process is cyclical as the organization interprets feedback information obtained during the output stage. Finally, the external environment consisting of social, political, and economical conditions impacts each stage within the process. In a school system, inputs may include, but are not limited to, federal and state mandates, local governments, personnel, and financing. Outputs could involve the following: teacher performance, student achievement, student and/or teacher absenteeism, student and/or staff attitudes towards school, and school-community relations. Following the receiving of inputs and prior to producing outputs, a system undergoes the transformation process where the following become indicators of success: structure, culture, motivation, leadership, communication, change, and improving teaching (pp. 32-33). Hoy and Miskel (2005), in their in-depth analysis of the transformation process, classified the above indicators into four inner sub-systems at work. These sub-systems include: (a) structural system, consisting of the bureaucratic expectations of an organization, (b) political system which encompasses all power relations impacting the organization, (c) the individual system involving cognition levels and motivational triggers of the individuals working within the organization, and (d) the

cultural system maintaining the shared orientations of the organization such as shared values, norms, beliefs, and ways of thinking.

### *Leadership and Decision-making*

Dolan (1994), in his research on site-based decision making, began to look at the concept of school improvement efforts and how systems-thinking aligned to those efforts. In looking at numerous attempts towards organizational change, Dolan found that, more often than not, change efforts were grounded in the mechanistic metaphor, where strategies towards change became a visit to the “parts” store for the proper upgrade and school improvement became a series of well-intentioned tweaking with new “bits” (p. 3). In contrast, there were organizations attempting a process of change grounded in what the author referred to as the organic metaphor, where they were able to see the “whole” system comprised of deeply interconnected sub-systems, much like that of a living organism (p. 4). Using the organic metaphor, one would understand that changing a specific part would ultimately impact the status of all other connected parts. For example, Dolan insists that within the organic frame of understanding, one would not consider changing the roles of a group of teachers, without a specific strategy which would involve the principal, other teachers, and parents.

In order to effectively manage the “whole” system, Dolan (1994) offers the concept of the “over-site committee,” urging readers to understand that without such a committee, or leadership team, there is nowhere that the system as a whole can learn. Further, this committee or team is the place “where a system ‘as a system’ can stop, look at itself, and work on healing itself” (p. 112). In addition, it is a place where the learning of multiple sites within an organization is integrated; thus, allowing the organization as a

“whole” system to learn. Example tasks of the over-site body may include: (a) giving themselves permission to take the risk of exploring new territory and make decisions differently, (b) setting parameters to ensure enough structure to operate effectively, (c) taking responsibility for securing the necessary resources (including time) needed for improvement efforts, and (d) serving as the lead listening and learning body. Without this over-site body, school-focused restructuring becomes a series of pilot programs: isolated successes perhaps, with no systemic movement (p. 112).

Similar to Dolan’s (1994) emphasis on a leadership “approach” to school improvement efforts in order for an organization to learn, Sparks (2005) emphasizes the importance of building capacity of leaders, administrators and teachers. Referring to school improvement efforts found within the model of professional learning communities, Sparks contends, “the quality of teaching, learning, and relationships...depends on the quality of leadership provided by principals and teachers. Profound change in schools begins with profound change in leaders...profound change in leaders results from and is revealed through deeper understanding of complex interrelated issues” (p. 157). Sparks concludes that in order for principal and teacher leaders to develop such a deeper understanding, they must be involved in what traditionally may have been the role of the “sole” principal leader: creating, communicating, organizing, and acting upon new knowledge.

Kowalski, Lasley, and Mahoney (2008) illustrate the evolution from “sole” leaders making linear causal decisions to teams of leaders beginning to reflect on the interconnectedness of the “whole” system as they describe the three spheres of influence on decision making: individual, professional, and organizational. The individual sphere

of influence is characterized by the personal needs and wants of the members within the organization, while the professional sphere of influence is focused on knowledge base of members. Thirdly, the organizational sphere of influence provides a focus on the organizational needs and interests. The authors advocate that because decisions are influenced by each sphere, organizations are challenged to create a decision-making body capable of reflecting on each of these influences, thus, thoughtful consideration of the span of leadership capacity is necessary. According to the authors, “succeeding in an information-rich, reform-minded environment requires school leaders to alter their assumptions and beliefs about the necessity of change, risk taking, and their normative roles as decision makers” (p. 19).

#### *Continuous Improvement*

Educational reform, historically, has failed due to the inability for school organizations to understand, participate, or learn through a systematic reflective process (Conzemius & O’Neill, 2001; Cunningham and Gresso, 1993; DuFour et al., 2008; Kowalski, Lasley, & Mahoney, 2008; Reeves 2006; Ubben et al., 2004). Cunningham & Gresso (1993) insist leaders “cannot simply demand better results, but must provide methods by which an organization’s members can study and improve the processes to achieve better results” (p. 152). DuFour et al. (2008) describe this process as one which engages each member of an organization in the following continuous improvement cycle: (a) goal setting, (b) organizing and analyzing data aligned to goal, (c) identify strategies which will enable the organization to achieve success towards goal(s), (d) collect and evaluate data to determine success of strategies, and (e) celebrate successes and repeat cycle.

Similar to the continuous improvement cycle, Conzemius and O'Neill (2001) offer a reflective framework for organizations to follow in order to build shared responsibility for ongoing improvement. This framework consists of three components: (a) focus, (b) reflection, and (c) collaboration. According to the authors, and similar to the DuFour et al. (2008) model, establishing focus would involve consensus around the mission, vision, and strategic priorities of the organization. Reflection would involve a data and accountability structure (Reeves, 2004) aligned to the focus with the ability to foster reflective thinking and practice. Finally, collaboration would involve enhancing skill development in organizational members around their ability to collaborate effectively as members of teams. Throughout each of these three components (or stages), organizational members would become involved in establishing, monitoring, and evaluating goals. These goals would be specific and strategic, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time bound, referred to as SMART goals.

Reeves (2006), reflecting his theory on accountability which emphasizes the importance of feedback for continuous improvement, offers what he refers to as a decision-making for results model, where he assists schools in their ability to (a) collect and chart data, (b) analyze data into clear targets for growth in order to set measurable goals, (c) align strategies for improvement, (d) determine results indicators, and (e) monitor and evaluate the progress or lack of in order to more effectively make decisions for improvement. The author emphasizes the importance of organizations having the capability to identify and act upon their antecedents, which may include but not limited to the causes, instructional strategies, administrative structures and conditions for learning impacting the need for change.

Kowalski et al. (2008) recognize that “historically, educators have been socialized to work in institutions of stability...socialized to believe that risk taking was neither encouraged nor rewarded, but now they are being pushed via research in an opposite direction” (p. 21). In fact, the authors define today’s leadership as “the process of determining what should be done to improve schools” (p. 21). Offering a similar model to Reeves (2006), and referred to as a problem-solving model, the authors advocate that organizations walk through each of the following five stages in order to take risks and stretch towards improvement: (a) understanding, (b) formulating, (c) applying, (d) reflecting, and (e) improving (p. 12). At the initial understanding stage, organizations analyze their current reality in order to fully understand what improvement is needed. Following this analysis, organizations formulate and apply specific strategies in order to gain the results desired. Finally, in the final two stages, reflection upon the results achieved from the use of strategies occurs. This reflection then informs further action to be taken as the cycle through each stage continues. While organizational behavior is complex, the authors make the call for leaders to become more consistent and predictable in how they go about making decisions. In the same vein, “leaders face the demand that they build, maintain, and use information systems for making important decisions, and especially those that impact student achievement” (p. 17).

### *Organizational Understanding*

In order for an organization to be deemed a “learning” organization, Lunenburg & Ornstein (2008) offer seven action imperatives which an organization must develop or change. These imperatives involve the organization: (a) creating continuous learning opportunities for personnel, (b) promoting inquiry or dialogue during these opportunities,

(c) encouraging collaboration and team learning, (d) creating systems to capture and share learning, (e) empowering people towards a collective vision, (f) connecting the organization to its environment, and (g) providing strategic leadership for learning (p. 30). However, in order for these elements to work systematically, it is important for leadership and members to have a working understanding of their immediate organization (Blankstein, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Schein, 1992; Schmoker, 2006).

Often times, schools are working from the misconception that one single approach to school improvement applies equally to all schools (Blankstein, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005). What the authors find is that schools often, without fully taking the time to learn about their immediate organization, jump in a desperate search for any school improvement effort that might offer hope. According to Marzano et al. (2005), “no predesigned comprehensive school reform program will address the unique characteristics of a given school” (p. 81). Moreover, Blankstein (2004) makes a similar claim using the following analogy, “without a clear picture of the needs of the school community, it is easy to be like a kid in the candy store when pursuing the appropriate means of enhancing and sustaining student achievement” (p. 44). Because of this widespread occurrence, Reeves (2007), challenges school organizations to take the time to ask the following questions: (a) are our professional practices leading to improved achievement, (b) if so, how can we replicate the practice, and if not, how will we change them, (c) what is the evidence we have to justify continuation of current practice, and (d) what is the risk of trying new practice, risk of continuing current practice (p. 8-9). Reeves claims that if the time is taken to search for these answers, school organizations will be more readily able to “act” in a school improvement fashion.

Similar to Reeves (2007) making the call for schools to ask in-depth questions and seek evidence concerning the status of an organization, White (2007) advocates for organizations to employ a well-balanced approach to collecting the needed information. For example, the author refers to three types of information in which schools should be collecting to determine “what” is happening inside organizational walls. These types include learning data, teacher data, and leadership data. First, learning data includes student achievement information, summative and formative, which provides school leaders and teachers a deep understanding of specific needs which may then inform school improvement actions. Second, teacher data includes information collected on teacher behaviors, or antecedents, in which may be allowing for successful practice, or informing desired practice. Third, leadership data, similar to teacher data, is information collected which reveals the actions of leadership which may be contributing or hindering the success of the school.

The manner in which organizations have reflected on current practice has evolved over time. Wiliam (2007) refers to a generational comparison in order to communicate such involvement. The author recognizes that three generations have approached their organizational learning differently. The first generation, according to Wiliam, primarily looked to their summative test results (outputs) to gain information about their organization. Evolving more deeply, the second generation began to look more at the demographic makeup of organizations to inform them of what was happening inside their walls, as well as the “why” they were reaping their results. Finally, the third and most current generation, began looking at not only the output data, but the “value-added” actions which could be contributing to organization success or lack of. For example, the

author expresses that schools have been and are beginning to dig deeper into the causes contributing to different rates of learning which are occurring. Just as Wiliam (2007) found in his research that schools more effectively approach school improvement when they have taken the time to learn about what is happening inside their organization, Marzano et al. (2005) advises schools to use the information to create “site-specific interventions” (p. 81).

Referencing leadership and the level of understanding about one’s respective organization, Schmoker (2006) surfaces the importance of leaders also taking the time to fully understand themselves and efforts being made within their school. For example, the author contends that leaders must be willing to evaluate the “senseless things that may be diverting their time and attention away from the two elements most vital to school success—how we teach and what we teach” and whether or not student learning is the outcome (p. 128). In addition and with a similar focus, Schein (1992) voices a leaders potential to be vulnerable is an important variable to the success of a learning organization in that “the only way to build a learning culture that continues to learn is for leaders themselves to realize that they do not know and must teach others to accept they do not know” (p. 367).

Organizational learning requires members to “see” their organization as an open system. Leaders have the responsibility of making decisions based on the “whole” system and its integrated parts. In order for school organizations to learn effectively, leadership must create a continuous improvement process for decision-making. Such a process fosters an in-depth understanding of how the organization is functioning and the specific interventions needed. Organizational learning depends on the ability of all organizational

members to be system thinkers. Fullan (2005) clearly acknowledges that if leadership capacity is developed where “more and more leaders become system thinkers, they will gravitate toward strategies that alter people’s system-related experiences; that is, they will alter people’s mental awareness of the system as a whole, thereby, contributing to altering the system itself” (p. 40).

### *Summary*

This comprehensive review of literature presented a foundational understanding of the research supporting this study. In order for a school to learn using a PLC model of professional development and build a sustainable school improvement process, the learning actions must be guided through a commitment to ensuring that all students learn, cultivated by a collaborative culture, and focused on measurable results. In order to understand the development of such a community, the review of leadership suggests one must consider the role of leadership. Leaders of PLCs develop leadership capacity in others, present a compelling case for school improvement, foster interdependence among organizational members, and have a working understanding of how to sustain improvement efforts. In addition to leadership, the development of a PLC depends heavily on the organizations understanding of adult learning theory. Adult learning theory suggests that adults learn effectively when offered opportunities to construct knowledge collaboratively with other members of an organization. In addition, collaborative learning must be action-oriented and require in-depth reflection of the learners. Finally, organizational learning theory communicates that organizations function as systems, consisting of integrated sub-systems, which must be considered at any level of

organizational change. Decision-making is proven effective when organizations are able to work from a continuous improvement cycle where they are involved in actions that allow for deep understanding of the organization at large. This foundational knowledge is essential to understanding the intent of the study, to learn of one leadership team's processes and actions resulting in state-level recognition for facilitating high quality professional development. In chapter three, the methods selected in order to conduct the study, specifically, the qualitative methods, selection process, study design process, and the process used for data collection and analysis are outlined.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

There is a lack of information reported about the processes and actions of leadership teams responsible for leading professional development in schools, specifically schools recognized for demonstrating high quality professional development. In recent years, a sense of urgency to increase student achievement and teacher quality at high levels has led to an ever-increasing interest among schools in developing a professional learning community (PLC) model of professional development. In addition, traditional teacher professional development practices within schools have failed to have a direct impact on student learning (Drago-Severson, 2004b; DuFour et al., 2008; Reeves, 2007; Schmoker, 2006; Sparks, 2005; Wiliam, 2007). Out of all the historical efforts at the national, state, and local levels to improve professional learning, “only a handful have had a measurable impact on teacher learning” (Sparks, 2005, p. 158).

Sparks (2002) claims there is not a lack of information in the educational community about what constitutes high quality professional development; rather, there is a knowing-doing gap that exists. In order to gain a deeper understanding of potential variables impacting this knowing-doing gap, this study provides further insight into one specific leadership team’s processes and actions used to guide, facilitate, and sustain high quality professional development. In this chapter, the researcher first provides explanation for the methodology used for this case study. Next, the researcher explains the preparation involved for completing the study, including the process used to formulate the research questions, select participants to be studied, and the development of

interview questions. Further, an explanation of the processes used for data collection and analysis; and finally, an explanation of the ethical principles which guided the study will be included.

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to add to the body of knowledge concerning the processes and actions deemed effective by the leadership team being studied. The methodology best suited for this study is qualitative. Qualitative methodology was selected because the researcher was seeking to learn from a particular phenomenon, in this case a school leadership team responsible for guiding professional development processes and actions. Qualitative research methodology lends itself to the understanding of “poorly understood phenomena, and differences between stated and implemented policies or theories, in order to discover unspecified contextual variables” (Creswell, 2003, p. 11). According to Merriam (2002), when concentrating on a single phenomenon (case), the researcher is able to describe, in-depth, what is being studied. In this study, the researcher explored potential variables (processes and actions) that contributed to the result of state-recognized, high quality professional development for teachers. In this form of methodology, the researcher arrives at claims based on constructivist perspectives, multiple meanings from individual experiences, with the intent of finding patterns and developing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Because the purpose of the study was to create meaning from the individual experiences of leadership team members and to review documents in order to find supporting patterns to their work, it was only appropriate to approach this study as qualitative, particularly using a descriptive case study format.

### *Case Study*

The identified problem called for a descriptive case study approach to research. The phenomena being studied was captured through an exploratory process where the researcher attempted to discover greater insight into the processes and actions used by the leadership team being studied. A case study is used when a researcher explores, in-depth, a bounded system while collecting detailed information, using a variety of data sources (Creswell, 2003). In this particular case, the bounded system was Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence (MCAE) School, with specific attention placed on the leadership team leading the processes and actions of the state recognized professional development model. Data included individual interviews and document analysis. These data enabled the researcher to develop an in-depth description of processes and actions used by the team to lead professional learning for teachers

#### Methods of Preparation

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to provide sufficient background information through which the audience can better understand the topic (Creswell, 2003). For five years, the researcher was immersed in leading and facilitating professional development in the school studied. During these five years, the researcher served as elementary principal of the school which transformed its approach to professional learning, from what one might refer to as the "traditional" one-shot method (DuFour et al., 2008), into one best described as a PLC. As a former principal of this school, the researcher had the opportunity to lead the development of a PLC from birth to sustainability. The researcher organized a leadership team whose primary role was to lead efforts in the processes and actions involved in a PLC structure. After three years of leading, observing, and finding the positive impact the learning community model was

having on teacher development and student learning, the school was awarded the Missouri Commissioners Award of Excellence for Professional Development for its positive efforts of conducting professional learning according to the state standards of professional development.

The experience of observing this school's transformation in the way teachers learned, and the level of sustainability reached over time, led the researcher to become involved in regional efforts to build leadership capacity among principals and teacher leaders in their effort to also facilitate professional learning within their own organizations. Through the researcher's experiences in working with regional leaders and gaining a greater insight into the distinct differences in schools' abilities to reach sustainable professional learning communities, the researcher began to question possible variables that could be contributing to one school's ability to develop and sustain PLCs, while another school attempting a similar approach struggled to thrive.

#### *Formulating the Question and Topic*

As the researcher began to focus on potential variables and reflected on her own experiences as principal leading a PLC, deeper reflection upon the level of leadership capacity that was developed among the leadership team facilitating the PLC work resulted. More specifically, the researcher began to reflect upon the processes and actions used by the team. During the researcher's experiences in consulting with schools working to facilitate professional development more effectively, the researcher became more inclined to believe that a leadership team's processes and actions heavily impacted a school's ability to learn effectively. By exploring one school leadership team's process

and actions, a more comprehensive understanding was developed in order to assist other schools in their high quality professional development pursuit.

While examining related literature and with consideration of the researcher's interest in one school's leadership team's ability to be recognized as an exemplary example in professional development, the researcher developed the following research question:

*Grand Tour Research Question*

What are the processes and actions used by the MCAE leadership team to achieve the school's state recognition for high quality professional development?

*Participant Selection Background*

One school was selected for this study, MCAE, based on its exemplary recognition of implementing a high quality professional development program. The school was able to develop and sustain a PLC model without the support of the statewide Professional Learning Communities Project (a three-year professional training model to support schools in the implementation of PLC). Rather than receive support through this offering, the sample school participated in an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) training series provided by a regional professional development center. ILT training was offered over the course of four sessions spread throughout an academic year. The purpose of the training was to build capacity in school leadership team members in order for them to successfully facilitate whole-school learning, collectively as members of a leadership team, at their respective school sites. Training themes delivered to participating teams included, but were not limited to: (a) culture, (b) collaboration, (c) goal setting, and (d)

data-driven decision making. MCAE's leadership team elected to participate in this annual training over the course of seven years.

Purposeful selection procedures were used to identify participants of the study (Creswell, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The leadership team selected for the study is described as *a unique phenomenon* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), and is the best source to assist the researcher in understanding the proposed problem (Creswell, 2003). MCAE leadership team was chosen based on its regional and statewide recognition received for developing and sustaining a PLC model of professional development. Regional recognition stemmed from attention received from professional development consultants referring regional schools to observe and research the work of the leadership team. Statewide recognition was awarded through the Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development.

In addition to the principal, six leadership team members participated in the study. Thus, a total of seven participants were selected to participate in the study. The principal held the role of classroom teacher at the onset of the PLC journey; and at that time, was a member of the leadership team. The six "teacher" members who participated represented six out of 13 total members serving on the leadership team since its formation in 2003. Qualitative inquiry involves selecting a "sample from which most can be learned...a purposeful sample" (Merriam, 2002, p. 12). The six leadership team "teacher" members consisted of a mixed representation sample. The selection process involved the following criteria: (a) representation of teacher members instrumental in the initial developmental stage of PLC implementation, and (b) representation of individuals currently serving in a leadership capacity recent years and present time. Each of the seven total participants

were interviewed individually. Participants were contacted by email regarding the nature and purpose of the study. Within this communication, the time commitment involved in their participation, methods to ensure confidentiality in their contribution, and their rights to withdraw at any given time during the study were explained. Written consent letters and signature forms for school district participation (Appendix A-B) and individual participants (Appendix C-D) were disseminated and collected prior to researcher conducting interviews.

### *Participant Information*

A brief demographic description has been provided for each MCAE leadership team participant. Information provided includes: (a) number of years of service the participant has served within the field of education, (b) total number of years of service within MCAE, (c) total number of years the participants has been a part of the MCAE leadership team, and (d) the type of role the participant has assumed while serving on the team.

Principal A has completed 16 years of experience in education. Principal A has been the principal at MCAE for three years. Prior to becoming principal at MCAE, Principal A served in the capacity of elementary teacher at MCAE for 10 years. Principal A has been a leadership team member throughout the entire span of PLC implementation at MCAE, serving two terms as co-chair.

Teachers individually interviewed included:

Team Member A completed 26 years of experience in education, with 15 years of service at MCAE. Member A has been a part of the leadership team for six years.

Member A was a part of the leadership team during the initial stage of PLC

implementation, but is currently not a member of the team. Member A was a member of the leadership team for six years. Member A assumed the role of co-chair for two years.

Team Member B completed 14 years of teaching experience, with 11 years of service at MCAE. Member B was a member of the leadership team during initial and early implementation stages, the first three years. Member B did not assume any leadership role during that timeframe.

Team Member C completed eight years of teaching experience, with eight years of service at MCAE. Member C has been a member of the leadership team for six years. Member C has served as co-chair of the leadership team. Member C is currently not an active member of the leadership team.

Team Member D completed 28 years of experience in education, with 28 years of service at MCAE. Member D has been a member of the leadership team throughout the entire span of PLC implementation. Within that timeframe, Member D assumed the role as co-chair.

Team Member E completed 31 years of teaching experience, with 27 years of service at MCAE. Member E has been a member of the leadership team for three years. During that timeframe, Member E has assumed the role of co-chair.

Team Member F completed 15 years of teaching experience, with 8 years of service at MCAE. Member F has been a leadership team member for one year. Member F has not assumed a leadership role within the team.

Table 1

*MCAE Leadership Team Members Profile.*

Member	Total Yrs. Education	Total Yrs. MCAE	Total Yrs. Lead. Team	Lead. Team Role Held
Principal A	16	13	9	Co-Chair
Member A	26	15	6	Co-Chair
Member B	14	11	3	
Member C	8	8	6	Co-Chair
Member D	28	28	9	Co-Chair
Member E	31	27	3	Co-Chair
Member F	15	8	1	

Data Collection Procedures

Preceding the collection of data, a letter of request was sent to MCAE’s Superintendent in order to obtain permission to interview selected participants and obtain necessary documents to support the study. The letter communicated the purpose of the study, the confidentiality rights of selected participants, as well as their right to decide at any time whether or not they wish to be a part of the study process. Following response from MCAE’s superintendent, expressing the school’s willingness to participate, a letter was sent to all participants outlining the purpose of the study, their rights, and more specific information about the motions of participation. Data collection procedures were three-fold: individual interviews of seven participants selected to participate in the study, review and analysis of documents obtained from the participants, and an ongoing revisit to the literature supporting the research question.

### *Interview Questions*

Interview questions were administered using a semi-structured interview protocol (Creswell, 2003). Due to the exploratory nature of the study, this approach to administering questions allowed for the necessary clarification and elaboration during the interview process in order to gather a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives shared by participants. The interview question and probes used were clear, open-ended, and derived from the common language found within related literature and the context of the school studied.

The interview process was designed to prompt each participant to share their perspectives related to the processes and actions used by the leadership team in order to implement high quality professional development. Participants were asked to describe, from their individual perspective, the leadership team's processes and actions they believed assisted their school being recognized as exemplary, as well as contributed to present-time sustainability. During each interview, probing and specifying questions were used, as needed, to follow-up on what participants had said or to ask them to provide more specific examples to responses provided during direct questioning. This development of probing questions was an iterative process as supported by Merriam (2002). The initial development of questions evolved from the review of literature, the researcher's six years of experience in working with the leadership team, and the use of high quality professional development resources. Probing questions were reported, as appropriate, and an entire list can be found in Appendix E.

### *Individual Interviews*

Individual interviews were conducted with the six leadership team members purposefully selected. These members were selected in order to obtain a balance in the number of years and types of experiences each individual has held in this specific leadership role. Interviews took place at the school site in a conference room, deemed conducive to both building principal and teacher participants.

Using a semi-structured approach to interviews, the researcher and participants were able to have flexibility in the dialogue process. An interview protocol was developed to guide the interview process. The protocol included a heading, instructions for the interview process, key research questions, probes to gain elaborate insight into the key research questions, and space for additional notes and reflections that may emerge from the researcher and participants. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim with the consent of participants (Creswell, 2003).

### *Document Collection*

A variety of documents were collected, analyzed, and compared to the data obtained from individual interviews. Review of documents relevant to the leadership team's processes and actions captured useful information relative to responses provided during interviews, as well as provided additional information overlooked during the interview process (Creswell, 2003). Documents collected were documents developed by the leadership team members and reflect the processes and actions used to lead professional development within the school studied. Documents collected included: leadership team schedules, study group professional development proposals, study group agendas, study group logs, collaboration protocols, needs assessment tools, and SMART

goal examples (see Appendix F for a list of documents). Documents reviewed consisted of those utilized by the leadership team and school staff during the initial stages of PLC implementation as well as those developed and used currently. Documents were made available and collected from the principal.

### Data Analysis

The process of data analysis involves “making sense out of text” by “preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2003, p.190). In this particular case study, the researcher examined the data collected from individual interviews and a variety of documents shared from the leadership team members in order to derive meaning that will add to the body of knowledge surrounding the processes and actions used by the leadership team. Interview responses were recorded and transcribed and documents were collected. This data was organized and prepared for data analysis. In order to ensure the process allowed for consistency and dependability in the findings (Merriam, 2002), the information collected was triangulated (see Figure 1 and 2) against supporting literature aligned to the emerging themes discovered. Preliminary analysis was conducted following each interview. A summary of the information was sent back to each participant, through a member-checking process (Merriam, 2002), for their review and reliable confirmation of what they felt was reported. Using the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2002), a coding and categorizing data analysis process was used in analyzing both interview responses and documents offered by the leadership team. This systematic way of identifying emerging patterns within the data assisted the development of larger meaning

aligned to the research question. These patterns were translated into themes that were described within the findings and finally, interpreted by the researcher (Creswell, 2003).

Figure 1

*Data Collection Process-Triangulation.*

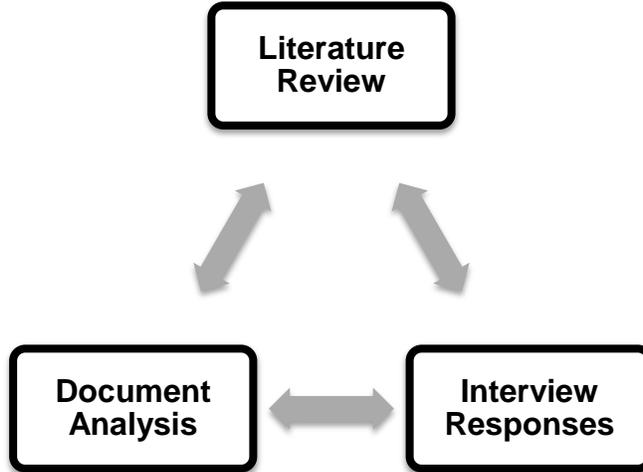
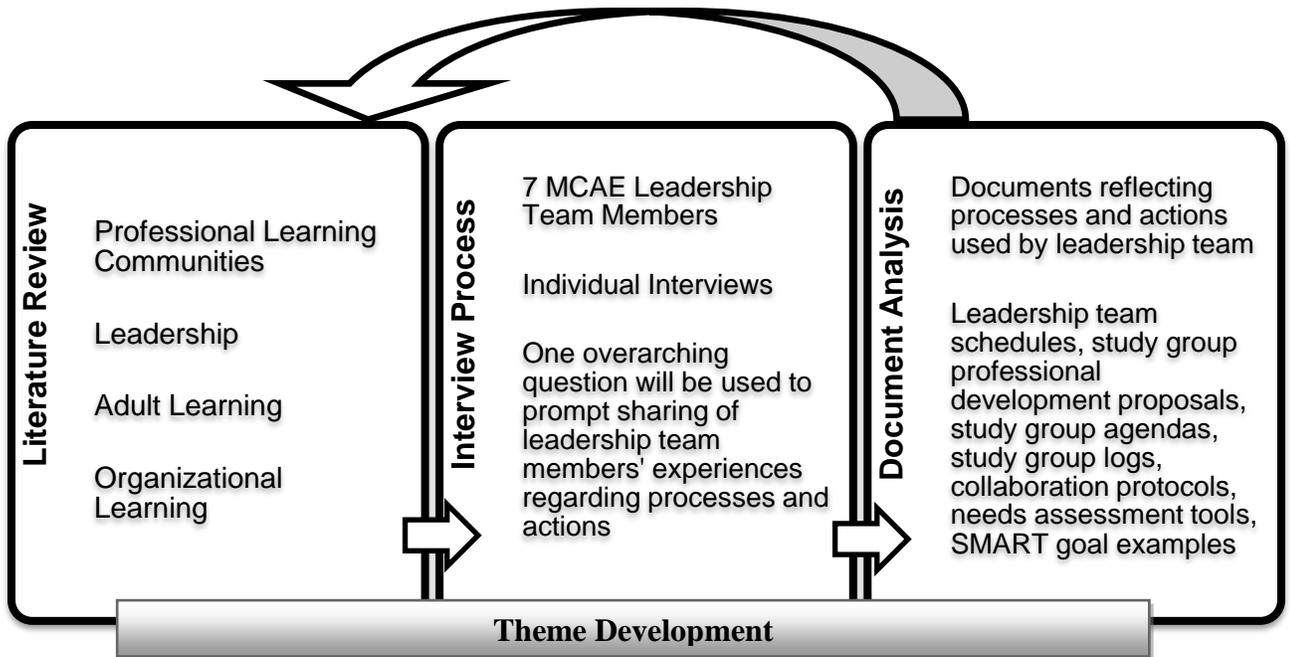


Figure 2

*Data Collection and Analysis Process.*



## Dependability and Trustworthiness

As part of the qualitative research method, the researcher's dependability and trustworthiness is of vital importance to the validity of the study. With the understanding of the prior employment history with the selected school and extensive background in the area of professional development, as a learner and a leader, the researcher had interest towards seeking new information that had the potential to assist schools in professional development efforts. However, it is clear that this background could have influenced the researcher's perceptions and interpretations while performing the outlined research.

While there is a historical connection between the researcher and MCAE, there has been a three-year time lapse from when the researcher was employed by the school and the researcher's current professional role. At the time of the study, the researcher's professional role within the field of education had expanded. The researcher currently works as a school improvement consultant for a professional development center servicing 59 school districts in Missouri. It is this expansive insight that the researcher has gained from working with regional schools on PLC efforts that have contributed to the questioning of what variables could be contributing to a school's ability to successfully implement the work of PLC, while another school may struggle.

Throughout the research process, the researcher conducted the study in an organized and systemic fashion. Multiple research strategies were implemented to assist the accuracy of findings. Data collected from individual interviews, document analysis, and research-related literature was triangulated in order to build a coherent validation of emerging themes. Peer debriefing and advisor review, along with the inclusion of rich,

thick description was utilized to assist with any potential researcher bias. Finally, any negative or discrepant information which emerged during the research process was disclosed in order to enhance the trustworthiness and dependability of the study (Creswell, 2003).

### Ethical Principles

As researchers anticipate and employ the methods outlined in their study, it is paramount that he or she anticipate the potential for ethical issues to arise (Creswell, 2003). Upon approval of this proposal by the researcher's doctoral committee, permission was sought to conduct the outlined study from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Missouri. Before conducting individual interviews, document collection, and analysis, the researcher contacted participants in order to request consent for their participation in the study. These participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix D) which fully disclosed the nature and purpose of the study, the manner in which the findings would be disseminated, and the acknowledgement of the study being used as a component of the researcher's doctoral program. Demographic information was collected, including descriptive statistics describing the school setting, participant's number of years in education, number of years in system being studied, number of years in the role of leadership team member, and current role of participant.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed digitally. Following transcription, original digital recordings were destroyed. Interview transcripts were securely stored, electronically. This information will be stored for three years by the researcher as required by Institutional Review Board. Confidentiality of all participants was maintained throughout the duration of data collection, analysis, and description of findings. The

researcher upholds a commitment to administering a reliable research process, including data collection, analysis, and communication of findings. The purpose of the proposed study was to seek information surrounding the research question guiding the study.

### Summary

In chapter three, the research design for the proposed case study was outlined. Preparation for the study involving the development of research questions, participant selection, and construction of interview questions were explained. Data collection and analysis processes were illustrated to communicate clearly the processes used by the researcher to seek information aligned to the study's research question. Finally, the researcher revealed all information related to any potential bias involved in order to communicate the commitment to conducting a trustworthy and ethical research process. In chapter four, a thorough description of the school being studied, as well as the findings which emerged from the data collection process are shared.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA COLLECTION

As outlined in chapter three, data collected involved interviews of Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence (MCAE) leadership team members' perceptions of the processes and actions used by the team to achieve the school's state recognition for high quality professional development. In addition, a variety of documents, created by the team, were collected in order to derive a deeper understanding of the process and actions. The data from these two sources, interviews and documents, were coded, organized, and finally analyzed in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the work of the leadership team and address the research question of interest. In this chapter, the setting for the case study is described, data collection and analysis processes are reviewed, and themes which emerged from the data collections are examined.

#### Setting for the Case Study

##### *Description of MCAE School*

MCAE School is a small, rural school housing grade level preschool through sixth grade. The school houses a total population of 213 students, 191 K-6 grade students and 22 preschool students. MCAE's student population consists of 2.6% Asian, 1% Black, 1.6% Hispanic, .5% Indian, and 94.2% White. 49.7% of the student population qualifies for a free/reduced lunch program. 17.36% of the population qualified for special education services.

MCAE School has one elementary principal. The facility in which MCAE resides also houses grade levels 7-12. Therefore, one high school principal and one district superintendent work in the same facility as the elementary principal. 49.8% of MCAE

staff hold advanced degrees. The current principal of MCAE school has been principal for three years. Prior to assuming the role as MCAE building principal, the individual acted as MCAE elementary teacher for 10 years. Each of the three administrators were employed by the MCAE district in the same year. MCAE experiences a low staff attrition rate, characterized by only a few teachers choosing to leave the school, and for personal reasons. MCAE is a school-wide Title I building, with achievement in Communication Arts indicating 54.8% (compared to 54.6% at the state level) of students scoring at or above proficient levels and 71.2% (compared to 54.2% at the state level) of students scoring at or above proficient in Mathematics.

#### *History of Leadership Team Development*

The researcher of this study served as MCAE principal for eight consecutive years. During this tenure, the principal attended a state-level Leadership Academy where learning surrounding professional learning communities (Dufour & Eaker, 1998) occurred. During the Leadership Academy experience, the researcher learned about the following concepts: teambuilding, SMART goal development (Conzemius & O'Neill, 2001), and Whole Faculty Study Groups (Murphy & Lick, 2001). It was during this learning experience that the researcher began to understand the value of instructional leadership and the need to re-examine adult learning practices within the MCAE school system. As a result, following Leadership Academy, the researcher selected a team of teacher leaders to become involved in an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) training experience. The ILT experience was designed by the Regional Professional Development Center (RPDC) and comprised of four full days, throughout a school year, of instructional leadership training for teacher leaders and principals. The training allowed

teacher leaders to: (a) gain an understanding of how to develop a culture where failure was not an option, (b) learn about a cycle of continuous school improvement, (c) obtain knowledge of processes found within a professional learning community (PLC), and (d) understand how to develop SMART goals to focus improvement efforts. Due to the positive experiences MCAE's newly formed leadership team found in the ILT experience, the researcher chose to continue the schools involvement in the training for five additional consecutive years. This ongoing training allowed for knowledge base to deepen, participants to hear perspectives from other school systems working through a similar journey focused on developing a learning community, and allowed for guarded leadership team planning time, where the team could reflect on the learning and plan for future action steps.

MCAE's current building principal, referred to as Principal A in this study, has been a member of this leadership team since its initial development. In addition, during tenure as teacher, this individual was asked to attend Leadership Academy in order to further deepen the skillset involved in leadership. This background knowledge gained through professional development, and experience of working at the capacity of teacher leader guiding school improvement efforts, allowed for a smooth transition into the role of principal.

MCAE School operates on a traditional 5-day school week schedule. The school releases students early, one day per month for two hours, to allow for professional development time for teachers. The leadership team is responsible for the guiding and planning of staff learning during this allotted time. The "early release time" devoted to professional learning was a result of the new learning obtained by the researcher (former

principal) and teacher leaders. The MCAE Board of Education listened to the new learning, gained a clear understanding of the value of continuous school improvement through the means of developing a learning community, and stayed current on the specific action plans and progress in which the leadership team attributed to the additional learning time.

#### Relationship of Researcher to Research

As a former principal of the school which serves as the setting for the case study, the researcher holds a connection to the research. The researcher was acting principal at the onset of the formation of MCAE's leadership team; thus, has first-hand knowledge of the processes and actions used by the leadership team during the principal's tenure. Following five years of experience working with the MCAE leadership team, the researcher pursued employment with a different school district. Since this time, the researcher has been employed as an educational consultant working to assist schools with school improvement processes. At the time of the data collection and analysis processes, the principal had been removed from the work of MCAE's leadership team for approximately three years. Having had a good working relationship with MCAE's leadership team and school at large, both during and following employment at MCAE, it was assumed that all parties involved in the case study would be able to work together effectively to capture the data necessary to determine what processes and actions of the leadership team contributed not only to state level recognition, but sustainability. Due to the researcher's previous history within the research setting, it was essential that leadership team members and current leadership recognized the purpose for the research. They needed to understand that the historical efforts of the leadership team, and efforts

produced under new principal leadership, were both essential to form a comprehensive understanding of the leadership team's processes and actions.

### Participants

Purposeful selection procedures were used to identify participants of the study (Creswell, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). MCAE leadership team was chosen based on its regional and statewide recognition received for developing and sustaining a PLC model of professional development. Regional recognition stemmed from attention received from professional development consultants referring regional schools to observe and research the work of the leadership team. Statewide recognition was awarded through the Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development.

In addition to the principal, six leadership team members participated in the study. Thus, a total of seven participants were involved in the study. The principal held the role of classroom teacher at the onset of the PLC journey; and at that time, was a member of the leadership team. The six "teacher" members selected to participate represented six out of 13 total members serving on the leadership team since its formation in 2003.

Qualitative inquiry involves selecting a "sample from which most can be learned...a purposeful sample" (Merriam, 2002, p. 12). The six leadership team "teacher" members consisted of a mixed representation sample. The selection process involved the following criteria: (a) representation of teacher members instrumental in the initial developmental stage of PLC implementation, and (b) representation of individuals currently serving in a leadership capacity recent years and present time.

### *Interview Participant Demographics*

A brief demographic description has been provided for each MCAE leadership team participant. Information provided includes: (a) number of years of service the participant has served within the field of education, (b) total number of years of service within MCAE, (c) total number of years the participants has been a part of the MCAE leadership team, and (d) the type of role the participant has assumed while serving on the team.

Principal A has completed 16 years of experience in education. Principal A has been the principal at MCAE for three years. Prior to becoming principal at MCAE, Principal A served in the capacity of elementary teacher at MCAE for 10 years. Principal A has been a leadership team member throughout the entire span of PLC implementation at MCAE, serving two terms as co-chair.

Teachers individually interviewed included:

Team Member A completed 26 years of experience in education, with 15 years of service at MCAE. Member A has been a part of the leadership team for six years. Member A was a part of the leadership team during the initial stage of PLC implementation, but is currently not a member of the team. Member A was a member of the leadership team for six years. Member A assumed the role of co-chair for two years.

Team Member B completed 14 years of teaching experience, with 11 years of service at MCAE. Member B was a member of the leadership team during initial and early implementation stages, the first three years. Member B did not assume any leadership role during that timeframe.

Team Member C completed eight years of teaching experience, with eight years of service at MCAE. Member C has been a member of the leadership team for six years. Member C has served as co-chair of the leadership team. Member C is currently not an active member of the leadership team.

Team Member D completed 28 years of experience in education, with 28 years of service at MCAE. Member D has been a member of the leadership team throughout the entire span of PLC implementation. Within that timeframe, Member D assumed the role as co-chair.

Team Member E completed 31 years of teaching experience, with 27 years of service at MCAE. Member E has been a member of the leadership team for three years. During that timeframe, Member E has assumed the role of co-chair.

Team Member F completed 15 years of teaching experience, with 8 years of service at MCAE. Member F has been a leadership team member for one year. Member F has not assumed a leadership role within the team.

Table 1

*MCAE Leadership Team Members Profile.*

Member	Total Yrs. Education	Total Yrs. MCAE	Total Yrs. Lead. Team	Lead. Team Role Held
Principal A	16	13	9	Co-Chair
Member A	26	15	6	Co-Chair
Member B	14	11	3	
Member C	8	8	6	Co-Chair
Member D	28	28	9	Co-Chair
Member E	31	27	3	Co-Chair
Member F	15	8	1	

## Data Collection Procedures

### *Interview Setting*

Seven out of seven selected participants chose to participate in the interview process. Interviews were held in the conference room, housed near the offices of principal and secretary of the school. This location, selected by MCAE principal, was chosen for its layout which allowed for comfortable seating for participants, minimal to no interruption opportunities, and central location. Interviews were conducted during the school day, on two different occasions, where MCAE principal designed a schedule for teachers to meet with researcher. This allowed for data collection to be bounded within the context of the study (Creswell, 2003). Four out of six teacher leader interviews took an average of twenty minutes to complete, while the remaining two took an average of thirty minutes. Principal A's interview took fifty minutes to complete.

While a conference room may appear as a formal setting for an interview to be conducted, the feel of the room and receptiveness observed by each participant communicated that the room was often used for casual, collaborative meetings of staff. Thus, the setting was comfortable for the participants. Upon entering the interview setting, the researcher allowed for casual conversation in order to relax each participant prior to conducting interviews. During this time, participants were reminded of methods to ensure confidentiality, and their rights to withdraw at any given time during the study. In addition, participants were informed the purpose for audio-recording each interview and how the data would be used. Due to the historical connection of researcher to research participants, trust had already been established. This allowed for participants to share openly as they responded to each interview question.

### *Interview Questions*

The primary interview question asked of each participant reflected the grand tour research question of the study: What are the processes and actions used by the MCAE leadership team to achieve the school's state recognition for high quality professional development? At the onset of each interview, the researcher had prepared opening questions directly aligned to each participant's background or current role on the leadership team. This allowed the participant to get comfortable with the content about to be explored at an in-depth level (Merriam, 2002). In addition, the researcher prepared nine broad, open-ended questions (Appendix E) to assist in participant sharing of the processes and actions used by the leadership team (Merriam, 2002).

Using the first interview to establish a baseline, the researcher began to document specific questions that were triggered from responses shared by the participant. This banking of questions became an iterative process which allowed for deeper questioning as the interviews progressed (Merriam, 2002). Following the completion of all interviews, the researcher performed a member checking (Merriam, 2002) process where each participant was given the opportunity to review the interview questions and responses to ensure accuracy of transcripts and to confirm whether or not they felt the information transcribed accurately portrayed their perspectives. This member checking process was performed using email technologies.

Throughout the transcription process, the principal and team members were referred to using the following headings: Principal and Team Member. Team Members were each assigned a letter as part of their name (Table 1). This process allowed for their

identity to remain anonymous throughout not only the interview process, but also during data analysis.

### *Document Collection*

During the interview process, the researcher documented the names or types of documents referred to by participants. Once interviews were completed, the researcher provided the compiled list of documents referred to by participants to the principal. The principal spent one day gathering the items found on the researcher's running list. In addition, the principal offered additional documents to the researcher, related to the questions asked during the interview process.

### Data Analysis

The researcher used a constant comparative method of analyzing participant's transcripts and documents for data analysis (Merriam, 2002). This method included mining through the interview conversations as they developed, probing further interview questions as needed, and adjusting and aligning questions based on information transpired through the interview process. Further, the researcher's reading of all interview transcripts, review of eight years of documents, identifying relevant and common phrases in the interview transcripts and documents, and finally arriving at emerging themes when comparing this coded information, all became a part of the constant comparative method. Finally, literature relevant to the study was continuously consulted as themes emerged to allow for a deeper examination of the data collected.

Once interviews were transcribed, using the color yellow, the researcher first highlighted key phrases aligned to the research question outlined in the study. This process was completed with all seven transcribed interviews. During and following this

process of identifying key phrases related to the study, the researcher began to identify themes of information that could be threaded across transcripts. These potential themes were documented as discovered. Second, the researcher went back to each interview and began to recode the yellow highlighted information into specific colors assigned to emerging themes. Third, the researcher completed an identical coding process for each document shared by MCAE's principal. Each document was coded for relevant phrases using a yellow highlighter. Themes emerged from this thorough review process and later categorized by these themes. The themes found using both forms of data were compared to each other and the researcher found the following commonalities: (a) leadership capacity, (b) focused, systemic professional learning, (c) purposeful and precise planning, (d) monitoring and evaluating implementation, and (e) culture of collaboration and accountability.

External and internal validity was controlled by the researcher of the study. The act of using multiple qualitative research methods such as individual interviews, mining of archival documents relevant to the study, and a constant refer to related literature contributed to quality control. Other safeguards included seeking and receiving Institutional Review Board and school district approval to conduct the study. The researcher distributed and collected consent form letters (Appendix C) to all participants stating their rights as participants of the study. In order to ensure validity, the researcher used a member checking method and triangulated data using interviews, documents, and related literature. Additionally, the researcher chose an adequate and appropriate sample size to gather necessary information to support findings of the study, interviewed until saturation of data was obtained, and employed the use of thick rich description of the

phenomenon (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 2002). Finally, for reliability purposes, the researcher was transparent about all potential biases associated with his prior relationship with the population studied (Creswell, 2003).

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Developing Leadership Capacity as Lead Learners

Examination of data indicated a high level of involvement by MCAE building principal in the efforts of the leadership team. These efforts include attending all professional development experiences which the team attended to gain knowledge on how to operate as a learning community, as well as sitting at the table for all leadership team meetings. In addition, interview data revealed several key sources where the opportunity for teacher leaders to develop and refine leadership knowledge and skills exist. These opportunities stem from academies and networks provided by MCAE's RPDC.

#### *Principal's Initial Involvement and Training with Leadership Team*

Principal A, throughout the role of teacher leader and now as principal, had been exposed to every lead learning experience the leadership team had been presented. These experiences included being involved in ILT for multiple years, where the team was able to receive lead learning on school improvement efforts such as: (a) gaining an understanding of how to develop a culture focused on student learning, (b) creating systems for collaboration where high-performing teams exist, (c) understanding how to develop SMART goals to focus improvement efforts, and (d) creating processes for data-driven decision making. Throughout the years of MCAE's involvement in this training, topics would alter based on new learning in the area of professional development around

professional learning communities. Principal A reflected on this collective learning experience with leadership team members by stating, “The advantage of Instructional Leadership Team training was...working with other leaders in the district, there was more of an opportunity to implement what we had learned. It wasn’t one teacher going back giving an idea, it was a team coming back with ideas.” Team Member B reflected on the ILT experience by sharing, “We would all sit around at the table and discuss...they would have people in and share their experiences and then we would brainstorm at the table...we would come back, of course, in our meetings and be able to talk about that, too.” Team Member B added, “The training was extremely important for it to be able to work.”

#### *Principal’s Own Professional Training*

Aside from Principal A’s involvement in ILT, the principal was able to receive individual lead learning opportunities from a Leadership Academy (Appendix H), sponsored by the state education department and the principal’s RPDC. Leadership Academy offered the principal the opportunity to network with regional and state-wide principals, superintendents, and teacher leaders on topics in alignment with what the principal and leadership team members experienced in ILT. However, this experience offered a deeper perspective within the learning and was aligned directly with the role of leader of teacher leaders. This academy experience was structured to provide monthly, regional professional development to participants as well as four opportunities to receive state-level professional development from national researchers in the field. Principal A commented, “I was one of those fortunate teachers before I became an administrator [to

attend Leadership Academy], [this experience] probably molded me more than anything professional development-wise in the area of leadership at that time.”

Following Principal A’s involvement in Leadership Academy, the principal enrolled in Advanced Leadership Academy where graduates of Leadership Academy would come together four times throughout a school year to stay connected with current research surrounding professional learning communities. Most recently, Principal A has been heavily involved in attending comprehensive trainings, with MCAE leadership team, on the use of school data. These trainings focused on how to use data effectively to make system-wide decisions towards school improvement, along with how to incorporate data team meetings where teachers analyze student achievement results, formatively, to make instructional decisions in the classroom.

#### *Principal’s Hands-On Engagement in Leadership Team’s Efforts*

In addition to being involved in all professional development experiences alongside the leadership team, as well as individualized lead learning opportunities to stay current on research-based practices in school improvement, Principal A has attended all leadership team meetings throughout the school year in order to implement new learning. Meetings have been held monthly (Appendix I) to reflect on progress and plan for upcoming professional development experiences for staff. During the summer months, meetings were scheduled to review staff input gathered from survey information and to map out a monthly plan for professional learning for the school year ahead. Principal A played a key role in facilitating the direction for professional learning by sharing knowledge and expertise with team members and coaching their thinking as they make decisions about school improvement.

According to interviews conducted with leadership team members, the staff viewed their principal as being hands-on with tasks which the leadership team carries out to facilitate professional learning. An examination of the leadership team's documents revealed timely and concise communication from Principal A to all staff about the work of the leadership team. Memos, calendars, schedules, as well as ongoing communication items staff would need to know to be prepared and successful in upcoming professional learning activities were made available. Evidence of fiscal support towards leadership team goals also indicated a strong sense of commitment by the building principal in carrying out the team's work.

#### *Teacher Leadership Training*

Similar to Principal A's experiences in building her own leadership capacity, members of the leadership team were also supported in similar opportunities. As evidenced in the interviews conducted, it was important to the two principals involved (current and previous) to find opportunities where leadership team members would have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge and skillset in their role as instructional leaders, in addition to the learning gained from ILT. One means of providing such an opportunity was through Teacher Academy (Appendix J), sponsored by the state education department and RPDC. Teacher Academy, having a similar design to Leadership Academy, allowed teacher participants to network with other teachers across the region and state on topics aligned to teacher leadership. Team Member C reflected on the experience,

We knew that the group of teachers that were there [Teacher Academy] were there for the same reason. We all wanted to know what was current

and what was out there. We also wanted to learn new skills that we could bring back to the classroom and our colleagues...we would have a book study...we dissected each chapter of the books and did a lot of the activities that we would do in our classroom there with the other teachers, and learn those techniques in that matter. We would share ideas with each other.

Aside from the lead learning experiences exposed to MCAE's leadership team members through Leadership and Teacher Academy, additional professional development opportunities were routinely taken advantage of through services offered by MCAE's RPDC. Example opportunities shared during the interview process included attending sessions with Rick DuFour and Bob Eaker sharing about the necessary components of a PLC, Mike Mattos relaying how to develop and support Response to Intervention Systems, Doug Reeves sharing about researched-based practices in school improvement, John Antonetti sharing insight on student engagement, and taking full advantage of RPDC's comprehensive learning series on Decision-Making for Results and Data Teams.

#### Focused, Systemic Professional Learning

Interviews and documents revealed an emphasis on MCAE's use of data to drive all decision-making regarding school improvement actions. Using school-wide data to make decisions on one strand of focus for year-long study by staff, modeling and coaching staff on the use of goals to focus improvement efforts, and the commitment to aligning all resources to one focus of study, indicated a focused, systemic approach to professional learning.

### *Use of Data*

MCAE's leadership team used multiple sources of data to make decisions on what professional learning was needed by staff. Examples of data sources included: (a) state assessment, (b) summative assessment, (c) formative assessment, (d) staff surveys, and (e) parent surveys. These sources were referred to throughout the interview process and the leadership team offered numerous tools depicting how not only the leadership team but all teachers collected, analyzed, and problem-solved the information. Team Member C outlined the leadership team's use of data to drive decision-making,

Data [plays] a huge role in what our school decides to do. We look at [state assessment] data. We look at data from our common assessments. We look at data from our DIBELS and our STAR testing, and from our writing prompts. We look at all that data and we see where we need to progress in. For example, our [state assessment] mathematics scores are relatively high, and so we know that that's pretty much on the right direction. But in communication arts, our scores really need some help. So right now our focus is communication arts. We are revising some common assessments that we started. We are working on benchmarks that are aligned, because of the data that we have received from all those other measures that I talked about.

Teacher B reiterated the leadership team's focus on communication arts by sharing,

Communication arts are a big focus for us, because our [state assessment] scores have never been quite as high in communication arts. We're working on mapping, curriculum mapping. There will be a lot of time

for curriculum mapping [this year] for different grade levels and then vertical teaming together to get together and look at holes and scope and sequencing in that.

Other specific areas of focus MCAE has indulged in throughout the years of implementing a PLC approach to professional learning included: writing development, reading comprehension, active learning strategies, designing common assessments, and data team meeting processes.

In a given year, once the MCAE leadership team had reviewed state assessment data, data collected throughout the previous school year, and feedback received from staff surveys on professional learning needs, a focus for learning was identified for the entire school and year. Principal A referred to this as system-wide learning process when stating,

From the system's level, everything we do is a process, a system. When I first started teaching -- and it was not that many years ago, 15 years ago, we all had a reading series. We all had a math series. We all had an English series. And we all went to our rooms and we went through the book. That is no more. There is a flow chart...that shows where we are going...every piece of organization that we do through the Leadership Team. There is an understanding that the student learning process is collaborative in all ways. There has to be a system in place that all of us are using, following, and we're not just going off the skids and teaching whatever we want to teach.

### *Annual Focus for Professional Learning*

Once the focused area of learning was decided, and during the summer months, the leadership team began to draft an outline of the professional learning activities to take place for the entire year, for not only planning purposes, but also budgetary. Using a study group model for collaborative teaming, the leadership team began to think specifically about the resources each study group would need in order to learn effectively. Example resources included contracting with educational consultants from MCAE's RPDC (Appendix K) to train teachers in the area of focus, identifying books which would benefit teacher learning in the area of focus, scheduling dates to observe area schools identified as successful in implementing the area of focus, or simply creating time for teachers to explore and plan together based on what they already know. Team Member E reflected on the resource of time when sharing,

One year we just worked on writing. And our grade levels were close enough that we would, of course, [work to] understand what the grade below us and the grade above us were doing, and then try to make sure we were covering what maybe hadn't been covered in the grade below and work together that way.

### *Goal Development Aligned to Professional Learning*

As the school year began, MCAE leadership team mapped out the focus for the school year for all staff. While the staff had a general idea of the "what" would be studied during professional development time, there were many specifics regarding the "when" and "how" the time would be spent. From the very beginning implementation of a PLC approach to professional learning, MCAE leadership team had facilitated the process of

staff-generated SMART goals, aligned to the area of focus. Staff developed SMART goals (Appendix L) at the start of the school year, using a common assessment tool to determine a beginning-of-year (BOY) baseline measure. At middle-of-year (MOY), teachers reflected on the progress made with SMART goals, as well as during end-of-year (EOY).

Each month, between these monitoring periods (BOY, MOY, and EOY), study groups came together to participate in learning activities designed to support increased student learning in the area of focus; hence, improvement in SMART goals. Each study group session was guided by an agenda (Appendix M), drafted by the MCAE leadership team. The agenda provided structure and focus for the work of each study group. At early implementation, agendas were highly structured by the leadership team; however, as the school had become more fluid with the learning community process and deeper in overall knowledge base and skillset, study groups were able to have more ownership in outlining the work of their teams during monthly sessions.

#### Purposeful and Precise Planning for Professional Learning

Interviews with MCAE's leadership team members and principal, and review of all documents shared indicated a high level of commitment to the planning processes for professional learning. As stated earlier, the leadership team came together during the summer months to reflect on the outcomes of the previous year's professional learning, and to determine the needs for the learning in the year ahead. Multiple sources of information were used to make this determination, as interviews and documents revealed the following sources: (a) state assessment data, (b) local formative and summative student achievement data, (c) staff input information gathered through a needs assessment

tool created by the leadership team (Appendix N), and (d) deepened knowledge and perspective of leadership team members. Team Member F echoed how the team capitalized on their deepened knowledge-base,

As a team, we guide the changes that we're making through the teachers, we use our knowledge and set up our learning processes...we use our background knowledge and our learning from different speakers, books that we've studied, and we use that to outline the year here at [MCAE]. And then along the way we make changes [as needed].

### *Study Group Design*

Once a focus for professional learning had been determined, MCAE's leadership team brainstormed how study groups should be designed, giving thought to the study group configuration (Appendix O) that would best benefit the staff and student learning. For example, the team made decisions on what grade levels and departments should be represented in each group. Study group configurations had included the following grade levels: PK-1, 2-3, and 4-6, but had altered, over the course of time, due to areas of focus being changed. MCAE's leadership team determined that the focus for learning should guide team configuration. Following configuration decisions, the leadership team began to think about what the study groups could do (activities) to professionally learn.

### *Agenda Setting*

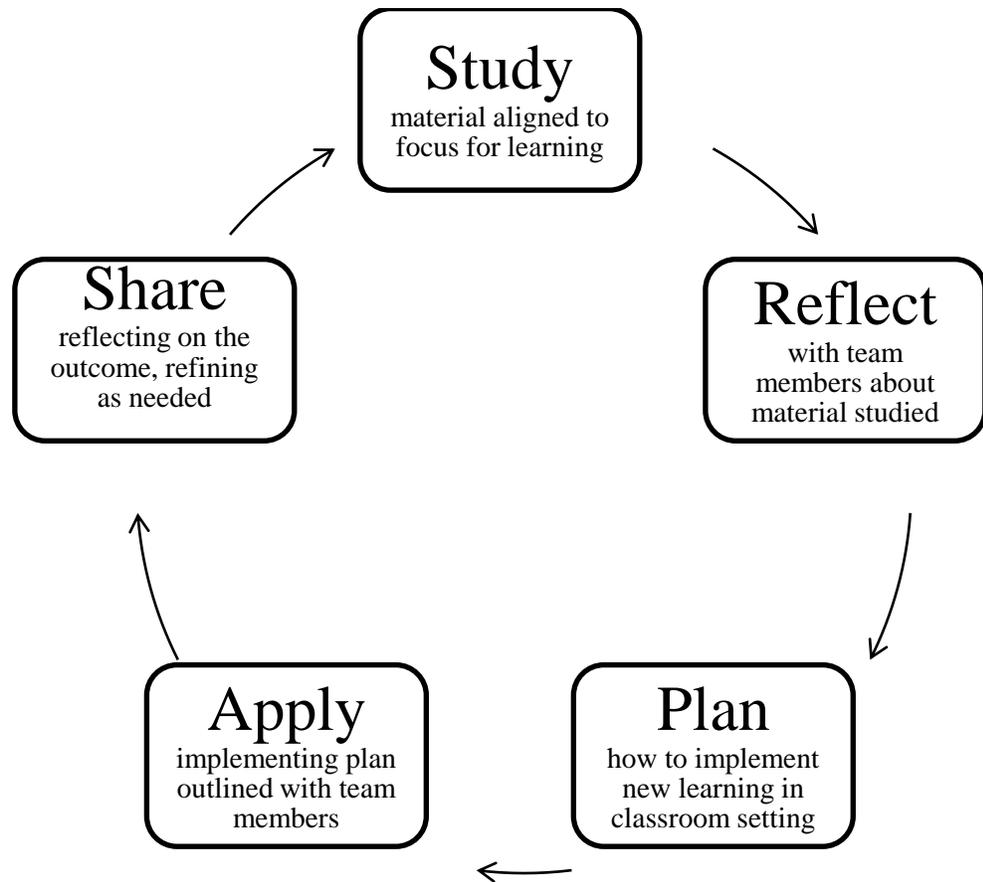
In addition to summer planning, the team met monthly (Appendix I) during the school year to more specifically plan for professional learning sessions. MCAE's leadership team met to map out an agenda (Appendix M) for study groups to follow during the two-hour allotted professional learning time, as well as reflected on the

learning during the previous month's session. At the onset of developing a PLC where teachers were just starting to learn how to effectively collaborate about student learning, the leadership team chose to provide a strong sense of structure to the monthly agenda-setting. Principal A reflected on this structure while serving as a teacher leader in early implementation, "At the very beginning it was very -- it was very modeled, very structured, very much ILT-guided." During the first year of implementation, the team determined that a book containing content and learning strategies, directly aligned to the "identified MCAE learning focus for the school year", would be helpful in guiding the monthly work of study groups. As a result of the leadership team's learning and brainstorming during ILT experiences, the team organized their approach to agenda-setting around the following steps: 1) study, 2) reflect, 3) plan, 4) apply, and 5) reflect and refine (see Figure 3). Team Member A reflected on this structure and the role the book, as resource, played,

We would have certain things that they want us to do, like we might have a book that we're using as a reference and have assignments from that book. We might have assignments that we can do with our students, and then we bring those back and we share and go over those things with people at our table."

Figure 3

*Agenda-Setting.*



MCAE’s leadership team continued using a professional book resource to guide their planning for consecutive years in order to create a strong foundation of collaboration. Agendas, outlining the professional learning activities for study groups to follow, were similar, each month, in how they were organized (Appendix M). Using a two-hour block of time, agendas typically contained the following steps, and in order: (a) short icebreaker component, (b) segment of time where study group members share out student work examples from strategies they have implemented from the book being studied, (c) time allotted where the group reflects on their most recent reading of book being studied, and (d) opportunity to determine what their action plan (strategies to apply) might be in

relationship to this reading in which members would bring back to the next session to share and reflect upon. These outlined steps have remained the core foundation of the work of study groups, but have also altered as the focus for learning and learning tasks have evolved.

### *Role Distribution*

In order for these steps to be effectively carried out, MCAE's leadership team spent time in the early stages of planning to identify roles (Appendix O) which would be necessary in order for the work to be efficient and productive. Team Member D shared, "People have assigned roles, which rotate. Leadership will rotate each month in presenting to their groups so that in a sense everyone is a piece of that puzzle". Roles consistently used included: (a) facilitator (leader), (b) recorder, and (c) timekeeper. As Team Member D shared, the role of leader is rotated each month (Appendix O). MCAE's leadership team determined that this would be essential in their efforts to further build capacity in teachers as leaders. The role of "monthly" leader was to read the prompts from the study group agenda, facilitating the conversation and sharing which was planned. The task of the recorder was to capture the reflections and questions that would arise from the conversations of the session. Recorders would compile and share electronically this information with not only their respective study group members, but the entire staff and principal. Finally, the role of timekeeper was to ensure that all members stayed on topic and that the work of the group stayed within the time allotted on the agenda.

As mentioned earlier, the steps found in study group agendas have evolved as MCAE's teachers have become more knowledgeable and proficient in their professional

learning practices. Through ongoing monitoring of study group progress and lead learning experiences to deepen their own learning on research-based practices, MCAE leadership team have planned and structured for more comprehensive professional learning activities over time. These activities include planning for teachers to participate in deeper analysis of student work, designing lessons collaboratively, spending additional time (monthly) with an educational consultant modeling strategies to be implemented in the classroom, designing common assessments to measure student learning, and more recently, mapping curriculum and refining teacher skills in use of data.

#### *Tool Creation*

A multitude of documents furnished by Principal A evidenced that MCAE's leadership team spent a considerable amount of time creating tools and templates to allow for teachers to be successful in more comprehensive learning activities. These documents included protocols for analyzing student work samples (Appendix P), a lesson plan template to guide the work of teachers as they plan lessons collaboratively (Appendix Q), reflection templates for teachers to use in order to document their learning or reflections following a consultant's modeling session (Appendix R), templates to guide formatting decisions as teachers design common formative assessments to monitor student learning (Appendix S), curriculum templates by grade level to capture the scope and sequencing of skills reviewed (Appendix T), and numerous documents developed for teachers to record student data and plan for instruction following the review of data (Appendix U).

#### *Modeling and Hands-On Assistance*

In addition to the creation of tools and templates to guide the work of study groups, interviews suggested a great deal of modeling by MCAE's leadership to study

groups. Two specific examples were threaded throughout the interview responses and documents provided: (a) building a common formative assessment tool for communication arts and mathematics and (b) ongoing revision of writing SMART goals. Each of these professional learning activities had been a part of “year-long focus areas” for MCAE staff during professional development time. The following interview responses provided rich examples of the level of planning and modeling provided by the leadership team to all staff.

First, regarding building common formative assessments, Principal A outlined the “leadership” thinking behind choosing this activity as part of a year-long focus at MCAE,

We decided at the time to create a common assessment for math that was based upon what a [state assessment] would look like so that there was exposure especially for the first and second grade levels to what a [state assessment] looks like...we found that the [math program] that we had was not covering every [standard] in the depth that it needed to. So what we did was we, as the leadership team and the administrator, we set up times and the leadership team helped guide that process. We did it during school hours.

Principal A further shared about the planning support the leadership team offered to successfully set up a process for building a common assessment,

We set up time to go to the computer lab in grade level teams and create a formative assessment for math that would not only address all of the [standards], but also gaps in our math program. We used our [leadership team] members as the professionals in the room with the

teachers, grade level teachers, and they [leadership team] had a process. We usually had two [leadership team] members there. One team member was the person that would go through the [standards] with those teachers and help them find resources to create questions that would address the [standards] in the depth that it needed to be. The other person was more of a technical person. After we did the math common assessment and felt success with that and saw that our scores had improved, we decided to come together to create a common assessment for communication arts, looking very much the same way.

Team Member C offered a team member's perspective on the supportive process, "[They] tried it out, decided what was going to be the easiest for our staff so that we weren't just all spinning our wheels." Team Member C further shared, "the time that they gave us was used wisely, we were getting things done...we weren't just all sitting there like, "Okay. What do we do next?"

Secondly, the support MCAE's leadership team provided staff when writing SMART goals provided a rich example of not only the thoughtful preparation, but also reflection, the team put into planning for professional learning. Sharing about how leadership team members have assisted staff in creating well-written SMART goals, Team Member F explained,

When we were writing SMART goals, the team was there to assist. We had somebody looking at them making sure that it was done the right way, and then we had somebody else there to help them write them if they didn't understand how to do it. The team members were spread throughout

the faculty that day. We've used different tools from RPDC...the template, I guess you would say. Then what we did is we revised that template for [MCAE]. We're focusing on communication arts, so we have a reading template and a writing template (Appendix L). And then what we've done to make it even easier is added some words in there for the teachers so it's easier for them to see it in black and white.

Aside from creating tools or planning for the modeling of processes during monthly study group sessions, MCAE Leadership team members spent time during their monthly team meetings determining what “managerial items” needed to be attended to in order for the plans outlined on agendas to result in an effective and productive use of time. These items included determining (a) what communication is necessary for staff to be adequately prepared for the next professional learning session (Appendix V), (b) what materials are necessary to have at the table to support the work outlined (Appendix W), and (c) problem-solving any foreseeable barriers in which can be prevented. Additional managerial tasks included coordinating educational consultant services as needed, outlining schedules for substitutes (Appendix X) in order for teachers to have time for collaboration or for observation in classroom, researching regional professional development offerings that might be assistive for small groups of teachers to attend and in alignment to the school's learning focus, and monitoring the professional development budget. Finally, as evidenced through interview responses, MCAE's leadership team was continuously aware of the “additional” needs that surfaced following monthly study group sessions, and worked to meet those needs. For example, Team Member C described an example of this attention when teachers needed more time for curriculum

conversations, “The leadership team built in additional time so that those grades could go ahead and get together and start having dialogue on where there are holes, what they are teaching, and whether or not that is what they should be teaching.”

### Monitoring and Evaluating Implementation

Interviews and documents reveal MCAE’s leadership team placed an emphasis on monitoring and evaluating their implementation efforts. First and foremost, the leadership team met monthly to reflect on the previous month’s professional learning and to use that reflection to guide planning for the following month. The leadership team used three primary means, in addition to the use of data, where they monitored and evaluated their efforts in implementing a PLC design for professional learning during scheduled meetings. Throughout the interview process and document analysis, evidence of decision-making processes and outcomes resulting in these monitoring and evaluating efforts surfaced. As mentioned earlier, the leadership team members shared how significant the role of data was in the team’s decision-making processes. Data was used to determine a focus for learning for a school year, as well as to guide decisions the team made within the school year when planning for specific learning activities. In addition to looking at data, MCAE leadership team members shared the importance of needs assessment tools, collaboration logs, and SMART goals in their monitoring and evaluating efforts.

### *Needs Assessment Practices*

Team members interviewed repeatedly referred back to their initial learning of how to use tools to monitor and evaluate the status of professional learning in their school. During their initial training at ILT offered by their regional professional development center, the team learned how to use a professional development standards

rubric (Appendix G) to reflect on whether or not their school was in alignment to the processes and actions research indicated as being effective. Team Member C reflected on the team using this rubric to self-assess their processes and actions,

We came together and we actually discussed with our Leadership Team what our school was doing on a [rubric]...we used the dots. There were five or six topics and we had to rank ourselves and our school. We would dot ourselves as a Leadership Team, so we knew what direction we needed to go. We brought that information back to the school. We even did the same [dotting] activity here at the school. I think that we learned lots about our own school in terms of where we needed to go by using that tool.

As Team Member C alluded to, the leadership team transferred their ILT learning about monitoring and evaluating into experiences for all staff. As a result, it became common practice for MCAE staff to annually, often at mid-year, reflect on their professional learning processes and actions using the standards rubric. In addition to using the standards rubric, team members shared through interviews about a “world café” process (Appendix Y) frequently used. This needs assessment tool was initially learned of through the MCAE principal’s learning experiences in Leadership Academy, another example of taking new learning and applying to common practice. Team Member E described the world café technique,

At the end of the year, when we come together, we’re always going over strategies that we think worked. We’ll write it on paper. When we’re all

together, the teams have different questions posed on big sheets of paper.

The teachers are asked to go around and answer those questions the best they can. And it really covers the year; what worked, what didn't work.

Aside from using the standards rubric and world café conversation method to monitor and evaluate the status of professional learning at MCAE, leadership team members routinely used a building-level survey tool (Appendix N) at the end of each school year. This tool allowed teachers to individually reflect on their perceptions about professional learning processes and actions in their school. The survey tool consisted of explicit questions about what learning processes and actions were effective during that school year, not effective, or ideas staff might have to strengthen the professional learning of all staff. Team Member C reflected on this individual feedback instrument,

The needs assessment [survey] is where the team will ask questions about our year, about what worked well, what didn't work well, what improvements that we think need to happen, or any ideas that we have, how our teams are set up. They ask us a ton of questions about how the year went so that they can meet and get together and decide if they need to take all of those notes and make some changes so that we're a more cohesive school and that we're all on board together.

Principal A shared specific insight into the level in which the leadership team used the survey information, as well as how the reflective questions had progressed over time,

We look at the needs assessment to help drive what we're going to do.

Every year, that instrument is developed by the Instructional Leadership

Team. What guides the questions on that are what has been happening for

the year within our building. We ask questions such as what are the strengths of how our teams met this year? What are some areas you would like to see improved? One of the newer questions in the past few years has been, do you want the Leadership Team to have their hands on this more? Do you not? Are you ready for a little more freedom? I found that, you know, the teachers think they want freedom, but then if you don't give them some sort of guidance, templates, then they become very worried that they are not going to be on the right page. So we ask questions like that. We ask teachers to tell us where they would like to go, and what their data is showing in terms of where they need to go in their teams for the following year.

#### *Team Logs*

While the standards rubric, world café technique, and survey tool served as annual means to gather input from staff in order to monitor and evaluate professional learning progress throughout the school year, the team also used collaborative team logs and SMART goals as a means to “formatively” reflect on the professional learning status. Because MCAE’s primary context for professional learning consisted of collaborative teams coming together to participate in learning activities aligned to a building-level focus, agendas and logs were used to guide the work of each team and also to capture the learning. These logs (Appendix Z) served as reflection tools where teams recorded not only the actions of the team during a learning session, but also conversations and the inquiry teams had as a result of new learning. Logs were recorded monthly, during each professional learning session, and submitted to Principal A, electronically, for review.

While reviewing each team log, Principal A added to each log, feedback based on the focus of the work. This feedback, all captured on one log, was then electronically distributed to all staff members. This feedback and sharing allowed for a transfer of understanding by all teams about the work in which they were involved. Team Member C, referring to the log as a reflection tool, shared, “Not only could the rest of the school look at what we did, but also the Leadership Team could make sure that our learning was guided in the right direction.”

### *SMART Goals*

SMART goals have also become a method in which MCAE’s leadership team not only monitors and evaluates professional learning of the school, but also supports the skillset within staff in their own capability of monitoring and evaluating learning. MCAE leadership team members shared throughout the interview process about how SMART goals have been an integral part of their professional learning processes and actions. From the onset of reconfiguring the professional development approach at MCAE, the leadership team has incorporated the use of building and classroom SMART goals (Appendix L) aligned to the focus of professional learning. For example, if the school was focused on improving communication arts performance among students, the leadership team supported the teachers in developing goals using specific assessment tools. These goals were then reviewed at mid-year and again at the end of the year. End-year reflection was a comprehensive process, according to interviews and SMART goal reflection tools (Appendix AA) shared. At the end of each school year, MCAE staff came together in teams, sometimes as whole staff, and shared the following with each other: (a) restated SMART goal for the year, including strategies outlined, (b) shared how data

was organized to communicate whether or not goal was met, (c) provided insight into their own individual reflections as to what they learned from implementing the strategies, and (d) how their practices would or would not change based on this reflection.

Even though SMART goals had been utilized for several years, team members shared specifically how they had strengthened the process over time due to new lead learning the team members had been exposed to, as well as due to the ongoing monitoring reflections by the team. Team Member F described this reflection and changes which had occurred as a result,

In the meantime, we've changed how we write our SMART goals because we've done SMART goals here at [MCAE] for seven or eight years. We felt like that was becoming kind of what we think should happen. But now what we've done is we've taken the learning from the data training that we attended, and now have a revised process that we're using to write our SMART goals.

Team Member C added further insight,

The Leadership Team has recently come to us and they've found a different way for us to create SMART goals. Before school started at one of our in-services, they demonstrated it, the systematic process of how those SMART goals were going to be created what the new ones are going to look like. Just like at the beginning when we first were introduced to them, the Leadership Team at that time showed us exactly how to do them then. But they've gone to new meetings and they've gotten new learning

which has just continually led for us to make changes and to give us the new learning as well.

### *Awareness of Outcomes*

While MCAE's leadership team had utilized many tools to monitor and evaluate the implementation of professional learning practices, the team, throughout the interview process, also shared about the many decisions which have historically been made, as well as outcomes produced, due to the team placing high value on monitoring and evaluating their work. Interview responses and documents shared by the team revealed numerous small and large-scale decisions the team would make about the design of professional learning and implementation processes based on the needs assessment results received. For example, MCAE's leadership team had used this information to determine which of the following would be most conducive to learning: (a) having a consultant contracted for the school year to provide monthly modeling of learning strategies, (b) capitalizing on internal staff knowledge and ensuring these staff members were put in a position to successfully model and facilitate meaningful conversations about the topic at hand, or (c) providing the staff's collaborative teams the opportunity to create proposals and outline how they would facilitate their own learning throughout the school year (Appendix BB). Additionally, the leadership team used needs assessment information to determine the appropriate level of pacing to use when planning for learning activities or determining the scope and sequence of action for the entire school year. On multiple occasions, and as evidenced by the implementation continuum (Appendix CC) shared by the team, the team expressed how important it was for teachers not to feel they have too much information at once and to have a clear understanding of how to use the information received.

Finally, the outcomes noted by team members and also supported through document analysis, confirmed the level in which MCAE's leadership team followed-up on the formative feedback information received. For example, team members shared about the following school-wide changes resulting in not only staff feedback generated through needs assessment activities, but also due to increased staff learning. Team members noted that as they began to learn more about research-based practice through professional learning experiences, the higher the level of reflective thinking staff could do as a whole regarding what was best for staff and students. Team Member F best described the reflective practice as a result of collective learning of the team,

We felt like in our state assessment data, our communication arts scores weren't where they needed to be. We kind of plateaued. We were at 50 percent advanced and proficient. It had been that way for several years. We'd been studying communication arts in our PD for several years probably. We started with writing and then we moved to reading, reading comprehension. And still our scores are at 50 percent or so. So now what we've decided is that maybe we need to look at our curriculum mapping. So we are actually mapping our curriculum in communication arts as part of our focus now.

Principal A acknowledged, "We are more in tune to, I guess, strategies that are going to get us where we need to go." Examples of changes included, but are not limited to: (a) requesting additional time to collaborate and follow-up on monthly professional learning activities, (b) altering staff meeting agendas to include time for professional learning conversations and less housekeeping business (Appendix DD), and (c) making ongoing

alterations to strengthen the Response to Intervention Systems in place for students (Appendix EE). One primary example of MCAE's leadership team's emphasis on monitoring and evaluating the professional learning of staff consisted of their ongoing work surrounding communication arts.

### Culture of Collaboration and Accountability

MCAE's leadership team members shared insight into how their processes and actions have fostered a culture of collaboration and accountability. Likewise, the review of documents led to many "purposeful" processes and actions carried out by the team in order to foster such a culture. Two key concepts emerged when leadership team members spoke of their culture of collaboration: (a) efforts to build common language and practices among staff around their new learning and (b) efforts to ensure a collective focus on student learning, including the use of assessment schedules and goal setting to ensure focus, and the leadership team's commitment to structuring tools and activities resulting in follow-through of these processes and actions.

### *Common Language and Practice*

First, common language among staff around professional learning practices emerged within MCAE over time. The following opportunities contributed to this commonality and consistency in language: (a) aligning all learning activities to one focus throughout a school year to allow for deep and embedded learning, (b) immersing whole staff in current research surrounding proven practices in schools, and (c) incorporating teacher reflection into monthly collaborative team agendas where teachers articulated their own learning and participated in higher level conversations with colleagues about their learning. Not only did team members recognize that a common language had

resulted from collaborative professional learning, but also common practices. Team Member D shared one example of how these common and consistent practices directly benefited MCAE's students,

I teach art. I realize that the skills we learn as they pertain to reading and writing have an effect on what they learn in the other classes. And if all of us are using the same practices, the kids get into it. They know what is expected of them and I think they perform to a better level. If we all ask the same thing consistently of them, be it how many sentences are going to be in a paragraph, or what form is my writing going to take. We all expect the same thing. They [students] know up front what we want from them.

Secondly, leadership team members in their interview responses, recognized the common practice that resulted from the professional learning experiences. Team Member F reflected,

Teachers here are more knowledgeable about how to, collectively, get everyone to learn. They know exactly where each kid is in their class pretty much at all times through the data...how they teach has changed. I mean, how they are teaching in the classroom has definitely changed with the cooperative learning strategies, there is less lecture, more active learning. Students are more actively involved I think than they used to be. As a teacher I just feel like I've learned so much in the last eight years that I just wish I would have known it before, you know, in my earlier years, because of the work, you know, the collaboration, the professional development that we've learned here at [MCAE].

Team Member A shared, “Well, I guess I have to go back to those scores because our scores were good this year, you know. I think if you walk in this building you will see a lot of the things that we have learned professional development-wise happening every day.” Last, Teacher C stated, “You can look at the atmosphere of the school and know that we’re going places. We’re not just learning about it and then leaving it behind. We’re actually moving with it. And I think that’s taking the learning to a whole different level.”

### *Collective Focus*

Interview responses and documents offered by MCAE’s leadership team indicated that the development of a culture of accountability contributed to the current level of sustainability in professional learning practices. A collective focus on student learning, consistent use of assessment and goal setting to ensure focus, and the leadership team’s commitment to structuring tools and activities resulting in follow-through of these processes and actions have all been fundamental to creating an accountable culture. Agendas, learning proposal overviews, data analysis templates, needs assessment tools, allocation of funding documents, and leadership team communications, all communicated a high level of commitment to a common professional learning focus each school year. Team Member D described this collective focus by stating, “We know we’re all on the same page and where we’re headed to and where we’ve been, constantly comparing where we’ve been to where we’re going.”

Moreover, when MCAE’s leadership team decided to create a formative assessment schedule, using a “beginning of year, mid-year, end-year” timeline, staff began to see a greater emphasis on accountability for student learning. In the same vein, the development of classroom SMART goals provided a mechanism in which classroom

teachers, and the school at large, could monitor growth in not only student learning, but also teacher practice. Team Member C reflected on the accountability system using goals,

They're [leadership team] going to look at our SMART goal results.

Going back to that, they'll look at the state assessment data. They'll look at any other data that we have. At the end of the year, we take what our SMART goals were and we do just a quick presentation of did we meet our SMART goal? What did we do to help us meet those SMART goals, and if we could change the...you know, if we could change what we did, something to help us reach it, what could we change the following year?

Team Member C shared insight into how this structure for accountability has led to her own learning,

I think a big thing is the developing the goals in the classroom. Before I would just teach and I wouldn't know why exactly I was teaching. I knew I had to, but I didn't know if there was specific reason. So now, like, developing goals in your classroom and looking at the benchmarks, I know exactly which students to target. And I'm not necessarily teaching to a whole class anymore, but I'm teaching to individuals. And I think that's important.

Finally, the level of commitment in which MCAE leadership team holds by structuring tools and activities to ensure follow-through of professional learning activities has been fundamental to creating an accountable culture. Team logs, needs assessment feedback, templates to record specific information relevant to learning activities, and other reflective documents all communicated the team's high regard to

making certain that MCAE staff follow-through in efforts designed to assist in school improvement. Team Member D described how a “follow-through” approach has taken professional learning to another level in the last eight years,

I think years ago PDC was thought of that you have something come in one day. I could just call it the one-shot development. It comes in, it's gone, and you forget about it, you move on. But in the last eight years, I feel we have stayed more on a track and there's been follow through and consistency, and it's made changes rather than that, 'Oh, we have to have some professional development. Here it is.' And then there was never any follow through, and I think that that was the complaint of the staff for years. We've done it but nothing was ever finished. And now we finish what we start. That allows us to grow further because we use that as a base and we just keep building a foundation.

#### *Summary*

Chapter 4 provided a description of the school being studied, an understanding of the context for leadership team development, as well as themes that emerged from interviews and document analysis. These themes included developing leadership capacity, ensuring focused, systemic professional learning, purposeful and precise planning for professional learning, monitoring and evaluating implementation, and the creation and sustainability of a culture of collaboration and accountability. Data was examined using a holistic perspective, threading multiple perspectives from team members in order to gain insight into the research question. Chapter 5 focuses on a discussion of these findings, as relevant to the

research question. This chapter also includes limitations and implications of the study, as well as an overarching conclusion.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

This case study was conducted to examine the processes and actions of Missouri Commissioner's Award of Excellence (MCAE)'s leadership team in its efforts to lead professional learning of staff. MCAE's leadership team was selected for study because of MCAE's recognition for demonstrating high quality professional development. The findings generated are of interest to the MCAE school organization, individuals seeking information on how to utilize a leadership team effectively in pursuit of school improvement, as well as researchers in the field. Discussion of the findings as they relate to the grand tour research question are outlined in this chapter, followed by limitations of the study, implications for both research and practice, and overall conclusions.

#### *Grand Tour Research Question*

What are the processes and actions used by the MCAE leadership team to achieve the school's state recognition for high quality professional development?

MCAE's leadership team was characterized by a high level of collective knowledge surrounding leadership skills and school improvement proven practices. As a leadership team, they have demonstrated a collective commitment towards involving themselves in lead learning experiences, spending the necessary time to plan and organize for focused professional learning, recognizing the need to formatively monitor their work, and ensuring that, as a team, they model and mold a collaborative and accountable culture of learning. The themes below (see Figure 4) emerged from the data, and were consistent with much of the interpretive literature related to transformational leadership, adult learning, and organizational learning.

Figure 4

*MCAE Leadership Team Processes and Actions.*

<b>MCAE Leadership Team Processes and Actions</b>				
<b>Developing Leadership Capacity</b>  Lead Learning Experiences ----- Empowerment through Shared Leadership ----- Leadership Team Membership Structure	<b>Focused, Systemic Professional Learning</b>  Structure of Professional Learning Experiences ----- Systemic Thinking	<b>Purposeful and Precise Planning</b>  Action-Oriented Learning Experiences ----- Planning Tools ----- Planning for Reflective Experiences	<b>Monitoring and Evaluating Implementation</b>  Formative and Summative Measures ----- Problem-Solving Processes Leading to Intended Outcomes	<b>Culture of Collaboration and Accountability</b>  Crafting a Clear Purpose ----- School-Wide Structure for Collaboration ----- Collaboration Training and Support ----- Accountability

### Discussion of Findings

#### Developing Leadership Capacity as Lead Learners

MCAE’s leadership team was characterized by their deep knowledge base surrounding leadership skills and the principles of proven practice in school improvement. In addition, the team’s shared leadership approach, determined to enhance and empower the leadership skills beyond team members, resulted in a collective willingness by MCAE staff to work towards school improvement and achieve sustainability in practice. This effort aligned with Blankstein’s (2004) recognition of, “sustainable success in education lies in creating cultures of distributed leadership

throughout the school community, not in training and developing a tiny leadership elite.” (p. 210-211).

### *Lead Learning Experiences*

At the onset of forming a leadership team, responsible for guiding the professional learning of MCAE School, building the capacity (Blankstein, 2004; Fullan, 2005; DuFour et al., 2008) of team members as well as other teacher leaders was of primary importance. Leadership team members received training from the regional professional development center, which involved team-oriented training as well as training from lead researchers and practitioners in the field. As professional learning needs of staff were determined through monitoring and evaluating systems in place, the team proactively identified lead learning experiences in which team members could participate to ensure that future planning effectively supported these needs. This “lead” knowledge enabled the team to gain trust by MCAE staff in their guidance and support. Sparks (2005) concluded, “profound change in leaders results from and is revealed through deeper understanding of complex issues related to professional learning communities, beliefs that are aligned with quality teaching and high levels of learning for all students, and ‘next action thinking’ that moves learning into action and sustains the momentum of change over time” (p. 157).

### *Empowerment through Shared Leadership*

Additionally, MCAE’s shared leadership approach and ability to empower (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993; DuFour et al., 2008; Gorton et al., 2007) staff, within and outside of the leadership team, has benefited a collective willingness of staff to commit to professional learning activities set forth by the team. Rotating leadership roles within

collaborative teams, organizing for staff to model and share expertise with other staff, and recruiting additional staff members to seek lead learning experiences with the goal of transferring the new learning to all staff were a few of the efforts used by the team to not only build capacity but to empower and provide ownership to the staff at large. DuFour et al. (2008) recognized that in order for leadership to transfer from instructional leadership to “transformational” leadership, leadership must be characterized by a collective autonomy well beyond the leadership team.

#### *Leadership Team Membership Structure*

Finally, the structure in place to ensure team members were a part of the leadership team for consecutive years allowed for positive transfer of organizational history, knowledge, and the ability to function as a high performing team by capitalizing on each other’s incoming backgrounds and strengths. All of this contributed to MCAE’s ability to achieve sustainability of implementation over time. It is important to note, even though a change of principal leadership occurred during this time period, sustainability of practice continued. Blankstein (2004) referred to sustainability when “internal capacity will continually thrive and enhance student outcomes, even in the face of external threats or their own departure” (p. 194). MCAE’s leadership team members served a three- year time commitment to being a part of the team, with the option of additional years of service. This amount of time allowed for continuity and supported the concepts of sustainability (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Blankstein, 2004; Gorton et al., 2007; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Katzenbach & Smith, 2003; Lambert, 2003; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Northouse, 2007; Reeves, 2006; Sparks, 2005; Ubben et al., 2004)

of practice, as well as opened the door for additional staff members to become a part of the team and enhance their own skillsets surrounding teacher leadership.

### Focused, Systemic Professional Learning

MCAE's leadership team's ability to establish a common purpose and direction for professional learning, and provide a compelling roadmap of how to collectively study and analyze information within this focused direction to ensure systemic change had been instrumental in ensuring sustainable implementation of a PLC approach to professional learning.

### *Use of Data*

The leadership team's ongoing use of data to determine a focused direction (Gregory & Kuzmich, 2007; Katzenbach & Smith, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2008; Schmoker, 1999; Zepeda, 2007) of learning during an entire school year allowed for change in teacher knowledge-base, instructional practices, and school-wide systems. Data used by the team ranged from student achievement information, staff feedback found on needs assessment tools inquiring about their insight into the needs of the school, and a continual comparison of the leadership team's collective knowledge gained from lead learning experiences and the current practices of the school. This use of data resulted in a trust from staff that the direction for learning chosen from year to year was realistic and relevant to their needs.

### *Structure of Professional Learning Experiences*

Secondly, the professional learning experiences in which MCAE's leadership team planned for allowed for an in-depth understanding about the focus for learning. This was achieved as collaborative teams met monthly to study the area of focus and have

reflective conversation around their new learning (Erkens, Jakicic, Jessie, & King, 2008; Langer et al., 2003; Ubben et al., 2004). The cycle of learning found on team agendas assisted staff on their ability to learn deeply and eventually make changes in their practice. This cycle included: (a) studying material relevant to the focus area, (b) participating in reflective conversation about material studied, (c) applying new learning over the course of a month, and (d) coming back to the table as a team to share individual approaches to application. Teachers were able to engage in transformative learning and make decisions effectively by reevaluating their actions, assumptions, and beliefs when collectively using the following approaches: (a) thoughtful analysis, (b) problem-solving, and (c) reflection (Langer et al., 2003).

### *Systemic Thinking*

Finally, the leadership teams' understanding of the correlation between narrowing a focus for professional learning and actually reaching systemic change (Cunningham & Cresso, 1993; DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Ferrance, 2000; Fullan, 2005; O'Neill & Conzemius, 2006; Reeves, 2006) was evident. Fullan (2005) relayed, "the key to changing systems is to produce greater numbers of 'system thinkers.' If more and more leaders become system thinkers, they will gravitate toward strategies that alter people's system-related experiences; that is, they will alter people's mental awareness of the system as a whole, thereby, contributing to altering the system itself" (p. 40). Interviews and documents revealed that MCAE's leadership team gave thoughtful consideration into embedding "systems" for inquiry (Reeves, 2006) that outlasted the initial professional learning. This was evidenced by the systemic alignment of processes the team employed. These processes included the following: (a) using data to determine a focus for learning,

(b) identifying assessment instruments which can be used to monitor whether or not teacher learning is enhancing student performance, (c) implementing the development of goals where teachers become more focused on their own efforts or strategies that will lead to improvement, and (d) determining school-wide changes of practice or systems for intervention, all which continued to be implemented, long after the year of focused, professional learning.

#### Purposeful and Precise Planning for Professional Learning

MCAE's leadership team demonstrated a high level of commitment to the precise planning of professional learning experiences for all staff. It was clear that the leadership team has been exposed, through their own training, to proven practices when it came to crafting meaningful adult learning experiences.

#### *Action-Oriented Learning Experiences*

Interview responses and documents revealed a prioritized effort, on the leadership team's part, to craft action-oriented learning experiences (Chappuis et al., 2004; DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Drago-Severson, 2004a; Drago-Severson, 2004b; DuFour et al., 2008; Hoy & Miskel, 2005; Schmoker, 1999; Ubben et al., 2004; Zepeda, 2007). These MCAE experiences included: (a) reading current research on educational practices, (b) designing lessons collaboratively which reflect newly learned practices, (c) applying newly learning practices modeled by consultants with the intent to share evidence of application with collaborative team members, (d) observations in classrooms where practices are being applied successfully, and (e) the act of goal setting and then determining how newly learning strategies may impact intended results. MCAE's leadership team acknowledged that it had taken time for teachers to become more proficient in their ability to implement

these action-oriented tasks. Team members expressed that repeatedly using some of the same learning activities with staff allowed for staff to feel more comfortable and secure overtime.

### *Planning Tools*

In order to assist staff's comfort in participating in and implementing the above activities, MCAE's leadership team proactively used their meeting time over the course of eight years to precisely plan how to go about modeling learning activities, and supporting their efforts along the way. Examples of support included: (a) creating detailed agendas to support step-by-step actions involved in these learning activities, (b) developing templates for staff to record notes or create action plans, and (c) providing the necessary resources for teams to use during their professional learning time. Feedback from staff, as evidenced in needs assessment results shared, indicated that staff view this type of support as being a key reason for their school's success in implementing a professional learning community (PLC) process for learning.

### *Planning for Reflective Experiences*

In addition to creating opportunities for staff to be involved in action-oriented learning activities, MCAE's leadership team ensured that staff did not merely "act" but also "reflected" on learning taking place. Langer, Colton, and Goff (2003) claimed, "for teachers to assimilate new ideas into their knowledge base, they need opportunities to pose questions, view situations from multiple perspectives, examine their personal beliefs and assumptions, and experiment with new approaches" (p. 27). As noted in leadership team members' reflections during the interview process, and the reflective templates offered as documents, a significant amount of reflective inquiry (Chappuis et al., 2004;

Drago-Severson, 2004a; Drago-Severson, 2004b; DuFour et al., 2008; Gregory & Kuzmich, 2007; Kowalski et al., 2008; Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006; Langer et al., 2003; O'Neill & Conzemius, 2006; Schmoker, 2006; Ubben et al., 2004) had been embedded in the learning structure of MCAE School. Reflective inquiry emerged throughout the many structured opportunities where the team arranged for staff to reflect on practice. These structured opportunities included: (a) SMART goal reflection sessions where staff report out on their results and reflections of what worked and could be improved, (b) monthly collaborative team meetings where staff share their experiences in implementing newly learned strategies, (c) data team meetings where staff analyze and reflect on their student achievement data and create action plans for improvement, and (d) involvement in the multiple needs assessment activities where staff collectively reflect on school practices, system-wide. In addition, reflective inquiry also emerged as one reviewed the numerous templates in which the leadership team created for staff to use during collaborative team meetings. These included: (a) templates for staff to record their reflections on goal setting, (b) collaborative team logs, (c) data team action plans and organization of data, and (d) needs assessment tools where leadership team members craft the “relevant” questions to prompt reflection.

### Monitoring and Evaluating Implementation

MCAE’s leadership team recognized that MCAE School was a learning organization that never stops learning. Ubben et al. (2004) contended that learning organizations are schools that “emphasize reflective, problem-finding approaches for the improvement of current conditions and practices” (p. 26). The leadership team also recognized that their school functions as a system, where all parts within that system are

connected. It was apparent the staff had a collective understanding that student achievement results depended directly on how well all of their “parts”, staff and their actions, worked together in their professional learning, how effectively they monitored student achievement, and whether or not they made changes with fidelity. With this in mind, the leadership team understood the value of formatively and summatively evaluating whether or not each of these “parts” were working as planned.

#### *Formative and Summative Measures*

One of the key processes and actions the MCAE leadership team was responsible for is monitoring and evaluating the “implementation” of professional learning. While some schools may have chosen to evaluate the success of their actions after the work is completed, MCAE’s leadership team designed multiple “formative” and “summative” processes to determine whether or not their efforts in leading professional learning were indeed effective. These tools included, but were not limited to: (a) formative student data gathered from assessment instruments used by the school, (b) state assessment student achievement results, (c) student work analyzed during collaborative team meetings, (d) staff feedback via needs assessments conducted mid and end-year, (e) collaborative team logs collected monthly, and (f) informal observations of professional learning actions by leadership team members.

#### *Problem-Solving Processes Leading to Intended Outcomes*

MCAE’s leadership team monitored and evaluated professional learning in a manner parallel to the five problem-solving stages outlined by Kowalski et al. (2008): (a) understanding the needs of the organization (MCAE: identify focus for learning), (b) formulating a possible solution (MCAE: professional learning plan for school year), (c)

applying the solution or strategy to the identified need (MCAE: teachers working to apply new learning in an attempt to increase learning), (d) reflecting by assessing and evaluating outcomes (MCAE: formative assessment system where leadership team members and staff monitor whether or not their strategies are impacting student learning), and (e) improving or repeating the strategy depending on former assessment of outcomes (MCAE: reflection during collaborative team meetings and action planning based on reflection) (p. 12).

Over the course of eight years, many adjustments and changes occurred based on MCAE's leadership team's use of information gathered through monitoring and evaluating efforts. First, "pacing decisions" regarding professional learning activities the leadership team structured for staff occurred due to staff feedback indicating more time was needed on specific tasks. Secondly, "taking a step backwards" in terms of what the staff targeted during professional learning time resulted due to staff obtaining increased knowledge about curriculum and assessment. Third, "team configuration" decisions as well as the "amount of structure" the leadership team provided in agenda-setting for teams were also decisions which resulted from information gathered through formative means.

#### Culture of Collaboration and Accountability

MCAE's leadership team successfully cultivated a culture of "focused" collaboration at MCAE School. DuFour et al. (2008) defined collaboration as a "systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results" (p. 464). Through the leadership team's efforts to identify and communicate a clear purpose

(DuFour et al., 2008) for collaboratively learning together, design a school-wide structure (Martin & Brown, 2007) to allow for collaboration to be embedded in the context, and provide the necessary training and support (Blankstein, 2004) for staff to collaborate positively, MCAE became a learning organization which valued working interdependently towards school improvement goals.

### *Crafting a Clear Purpose*

Over time, MCAE's leadership team developed and communicated a compelling case for "why" specific areas of focus for professional learning would be of value to not only staff, but ultimately students. The team's use of data as well as the capacity they built to have teachers analyze data more effectively, allowed the school to overcome any initial resistance to work collaboratively. Throughout the interview process, team member after team member clearly articulated why they were working on a specific focus area, as well as where the school was headed in a continuum of learning processes. The leadership team's use of staff feedback gathered during mid-year and end-year needs assessment tools to support a compelling case for action also allowed for the collaborative culture to strengthen over time.

### *School-Wide Structure for Collaboration*

Erkens et al. (2008) acknowledged, "teacher leaders understand that the work of teaching is far too complex and the work of learning is far too important for us to confine student achievement within the limitations of our personal expertise" (p. 13). This is the case with MCAE's leadership team as they recognized the importance of creating a school-wide structure for teachers to be able to collaborate in an ongoing fashion. The structure in which the leadership team designed consisted of the following: (a) monthly

in-service sessions where collaborative teams meet and use a structured agenda involving some form of action plan developed the previous month, (b) monthly staff meetings used to allow teams to follow-up on work generated from monthly team meetings, (c) monthly data team meetings where staff come together in specific teams to analyze student data and determine strategies that will support performance gaps identified, and (d) weekly grade level collaborative meetings at the request of staff, following their own identification of needing more time. These structures, built into the schedule, ensured that teachers have the necessary time to collaborate on professional learning topics.

### *Collaboration Training and Support*

Blankstein (2004) recognized that in order for collaboration to be productive, the following criteria needed to be available: (a) purposeful framework, (b) implementation guidelines such as team organization (roles), (c) decision-making processes, (d) system for sharing the workload, (e) communication protocols, and (f) system for monitoring team progress. Aside from ensuring a school-wide structure was in place to collaborate effectively, MCAE's leadership team had been proactive throughout the eight years in ensuring that staff had the necessary training on "how to" collaborate effectively, as well as the resources and tools to support their collaborative work. Examples of training included the leadership team modeling active learning strategies they had been modeled throughout their ILT experience, collaborative protocols shared by consultants leading academies or networks sponsored by the regional professional development center, and exposure from in-house consultants contracted with the school to model professional learning. Primary tools the leadership team made available to MCAE staff to ensure

productive collaboration included agendas providing structure for learning processes and protocols for teachers to use that prompted reflective thinking and sharing.

### *Accountability*

Finally, what has the potential of being the most important process and action identified in this study was the facilitation of a culture of accountability found within MCAE's efforts to lead professional learning. It is clear that the focus on accountability stemmed from the building principal. This was evidenced by the principal's: (a) attendance and hands-on involvement at leadership team meeting, (b) attendance at monthly collaborative team meetings, (c) attendance at monthly data team meetings, (d) active involvement in lead learning (training) experiences, whether it be individually or with the leadership team, and (e) multiple efforts to communicate, model, and participate in all professional learning work. Early on in the process of developing a learning community, the acting principal and leadership team recognized that whatever school improvement journey was to be had, the design and structures in place needed to ensure that all staff was accountable for being actively involved. Blankstein (2004) best described MCAE's principal, as evidenced by the findings of the study, when describing the qualities of a transformational leader,

These leaders: (a) build in themselves the courageous leadership imperative, focused on sustaining success for all students, creating a culture where failure is not an option, (b) work collectively with all staff to assure the resources and support necessary, and (c) do the above with a long-term view of sustainability so that internal capacity will continually

thrive and enhance student outcomes, even in the face of external threats or their own departure. (p. 194)

### *Limitations of the Study*

As with any research, there are limitations to what may be learned from the findings of this study. First, the researcher previously assumed the role of school administrator in the MCAE school context. Thus, the researcher was immediately involved in the work of the leadership team being studied. Any time the researcher attempts to study a case in which they have been previously close to, one may be concerned of bias. At the time of the research being published, the researcher had not been immediately involved in the work of the leadership team for the course of four years. It was the intention of the researcher, throughout the course of the study, to remove any bias that may influence findings in any way. Therefore, the researcher remained focused on the research procedures, in order to share the processes and actions of the leadership team, hoping that others may find the information to be assistive in their setting.

Secondly, the research conducted was limited to one sample school, a small rural school. Therefore, this may poses limitations to the findings being applicable to any school seeking to apply the findings to their own context. In the same vein, several years have passed since MCAE was recognized for demonstrating high quality professional development. However, it is an assumption by the researcher, and supported by research findings, that high quality professional development is occurring at present date. Additionally, MCAE's leadership team has been providing instructional leadership for

eight years. As with any study being examined for its historical context, one may or may not feel that eight years is adequate enough to support the findings.

Finally, MCAE's leadership team did not participate in the state-wide Professional Learning Communities training model; rather, the team received training through an Instructional Leadership Training model sponsored by the school's regional professional development center. This fact may pose limitations to schools currently working through the state-wide model, as they try to compare experiences.

### *Implications*

Several implications emerged from the study, both for research and practice.

#### *Research Implications*

First, this study raises the question whether or not the processes and actions of MCAE's leadership team, as outlined in the findings, would indeed emerge in duplicate studies of schools working to create or refine a PLC approach to professional learning. Thus, this research design could be duplicated, involving a larger sample size of leadership teams, to determine if similar processes and actions were perceived as being indicators of success. Secondly, information could be gathered and contributed to the research context in terms of "teacher perception" of the actions and processes of their leadership team responsible for guiding and supporting their professional learning efforts. Third, research could be conducted to determine if the processes and actions emerging from this study would be indicators allowing other existing leadership teams, working to guide efforts "aside from" professional learning, to work more successfully. Fourth, this study may prompt questions in the research community about the level of support within regional professional development centers. For example, one might be interested in

studying the design and components of MCAE's regional support system and whether or not this design could be of interest and benefit to other regions and states. Finally, it may be of interest in the field, and following extended research surrounding leadership teams, to develop a rubric outlining leadership team processes and actions to support other teams' efforts in guiding a professional learning community.

### *Implications for Practice*

For practitioners currently working to develop, support, or refine their school's efforts surrounding professional learning, this study could have potential implications where MCAE's processes and actions could assist the productivity and success of their work. A step further, for practitioners and schools who struggle to transfer the learning of leadership team members to whole staff, the findings of this study could be informative in order to narrow the transfer gap. Third, the multitude of documents involving tools and templates in which MCAE's leadership team has created to support the professional learning of their staff could be of benefit to other schools' efforts. Finally, the findings of this study could inform the role of principal in guiding a progressive professional learning community. School leaders could take data from this study and the perspective of the school principal to understand more deeply the processes and actions of the principal in a leadership team's efforts to develop, support, or sustain a professional learning community.

### *Conclusion*

MCAE School was chosen as the context for this study due to its recognition for demonstrating high quality professional development. MCAE's leadership team has been instrumental, through its processes and actions, in ensuring the MCAE professional

learning community approach to professional development has been sustainable and effective. The findings from this study conclude that the following processes and actions have contributed to and continue to contribute to MCAE's ability to learn as a system: (a) building leadership capacity in leadership team members and other staff, (b) ensuring focused, systemic professional learning opportunities, (c) commitment to purposeful and precise planning for professional learning, (d) monitoring and evaluating implementation of professional learning practices, and (e) cultivating a culture of collaboration and accountability. MCAE's leadership team is characterized by their high level of commitment to creating conditions for continuous improvement. This high level of commitment is evidenced by the amount of time and energy the team puts into studying, planning, and reflecting on their work. The system for professional learning which has been designed, supported, and refined by the leadership team has not only impacted the level of teacher quality, but also transformed the educational quality experienced by MCAE students.

There continues to be a lack of information found in current research about the processes and actions of "leadership teams" responsible for leading professional development in schools, specifically schools recognized for demonstrating high quality professional development. In recent years, a sense of urgency to increase student achievement and teacher quality at high levels has led to an ever-increasing interest among schools in developing a PLC model of professional development. However, at present day, there continues to be a number of schools that are unable to transfer the leadership team learning to school-wide implementation.

The findings of this study can be worthwhile to school leaders seeking insight on how to develop and guide a leadership team whose primary responsibility is to provide instructional leadership for teachers. It is the hope of this researcher that the processes and actions of MCAE's leadership team may assist other leadership teams in their pursuit. As researcher and former practitioner in MCAE School who worked to develop and institutionalize the leadership team concept responsible for guiding professional learning and school improvement efforts, I have come to the following conclusions which I believe have the potential of narrowing the "knowing-doing" transfer gap existing in today's schools:

- Leadership understanding: Today's leaders need to be educated in their certification programs about the concept of shared leadership. Beyond concept, these future and existing leaders must have a deep knowledge of the actions necessary to build a shared leadership system. Ideally, these leaders should have the experience of either participating and/or observing a leadership team at work.
- Leadership team design: Leaders must purposefully design the leadership team to include a mixed representation of staff. In addition, the individuals serving in this leadership capacity need to be individuals that have strong skillset in teaching and learning, positive interpersonal relationships with other staff, and a willingness to commit to the work of the leadership team.
- Compelling case: In order for the work of a leadership team to be developed and applied in a school setting, the entire staff must have a compelling reason to follow the leadership team's lead. Thus, the primary leader (or principal) and the

leadership team must give thoughtful consideration into how to design a compelling case for school improvement efforts.

- **Consistent time:** In order for leadership teams to reach a sustainable level, time and effort are key to the beginning developmental stages. Team members need the understanding that this team will meet consistently and frequently to carry out the objectives established.
- **Accountability:** Primary leaders must be accountable participants on the leadership team, providing the necessary guidance and modeling of effective practice. In addition, these leaders must hold not only leadership team members accountable for their role, but also each staff member following the leadership team.
- **Transformational leadership:** Primary leaders working to deepen the leadership capacity in team members understand the value in transformational leadership. In MCAE's example, a former leadership team member was promoted to the position of principal. This transfer of history, knowledge, and skillset allowed for the work to continue at a sustainable rate.

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## Appendix A

### District Permission for School Participation Letter

Date:

Dear Superintendent of Schools,

I am interested in conducting a research study titled, *High Quality Professional Development School: High Quality Professional Development School: A Case Study of a Leadership Team's Processes and Actions*. This study involves researching the processes and actions used by your leadership team in guiding and facilitating professional development within the school. Serving as dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from University of Missouri-Columbia, the information gleaned should prove to be useful to other school leadership teams seeking to effectively align processes and actions to school improvement efforts.

The design of this study is qualitative, consisting of data collection through the use of interviews and document review. For the purpose of the study, seven leadership team members will be interviewed, individually. This will include the acting school principal and six leadership team members representing a broad cross-section of the leadership roles during the nine years the school has implemented the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model. Documents which depict the processes and actions of the leadership team will be collected from participants. This information will allow for a richer insight into the leadership team's work.

I am seeking your permission, as chief administrator, to allow participation of the seven faculty members outlined above. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw from their involvement at any time, without penalty. Participant's identity and responses will remain confidential, anonymous, and separate from any identifying information. As researcher, I will not list any names of participants or of the school within the body of the dissertation or any future publication of the study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation. I may be reached by phone at (660) 562.1995 or by email at [jbarnes@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:jbarnes@nwmissouri.edu). In addition, you are more than welcome to contact my dissertation advisor for the study, Dr. Phillip Messner, who can be reached at (660) 562.1478 or by email at [PEMDAY@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:PEMDAY@nwmissouri.edu). If you should choose to allow participation in this study, please complete the attached consent form and retain a copy of this letter and your written consent.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this process.

Jennee Gregory, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix B

**School District Signed Consent Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, representing King City R-I School District, agree to participate in the research study titled, *High Quality Professional Development School: High Quality Professional Development School: A Case Study of a Leadership Team's Processes and Actions*, being conducted by Jennee Gregory. This study serves as dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

The act of signing this consent form acknowledges that I am aware of and understand the following safeguards are in place to protect me and our school:

1. Responses shared during the interview process will be used for dissertation research and potential future publications.
2. Participation in the interview process is voluntary, and I have the right to withdraw my participation at any time prior to the interview.
3. Identity will be protected in all aspects and reports of the research.
4. Consent or refusal to participate in the study will not impact my employment in any way.

I have read the information above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to allow school participation in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*Please keep a copy of the consent letter and signed consent form for your records.

## Appendix C

### **Participant Cover Letter**

Date:

Dear Participant,

Thank you for considering participation in the research study titled, High Quality Professional Development School: High Quality Professional Development School: A Case Study of a Leadership Team's Processes and Actions. This study serves as dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia. It is the researcher's intention that information gleaned from the study will be useful for leadership teams working towards school improvement through professional development processes.

Researcher: Jennee Gregory, University of Missouri-Columbia Doctoral Candidate, [jbarnes@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:jbarnes@nwmissouri.edu), (660) 562.1995.

Advisor: Dr. Phillip Messner, Brown Hall 207, Northwest Missouri State University, [PEMDAY@nwmissouri.edu](mailto:PEMDAY@nwmissouri.edu), (660) 562.1478.

Procedures: For the purpose of this study, your school's leadership team will be studied using qualitative methodology. Two methods will be used to collect data for the study, interviews and document analysis. Individual interviews will be conducted with the acting principal and six leadership team members representing a broad cross-section of the leadership roles during the nine years the school has implemented the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) model. Interviews will be audiotaped and take approximately 45 minutes. The researcher would appreciate the opportunity to collect documents reflecting the leadership team's processes and actions. These documents will provide further insight into the work of the leadership team.

Participation: Participation in the study is voluntary. Participants may choose to withdraw their participation at any time, without penalty. Participant's willingness or refusal to participate in the study will not affect employment in any way. Participants may decline to answer any question in which they feel a level of discomfort. The researcher will be available at all times to answer any questions or address any concerns about participation. In addition, participants may contact the dissertation advisor with any questions or concerns. Contact information for both parties is provided above.

Confidentiality: Information gathered from participants' involvement in the study will remain confidential. Data collected for the purpose of the study will be kept secure.

Participant's identity and employment identity will be made anonymous in the reporting of results. The researcher will not disclose any names of participants, or relative information, within the dissertation material or in any future publications of the study. Questions regarding participant's rights may be directed to the University of Missouri-Columbia Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882.9585, or visit <http://www.research.missouri.edu/cirb/index.htm>.

Risks and Benefits: Participation risk is minimal. Research gathered through the course of the study should be assistive to other school leadership teams involved in guiding and facilitating professional development within their own context. Participants concerned with level of risk or potential benefits my contact the University of Missouri-Columbia Campus Institutional Review Board at (573) 882.9585, or visit <http://www.research.missouri.edu/cirb/index.htm>.

If you should have any further questions about your involvement, please let me know. Thank you for your time and consideration for participation in the study, High Quality Professional Development School: A Case Study of a Leadership Team's Processes and Actions.

Sincerely,

Jennee Gregory  
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix D

**Participant Signed Consent Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to participate in the research study titled, *High Quality Professional Development School: A Case Study of a Leadership Team's Processes and Actions*, being conducted by Jennee Gregory. This study serves as dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

The act of signing this consent form acknowledges that I am aware of and understand the following safeguards are in place to protect me:

5. Responses shared during the interview process will be used for dissertation research and potential future publications.
6. Participation in the interview process is voluntary, and I have the right to withdraw my participation at any time prior to the interview.
7. Identity will be protected in all aspects and reports of the research.
8. Consent or refusal to participate in the study will not impact my employment in any way.

I have read the information above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\*Please keep a copy of the consent letter and signed consent form for your records.

## Appendix E

### Interview Questions

The question below will serve as the initial probe to begin the conversation between participant and researcher. Following the initial probe, the additional probes outlined below emerged naturally through the course of the conversation.

**Initial Probe:** Please share with me about your experience of being a MCAE leadership team member and how the work of the leadership team has contributed to the professional development of MCAE teachers.

**Probe:**

What do you perceive the role of the leadership team to be?

What processes and actions do you feel the team carries out in order to guide professional development at your school?

If I were to come to a given meeting throughout the course of the school year, what might I observe the team doing?

What documents, tools, resources, etc. has the team used to guide professional development of staff?

What are the professional development activities you, as a teacher, have been involved in at this school?

What type of learning did you as a team member receive that helped your role on the team?

How are professional development experiences determined?

How does the leadership team know if professional development they are guiding is resulting in teacher or school growth?

Has this school learned as a result of professional development guided by the leadership team?

## Appendix F

### Master List of Documents

The following documents were made available to the researcher as a means to provide supporting information and insight into the processes and actions used by MCAE leadership team. The documents were collected and analyzed by the researcher.

Documents are listed by theme.

#### **Leadership:**

Leadership Team Meeting Schedule (Year)  
Study Group Configuration--List  
Student Work Analysis Protocol  
Mathematics Common Assessment  
SMART Goals--District (Modeling)  
Leadership Team Meeting Log (Minutes)  
Professional Learning Proposal (Teacher Leadership)  
Purchase Orders--Funds Aligned (Materials, consultant services, etc.)  
District Professional Development Plan  
Professional Development Needs Assessment and Results  
Professional Development Consultant Plan  
Monthly Overview--Study Group  
Leadership Memo on Schedule Specifics, Processes, Materials  
MPP Learning Community Schedule  
Program Evaluation Reflection--BOE Approval  
Essential Outcome Schedule--Subs  
District Leadership Team Agenda  
Leadership Memo on Changes (Needs Assessment)  
Process for Completing CA Common Assessment  
Curriculum Map (Example)  
MA Common Assessment--Student Performance Chart  
Communication Arts Common Assessment  
Student Data Sheets--Across All Grade Levels (Includes All Assessments)  
District Professional Development School Calendar  
Modeling Activity--Data Teams/SMART Goals  
Building-Level Leadership Team Agenda  
Communication--Materials  
Revised SMART Goal Template  
Curriculum Development Plan

**Focus:**

Writing Prompt and Rubric  
Mathematics Common Assessment  
Study Group Agenda  
Leadership Team Meeting Log (Minutes)  
Professional Learning Proposal  
SMART Goal Template (Teacher)  
Purchase Orders--Funds Aligned  
District Professional Development Plan  
Professional Development Consultant Plan  
Monthly Overview--Study Group  
District Leadership Team Agenda  
Communication Arts Common Assessment  
Leadership Team Budget--Aligned to Focus Areas  
Building-Level Leadership Team Agenda  
Professional Development Continuum of Activities for Year (Steps)  
Data Team Meeting Tools (Checklist, Instruction Plan)  
Curriculum Development Plan

**Planning:**

Professional Learning Proposal  
Follow-Up Form (Implementation of Strategy Learned)  
Book Study Reflection Prompts (Various)  
Leadership Team Meeting Calendar (Year)  
Study Group Configuration--List  
Student Work Analysis Protocol  
Writing Prompt and Rubric  
Writing Workshop "Looks Like"  
SMART Goal Data Template--By Area  
Study Group Log  
Reflection Questions (Viewing PD Video)  
Strategies Learned "Toolbox"  
Norms  
Collaborative Lesson Design (Template)  
Homework Survey--Reflection questions for study group  
Mathematics Common Assessment  
Study Group Roles--Master List  
Study Group Agenda  
SMART Goal Template (Teacher)  
Master Study Group Member List  
Professional Development Needs Assessment Results  
Professional Development Consultant Plan  
Monthly Overview--Study Group  
Revised Study Group Log

Leadership Memo on Schedule Specifics, Processes, Materials  
Formative Assessment Data Reflection--Template  
MPP Learning Community Schedule  
Essential Outcome Schedule--Subs  
Essential Outcomes Template--Grade Level  
Process for completing CA Common Assessment  
DIBELS Template  
Curriculum Map (Example)  
MA Common Assessment--Student Performance Chart  
Data Meeting--Transitioning Students (Overview Template)  
Communication Arts Common Assessment  
Student Data Sheets--Across All Grade Levels (Includes all Assessments)  
District Professional Development School Calendar  
Modeling Activity--Data Teams/SMART Goals  
Building-Level Leadership Team Agenda  
Revised SMART Goal Template  
Professional Development Continuum of Activities for Year (Steps)  
RtI Program Outline (Mentions Templates, Roles)  
Data Team Meeting Checklist (Preparation)  
Data Team Meeting Instruction Plan--Template  
Curriculum Development Plan

**Monitor and Evaluate:**

End Yr. SMART Goal Analysis Form  
Professional Learning Proposal  
World Café Responses  
Writing Prompt and Rubric  
SMART Goal Data Template--By Area  
Collaborative Team Log  
Homework Survey--Reflection Questions  
Mathematics Common Assessment  
Better Answer Scoring Guide (Outcome)  
SMART Goal Results Graph (Outcome from Teacher)  
SMART Goal Template (Teacher)  
Whole Group Instructional Strategy Schedule  
Professional Development Needs Assessment and Results  
Monthly Overview--Study Group  
Revised Study Group Log  
Reflections on "Structure"  
Leadership Memo on Schedule Specifics, Processes, Materials  
Common Assessment Data Reflection--Template  
MPP Learning Community Schedule  
Program Evaluation Reflection--BOE Approval  
Grade 6 Classroom Assessment Data Template (Outcome)  
Leadership memo on changes due to (Needs Assessment)

Assessment--Student Performance by GLE  
DIBELS Template  
MA Common Assessment--Student Performance Chart  
Data Meeting--Transitioning Students (Overview Template)  
Communication Arts Common Assessment  
DIBELS (BOY, MOY, EOY) Comparison  
Student Data Sheets--Across All Grade Levels (Includes All Assessments)  
Revised SMART Goal Template  
Professional Development Continuum of Activities for Year (Steps)  
Communication to Parents--RtI Program  
RtI Program Outline (Mentions Templates, Roles)  
Data Team Meeting Checklist (Preparation)  
Data Team Meeting Instruction Plan--Template  
Curriculum Development Plan

**Culture of Collaboration and Accountability:**

End Yr. SMART Goal Analysis Form  
Professional Learning Proposal  
Follow-Up Form (Implementation of Strategy Learned)  
SMART Goal Data Template--By Area  
Collaborative Team Log  
Strategies Learned "Toolbox"  
Homework Survey--Reflection Questions  
Mathematics Common Assessment  
Study Group Agenda  
District Professional Development Plan  
Monthly Overview--Study Group  
Revised Study Group Log  
Common Assessment Data Reflection--Template  
MPP Learning Community Schedule  
Program Evaluation Reflection--BOE Approval  
Norms  
MA Common Assessment--Student Performance Chart  
Communication Arts Common Assessment  
DIBELS (BOY, MOY, EOY) Comparison  
Professional Development Continuum of Activities for Year (Steps)  
Communication to Parents--RtI Program  
Data Team Meeting Instruction Plan--Template  
Curriculum Development Plan

Appendix G

**Promising Practices Scoring Guide (Standards Rubric)**

**Aligned to MSIP and NSDC Professional Development Standards**

<b>CONTEXT</b>			
<b>LEARNING COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff in this school / district plan instruction and/or solve problems independently with little or no collaboration.</li> <li>• Little or no evidence of learning communities and leadership support for learning and collaboration.</li> <li>• Planning time is primarily used for individual planning or on non-instructional issues.</li> <li>• No attempt is made by teams to align staff development with district or building goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some staff collaboration exists to plan instruction and/or problem-solve; however, the instances are infrequent.</li> <li>• Evidence of learning communities with evidence of leadership support for learning and collaboration.</li> <li>• Staff sometimes works with others on non-instructional group concerns or personal issues.</li> <li>• Some attempt is made to align staff development to the district's Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) and/or the building-level goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff form collaborative teams and engage in planning instruction and solving problems on special instructional projects only.</li> <li>• Evidence of effective learning communities with skillful leadership and support for learning and collaboration whose goals are aligned with district and school goals.</li> <li>• Most staff teams focus their planning for instruction on improving student learning in subject matter or grade level teams only.</li> <li>• Collaborative teams align staff development with the district's CSIP and building level goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All staff participates in regularly scheduled PD as part of on-going school based collaborative teams that meet during the regular school day.</li> <li>• Evidence of highly effective learning communities with multiple leaders and goals that are fully aligned with district and school goals.</li> <li>• Building and District collaborative teams are focused on student learning.</li> <li>• Collaborative teams focus consistently on district and building-level goals (CSIP/SIP)</li> </ul>

CONTEXT			
LEADERSHIP	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The leader makes all decisions with little or no input from the learning community.</li> <li>Teachers serve in no instructional leadership roles within the school or district.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The leader sporadically seeks input from the learning community.</li> <li>Teachers serve as unofficial instructional and professional development leaders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The leaders consistently nurture collegiality within the learning community.</li> <li>Teachers serve on committees that make instructional decisions for the school and district and help to develop guidelines that support these practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leadership roles and responsibilities are interchangeable and stakeholders assume responsibility for student achievement.</li> <li>Teacher leaders serve as designated leaders on committees and as instructional coaches or mentors. Teachers work with administration and colleagues to promote, advocate and monitor the implementation of PD initiatives.</li> </ul>

CONTEXT			
RESOURCES	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The staff is given minimal time for adult learning and collaboration.</li> <li>The district has not prioritized professional development goals and resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The staff is given some time for adult learning and collaboration.</li> <li>The district has identified a large number of PD goals, which results in a lack of sufficient resources to accomplish goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The staff is regularly provided time for adult learning and collaboration.</li> <li>The district has identified a small number of goals, but resources are not dedicated to those goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school community consistently participates in adult learning and collaboration.</li> <li>The district is focused on a small number of high-priority goals and provides resources to support their accomplishment.</li> </ul>

PROCESS			
<b>DATA-DRIVEN</b>	<p><b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)</p>		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student data is not used in school improvement planning.</li> <li>• No one accepts responsibility for collecting, analyzing and using data to increase student achievement. Little or no meaningful student data is communicated to staff.</li> <li>• There is little or no evidence that staff works together to analyze student data, monitor progress and the impact on achievement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only end-of-year student data is used in school improvement planning.</li> <li>• Some staff accepts responsibility for collecting, analyzing and using data to increase student achievement. Some student data is communicated to staff upon request.</li> <li>• There is some evidence of staff working together to analyze student data, monitor progress and impact student achievement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary student achievement results are used in school improvement planning.</li> <li>• Staff accepts responsibility for collecting, analyzing and using data to increase student achievement. Student data are provided to staff for improving instruction.</li> <li>• Staff collaborate using student data in study groups, action research groups and other professional growth activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A variety of disaggregated student data is used to determine the learning priorities.</li> <li>• Staff accepts responsibility for consistently collecting, analyzing and using data to increase student achievement. Student data is readily accessible for improving instruction.</li> <li>• Meetings with colleagues are used to compare student baseline data with identified benchmarks across the school year.</li> </ul>
PROCESS			
<b>EVALUATION</b>	<p><b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)</p>		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development is evaluated based on personal satisfaction rather than its impact on student achievement.</li> <li>• Staff development evaluation results are not used to evaluate the impact of professional development.</li> <li>• Staff development evaluation is not used to determine needed resources such as time, money, expertise, and materials.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development is sometimes evaluated based on its impact on student achievement.</li> <li>• Staff development results are sometimes used to evaluate the impact of professional development.</li> <li>• Staff development evaluation is sometimes used to determine resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development is often evaluated based on its impact on student achievement.</li> <li>• Staff development results are often used to evaluate the impact of professional development.</li> <li>• Staff development evaluation is used to determine needed resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development is consistently evaluated based on its impact on teacher practices and student achievement.</li> <li>• Staff development results are consistently used to implement change.</li> <li>• A variety of evaluation data are used to determine resources and evaluate intended outcomes.</li> </ul>

<b>PROCESS</b>			
<b>RESEARCH-BASED</b>	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to apply research to decision making. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little or no research on best practices for professional development, curriculum, instruction and assessment is considered when making decisions regarding student achievement</li> <li>• Few, if any, staff members show interest in educational research.</li> <li>• Little or no collaboration for research is encouraged.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The staff has some awareness of the importance of research-based results when making decisions and/or selecting strategies for improving student learning.</li> <li>• Some staff has indicated an interest in conducting action research and communicating results.</li> <li>• Some staff collaborates and share research-based information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff often uses research when making decisions and/or selecting strategies for improving student learning.</li> <li>• The staff has often indicated an interest in conducting action research and communicating results.</li> <li>• Many staff teams use pilot studies and action research to monitor initiatives and make informed decisions about the continuation and institutionalization of those initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educators are skillful users of educational research regarding school improvement and the enhancement of student achievement.</li> <li>• The staff consistently conducts action research and communicates results.</li> <li>• Teams consistently conduct pilot studies and/or action research to support, confront, and/or generate new knowledge and evidence about the effectiveness of innovations and initiatives.</li> </ul>
<b>PROCESS</b>			
<b>DESIGN</b>	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development seldom moves beyond training, workshops, courses, and large group presentations.</li> <li>• The use of combined learning strategies by collaborative teams is seldom used.</li> <li>• No ongoing support or follow-up is provided.</li> <li>• Administrators have no expectations for implementation of new classroom practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development occasionally includes collaborative lesson design, the examination of student work, curriculum development, case studies and action research, etc.</li> <li>• The use of combined learning strategies by collaborative teams is occasionally incorporated.</li> <li>• Teachers experiment with new practices in the classroom alone or on an infrequent basis with colleagues.</li> <li>• Administrators articulate the purpose of professional development, but do not discuss expectations for implementation of new classroom practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often staff development includes collaborative lesson design, the examination of student work, curriculum development, case studies and action research, etc.</li> <li>• The use of combined learning strategies by collaborative teams is often incorporated.</li> <li>• Teachers participate in multiple related experiences with some collaborative support from colleagues.</li> <li>• Administrators discuss expectations for implementation of teacher practices related to professional development initiatives and student achievement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development consistently includes collaborative lesson design, the examination of student work, curriculum development, case studies and action research, etc.</li> <li>• The use of learning strategies by collaborative teams is consistently incorporated.</li> <li>• Support and follow-up for professional development consistently enables teachers to receive classroom feedback on their use of new instructional practices.</li> <li>• Administrators work with staff to create rubrics that clearly describe expected classroom practices associated with professional development initiatives.</li> </ul>

PROCESS			
<b>LEARNING</b>	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students applies knowledge about human learning and change. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development learning methods seldom mirror the methods teachers are expected to use with their students.</li> <li>• The focus is on awareness and not deep understanding.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development learning methods occasionally mirror the methods teachers are expected to use with their students.</li> <li>• Staff gain an understanding of new content, but cannot translate the knowledge into new practices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development learning methods often mirror the methods teachers are expected to use with their students.</li> <li>• Staff exhibit understanding of new content and are able to use new strategies routinely with students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development learning methods consistently mirror the methods teachers are expected to use with their students.</li> <li>• Staff exhibit deep understanding of new concepts and strategies and are able to adapt and implement new strategies in classrooms resulting in higher student achievement.</li> </ul>
PROCESS			
<b>COLLABORATION</b>	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is little evidence of focused collaboration on student achievement.</li> <li>• School leaders seldom facilitate increasing knowledge and skills for collaboration.</li> <li>• Educators seldom share what they learned through staff development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is occasional evidence of focused collaboration using student achievement and data-driven decision-making.</li> <li>• School leaders occasionally facilitate increasing knowledge and skills for collaboration.</li> <li>• Educators occasionally report information learned from staff development to colleagues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Often there is some evidence of focused collaboration on student achievement using data-driven decision-making.</li> <li>• School leaders often facilitate increasing knowledge and skills for collaboration.</li> <li>• Educators often share and model lessons learned from staff development will colleagues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is consistent evidence of focused collaboration using student achievement and data-driven decision-making.</li> <li>• School leaders consistently accept responsibility for, model and facilitate increasing knowledge and skills for collaboration.</li> <li>• Educators consistently implement and collaboratively reflect on their learning from professional development.</li> </ul>

<b>CONTENT</b>			
<b>EQUITY</b>	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No monitoring of achievement gaps among groups of students is done to adjust professional development.</li> <li>• Little or no evidence of an environment that supports diversity &amp; maintains standards</li> <li>• Educators are unaware of instructional needs of diverse students.</li> <li>• No support is provided for non-learning students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district occasionally monitors achievement gaps among groups of students to adjust professional development.</li> <li>• Some evidence of an environment that supports diversity and maintains standards.</li> <li>• Educators attend some training sessions, but are not connecting and applying what they learn about student diversity.</li> <li>• Support and success for non-learning students is left up to the individual teacher.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district monitors achievement gaps among groups of students to adjust professional development.</li> <li>• Environment that support diversity and maintains high standards is evident.</li> <li>• Uses a variety of instructional strategies to motivate all students to learn.</li> <li>• Educators are increasingly more knowledgeable about student diversity and apply their knowledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The district consistently monitors achievement and can document progress toward closing the gap.</li> <li>• Fully effective, diverse climate supporting rigorous standards for all students.</li> <li>• Educators are knowledgeable about student diversity and consistently adjust classroom instruction in light of student background, disabilities, cultures, and SES.</li> <li>• Multiple interventions that provide support for non-learning students are in place. If one strategy does not work, other options are utilized.</li> </ul>
<b>CONTENT</b>			
<b>QUALITY TEACHING</b>	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers demonstrate superficial knowledge of content / subject area – mostly relying on textbooks.</li> <li>• Uses end of unit paper-and-pencil tests as the primary assessment strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers demonstrate breadth of knowledge of content / subject area. They can explain and demonstrate to students the concepts that underlie the content / subject matter in multiple ways.</li> <li>• Uses a variety of formal and informal performance assessments (i.e., paper and pencil, writing, speeches, classroom recitation, projects, homework).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers exhibit deep understanding and meaning of new concepts / strategies and ability to adapt and integrate them into classroom lessons.</li> <li>• Uses scoring rubrics and teaches students to use the rubrics to improve their performance. Uses a variety of formal and informal performance assessments (i.e., paper and pencil, writing, speeches, classroom recitation, projects, homework).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers plan interdisciplinary units with colleagues that focus on major content area concepts. Teachers exhibits deep understanding of new concepts / strategies and ability to adapt and integrate them into classroom instruction.</li> <li>• Creates and uses authentic, embedded assessments connected to the subject/content area that are accompanied by scoring rubrics. Uses a variety of formal and informal performance assessments (i.e., paper and pencil, writing, speeches, classroom recitation, projects, homework).</li> </ul>

<b>CONTENT</b>			
<b>FAMILY INVOLVEMENT</b>	<b>Standard:</b> Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately. (Related to MSIP Standard 6.7)		
<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development does not prepare educators to create partnerships with parents to support student learning.</li>   <li>• There is no system for meaningful input from parents, business, or community.</li>   <li>• School leaders have little expectation for involvement of families and the school community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development occasionally prepares educators to create partnerships with parents to support student learning.</li>   <li>• There is occasionally a means for input from parents, business, or community.</li>   <li>• School leaders demonstrate some effort to involve families and community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff development is designed to prepare educators to create partnerships with parents for supporting student learning.</li>   <li>• The school staff has knowledge of why partnerships are important and includes members of the learning community in strategic planning and decision making.</li>   <li>• School leaders frequently involve families and the school community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school and community consistently partner to prepare parents and educators to support every child's learning.</li>   <li>• The staff is trained and consistently utilizes two-way communication with the learning community about student achievement.</li>   <li>• School leaders consistently demonstrate their belief that family and community involvement improves student achievement.</li> </ul>

<http://www.msdc-mo.org>

## Appendix H

### Leadership Academy



#### WHO

All practicing or aspiring leaders and administrators in public, charter, private and parochial schools are eligible to attend.

#### WHY

State of Missouri statute requires mentoring for school leaders provided through an Academy that promotes support, growth and development and positively and significantly impacts student performance through effective school improvement practices. School improvement mandates and standards are continuously evolving and redefining the role of school leaders. Continuous support opportunities through mentoring are necessary in order to develop and hone skills for instructional leadership resulting in improved student learning.

#### WHERE

Regional Leadership Academy activities will be coordinated by facilitators through the regional professional development center in your area. The statewide meetings will be held in the Lake of the Ozarks area.

#### WHEN

Following is a tentative schedule.

June 12-14, 2012 .....	Kickoff Statewide Meeting at Resort at Port Arrowhead, Lake Ozark
August 2012 – May 2013 .....	Regional meetings
October 10-13, 2012 .....	Outdoor Leadership Experience at Lake Ozark State Park
January 16-18, 2013 .....	Winter Statewide Meeting at Resort at Port Arrowhead, Lake Ozark
June 11-14, 2013 .....	Graduation Statewide Meeting at Resort at Port Arrowhead Lake Ozark

#### LEADERSHIP ACADEMY DELIVERABLES AND COST

Missouri's Theory of Action, as documented in its state model evaluation system, maintains that improving student performance happens by improving the professional practice of the adults who guide and direct student learning. The Leadership Academy Program's Plan of Study focuses on essential elements associated with research-based performance development. These essential elements include the use of research-based performance targets; the use of multiple levels of performance that identify status and growth; the use of timely and deliberate meaningful feedback; and a relentless focus on the improvement of student performance outcomes.

Leadership Academy participants will develop and refine strategies to enhance and improve professional practice associated with improved student performance through a program that includes:

- Statewide and regional meetings
- Expertise in implementing quality educator development systems.
- Application of the effective use of data
- Networking opportunities with educators across the state

Registration cost is \$600, plus \$75 for each of the four statewide meetings to cover meals and materials. Participant transportation and lodging are not included. For details on payment plan options, contact our office.

Discounts available:

Early Bird discount: register by April 1 and receive \$50 off  
Bring a friend discount: each receives \$100 off

Enhance your **LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

Focusing on **EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS**

Providing a **QUALITY EDUCATION** for each child

## Facilitator Teams

<b>Central</b> Julie Blaine, Central RPDC.....	800-762-4146
<b>Heart of Missouri</b> Marc Doss, Heart of Missouri RPDC.....	816-882-9869
<b>Kansas City</b> Custava Cooper-Baker, Kansas City RPDC.....	816-966-1750
<b>Northeast</b> Darl Davis, Northeast RPDC.....	888-878-7732
<b>Northwest</b> Bocey Baldwin, Northwest RPDC.....	800-663-3348
<b>St. Louis</b> Beth Plunkett, St. Louis RPDC.....	314-609-6062
<b>South Central</b> John Lewis, South Central RPDC.....	800-667-0665
<b>Southeast</b> Cheri Fuemmeler, Southeast RPDC.....	573-651-2479
<b>Southwest</b> Suzy Cutbirth, Southwest RPDC.....	800-735-3702

Changes in facilitator team members may occur before the 2012-2013 program begins.

## HOW TO ENROLL

Register online no later than May 15, 2012, through [mylearningplan.com](http://mylearningplan.com) at <http://dese.mo.gov/divteachqual/leadership>.

For first-time users of [mylearningplan.com](http://mylearningplan.com), enter <http://www.dese.mo.gov/divteachqual/leadership/>. This will take you to the Leadership Academy Bulletin Board, where you will find a link to MyLearningPlan. Click on the link. This will take you directly into the program without a userID and password.

Click on Leadership Academy 2012-2013. If you are a new user, click "new user" and follow the instructions. Remember or write down your userID and password, as you will need them in the future. If you are an existing user, click that choice and follow the instructions.

Your district will be billed for the academy unless you specify other billing information. Make sure the billing address is correct on [mylearningplan.com](http://mylearningplan.com).

If you experience problems using [mylearningplan.com](http://mylearningplan.com) or if you have questions regarding the registration process, please call 573-751-1941.

Make checks payable to Treasurer, State of Missouri, and mail to: The Leadership Academy, P.O. Box 480, Jefferson City, MO 65102-0480.

Register online for the Leadership Academy Program at <http://dese.mo.gov/divteachqual/leadership> by May 15, 2012.

## Missouri Leader Standards

Education leaders ensuring the success of all students

### Standard #1 Vision, Mission, and Goals

Facilitate the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community.

Quality Indicator 1: Develop and Articulate a Vision  
Quality Indicator 2: Implement and Sustain a Vision

### Standard #2 Teaching and Learning

Promote a positive school culture, provide effective instructional programs that apply best practices to student learning, and design comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.

Quality Indicator 1: Promote Positive School Culture  
Quality Indicator 2: Provide an Effective Instructional Program  
Quality Indicator 3: Design Comprehensive Professional Growth Plans

### Standard #3 Management of Organizational Systems

Manage the organization, operations, and resources in a way that promotes a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Quality Indicator 1: Manage the Organizational Structure  
Quality Indicator 2: Manage Personnel  
Quality Indicator 3: Manage Resources

### Standard #4 Collaboration with Families and Community

Collaborate with families and other community members, respond to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilize community resources.

Quality Indicator 1: Collaborate with Families and Other Community Members  
Quality Indicator 2: Respond to Community Interests and Needs  
Quality Indicator 3: Mobilize Community Resources

### Standard #5 Ethics and Integrity

Act with integrity and in an ethical manner.

Quality Indicator 1: Personal and Professional Responsibility

### Office of Educator Quality Educator Development

Linda Dooling, Director  
Paul Karnik, Director  
Susan Hodges, Supervisor  
Heather Northway, Administrative Assistant III  
Telephone: 573-751-1941 • Fax: 573-522-6526



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DESE 2011-9 Rev 5/12

<http://dese.mo.gov/divteachqual/leadership/satellite>

Appendix I

**Leadership Team Meeting Schedule**

Leadership Team Meeting Schedule  
2011-2012

District Monthly Meetings (2nd <i>Tuesday</i> of each month @ 7:15 a.m. in elementary conference room)				
August 1 (M)	September 13	October 11	November 8	December 13
January 10	February 14	March 13	April 10	May 8

High School Monthly Meetings ( <i>Wednesday</i> morning of early out days each month @ 7:15 a.m. in Art room)				
August	September 26	October 5	November 9	December 7
January TBA	February 8	March 14	April 18	May 2

Elementary Monthly Meetings (4 <sup>th</sup> <i>Monday</i> of each month @ 3 p.m. in elementary conference room)				
August 22	September 26	October 24	November 28	December TBA
January 23	February 27	March 26	April 23	May TBA

## Appendix J

### Teacher Academy

*Northwest Missouri Regional Professional Development Center  
BUILDING THE CAPACITY OF SCHOOLS TO MAXIMIZE STUDENT POTENTIAL*

## Northwest RPDC TEACHER ACADEMY 8



*Improving Student Achievement  
Using Effective Instructional Practices*

#### **What is the Program Design?**

Teacher Academy is a replication of the very successful Leadership Academy Satellite Program, which has been fundamental in providing professional growth for school leaders. The Teacher Academy is designed to provide participants with an intellectually stimulating opportunity to learn new teaching strategies and collaborate with other highly committed teachers in the region. Although not designed as a preparation program for National Board Certification, graduates of the Teacher Academy will find their experience to be a natural springboard into the National Board Certification process.

Participation requires monthly release days for regional meetings to allow teachers time to discuss educational issues, deepen content knowledge, and network with other highly committed educators from the area. Tuition, transportation, food and substitutes will be the responsibility of the school or individual.

The Academy focus is centered on student engagement, instructional strategies, and reflection on practice.

#### **Who Qualifies to be a Teacher Academy Fellow?**

- A current classroom teacher with three years of classroom experience
- A teacher with demonstrated classroom effectiveness
- A teacher with a Master's degree or significant professional growth
- A teacher with a commitment to sustained professional growth

#### **How are Academy Fellows selected?**

Fellows and scholarships are selected from an application process which requires a narrative response to a set of questions and two letters of recommendation.

#### **What are the costs and deadline?**

The program fee is \$500, due after acceptance. Please apply before 6/15/11.

**Register: Fax application form to: (660) 562-1890**

**OR Mail to:** Northwest RPDC  
800 University Drive  
Maryville, MO 64468

*Application form is on the back*

Appendix K

**Professional Development Consultant Plan**

**Planning for Science PD**

**District:**

**Contact Person:**

**Phone:**

**E-mail:**

**Dates and times:** **Half Days** – Sept. 14, Oct. 12, Nov. 23, Jan. 11, Feb. 8, March 22  
1:00 – 5:30 pm

**Team:** 3<sup>rd</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers

<b>Objective(s)</b>	<i>Gain a deeper understanding of science inquiry/experimental design and how it relates to the MAP assessment</i> <b>Sept. 14</b> – Classroom observation; Overview of Science Notebooking & Science Inquiry (directed) <b>Oct. 12</b> – Classroom observation; Guided Inquiry (testable question, hypothesis, IV, DV) <b>Nov. 23</b> – Classroom observation; Test out testable question and record in science notebook <b>Jan. 11</b> – Classroom observation; Collect and Record data (bar graph, line graph, data table) <b>Feb. 8</b> – Classroom observation; Analyze data/Conclusion; extrapolate information; Process Standard 1.6 <b>March 22</b> – Classroom observation; How science inquiry relates to the MAP assessment (MC, CR, PE; DOK level); instructional strategies
<b>Outcome(s)</b>	Implementation of science notebooking and guided inquiry within classrooms
<b>Responsibilities</b> <b>RPDC</b> <b>Dist. Teachers</b> <b>Dist. Admin.</b>	<b>RPDC</b> – Meet with King City Science Team six times during the 2009-2010 school year; Coach team through objectives; Observe team’s classroom teaching and give feedback on instructional strategies <b>District Teachers</b> – Attend all meetings; Complete on-going assignments between meetings; Participate in meetings and discussions. <b>District Administration</b> – Attend all meetings (when possible); Follow through on any needed issue pertaining to objectives and on-going assignments
<b>Evaluation</b> <b>Teacher Imp.</b> <b>Student Imp.</b>	<b>Teacher</b> – Own science notebook; creation of components of an experimental design; evidence of student work <b>Student</b> – Formative/Summative assessments on science inquiry and notebooking

Appendix L

**SMART Goal Template**

Reading SMART Goal

Percentage of \_\_\_\_\_ scoring proficient or higher in \_\_\_\_\_ will increase from \_\_\_\_\_% to \_\_\_\_\_% by the middle/end of the \_\_\_\_\_ school year as measured by \_\_\_\_\_ administered in \_\_\_\_\_.

Student Groups Fall	Student Groups Winter
Proficient/Advanced- 80% and above	Proficient/Advanced- 80% and above
Those Close- 70%-79%	Those Close- 70%-79%
Those Far- 50%-69%	Those Far- 50%-69%
Immediate Intense Intervention (Tier III)- 49% and below	Immediate Intense Intervention (Tier III)- 49% and below

## Appendix M

### Study Group Agenda

#### **2007-2008 LEARNING FOCUS: BETTER ANSWERS**

##### **AGENDA FOR OCTOBER 17, 2007**

###### **Team Leaders:**

**Recorders:** Shared Responsibility—Please do not be one to offer to do this role each time...share!!!

*At the start of the session, the team leader will assign portions of the agenda for different members to record.*

###### **Type/Email:**

###### **Keeper of the Clock:**

**1:15-2:15**

###### **Whole Group: ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES CNTD.**

--Marty will continue to consult with us, providing follow-up services to our 2006-2006 learning.  
--Marty has asked that each participant bring a copy of their lesson plans.

###### **\*Whole Group: PDC Reviews Agenda**

--This will take place in the Resource Room.

**2:15-2:30**

###### **Guiding Principles of Collaborative Teams**

--Literature will be shared about collaboration. This literature was shared with our PDC at the recent ILT (Instructional Leadership Team) training.  
--Each team will review this literature, using the jigsaw method.

**2:30-3:00**

###### **SMART Goal Reflection**

--Please bring a copy of your SMART goals for the 2007-2008 school year.  
--This will be *individual* reflection time, responding to the question below that applies to you. Please respond privately inside your journals.

1. If you *met* your SMART goals during the 2006-2007 school year, what specific strategies in each of the areas proved to be beneficial in meeting these outcomes?
2. If you *did not meet* your SMART goals during the 2007-2008 school year, what specific strategies did you select that are different than last year, that may assist your journey to success?
3. If you have not written a SMART goal in the past, reflect on your *thoughts about goal setting and educating students*. What might goal-setting do for you as the instructional leader in the classroom?

**3:00-3:30**

###### **Collaborative Lesson Design: RESTATE THE QUESTION**

--Information about this process will be provided at the 2:15-2:30 timeframe.  
-- Grade level teachers will come together at this point.

K-1 will meet:

2-3 will meet:

4-6 will meet:

--In these groups, the facilitator will do a summarization activity about the Chapter 1 material.  
--Grade level partners will then work together to design a lesson on this objective skill: **Restate the Question**.  
--The lesson will be administered between October 18 and November 13. Each grade level will share with peers in November about their reflections/observations during instruction and reviewing student performance.

Appendix N

Needs Assessment

**King City Elementary (PK-6)  
2008 Professional Development Needs Assessment**

**Professional Development Services**

**1. Please list three reflections from this year's professional learning development experiences which have proven to be most beneficial towards student learning:**

- a)
- b)
- c)

**2. When reviewing your own student data within the classroom (ex. DIBELS, Gates, Common Assessments, Unit tests, etc.), what goals do you recognize for your own instruction?**

<b>Data Reviewed</b>	<b>Goal(s)</b>

**3. What ideas might you have that could strengthen the process of our analysis of student work?**

4. Reflecting on our common math assessment experience, both writing and administering, please share some strengths and areas to improve upon as we move towards common assessments in other curriculum areas.

Strengths	Areas of Improvement

5. On a scale of 1 – 5 with 5 being most comfortable, what level of comfort do you have with implementing active learning strategies in your classroom? Please share where you would like to see this area of focus go in year three.

Rating \_\_\_\_\_  
 Comments:

6. After experiencing your fifth year as a member of an instructional study group/professional learning community, what could you share with your elementary PDC leadership team in regards to the strengths of the process and the areas to allow the process to grow?

Whole-Faculty Study Group Process	
WHAT IS WORKING	IDEAS FOR CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

Appendix O

Study Group Configuration and Roles

**ELEMENTARY STUDY GROUPS**

<b>Team 1—<i>Better Answers</i> (Ardith Davis)</b>	<b>Team 2-- <i>Better Answers</i> (Ardith Davis)</b>	<b>Team 3-- <i>Better Answers</i> (Ardith Davis)</b>

**TEACHER LEADER SCHEDULE**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Team 1</b>	<b>Team 2</b>	<b>Team 3</b>
September 12			
October 17 (Consult.)			
November 14			
December 12 (Consult.)			
January 4			
*January 16			
February 13 (Consult.)			
March 20			
April 16 (Consult.)			
May 7			

**TEACHER LEADER RESPONSIBILITIES**

*\*Work closely with a PDC representative in the planning for the upcoming study group session.*

- 1) **Choose and facilitate a team-builder (activity):**  
--Select a builder that can be applied to classroom practice
  
- 2) **Lead that month’s book study:**  
--Develop REFLECTIVE (not comprehension) questions over prior month’s reading assignment  
--Facilitate discussion about questions
  
- 3) **Facilitate reflection time:**  
--instructional strategies  
--student work

## Appendix P

### Student Work Analysis Protocol

#### "Wows and Wonders"

#### A Protocol for Looking at Student Work in Study Groups

**1. Presentation of student work: 3-minutes**

Team members listen silently while the Presenting Teacher presents:  
Assignment or prompt that generated the student work  
Student learning goals that inform the work  
Sample of student work  
Evaluation format (rubric, test, etc.) if appropriate  
Focusing question for feedback

**2. Clarifying Questions: 2-minutes**

Team members ask the Presenting Teacher clarifying questions, matters of fact (What kind of prior experience did this student have?)

**3. Examination of Student Work: 3 minutes**

Participants look at the work (without talking), taking notes on the Presenting Teacher's question, the strengths they see, the questions they have

**4. Feedback: 20 minutes total time**

**WOWS!** 10 minutes: While the Presenting Teacher only listens and takes notes, the team members talk among themselves expressing positive/affirming feedback and expressing the strengths in the work, such as:

I like the way...  
It is exciting to see...  
The student really seems to...  
The obvious strengths are...

**WONDERS!** 10 minutes: While the Presenting Teacher only listens and takes notes, the team members talk among themselves posing questions to help or to push the thinking of the Presenting Teacher, such as:

I wonder why...  
The gap between what was intended and what it seems to be...  
I wonder what would happen if...

**5. Reflection: 5 minutes**

Presenting Teacher talks about what she has learned from the feedback. This is not a time to defend oneself but a time to explore further interesting ideas that come out of the Feedback.

**6. Debrief: 5 minutes**

Facilitator leads an open discussion about the experience.

*Adapted from* ATLAS Communities: [www.atlascommunities.org](http://www.atlascommunities.org)

## Appendix Q

### Collaborative Lesson Design

### Collaborative Lesson Design IPI Level 5 or 6

Name of Lesson: Newspaper Feature Frame		Grade Level: 5/6
Skill focus: <b>Summarizing</b>		
GLE's Addressed: 1. <b>Reading-1H</b> – Apply post reading skills to comprehend and interpret text (summarize) 2. <b>Reading-3C</b> – Develop and apply skills and strategies to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate non-fiction/use details from text to restate main idea and supporting details, etc. 3. <b>Writing-3D</b> -Write summaries of text from magazines, newspapers, and info. articles.		
<b>Anticipatory Set</b> A short activity or prompt that focuses the students' attention before actual lesson begins.	Teacher will begin by reading a short article from the front page of a newspaper. Ask students if they can recognize what kind of writing it is? Fiction or nonfiction? Lead them to discussion of newspaper articles, purpose for reading, and writing of the articles.	
<b>Purpose</b> The objective-why the students need to learn it, what they will be able to do, and how they will show learning.	Students will read, comprehend, and summarize a chosen current event newspaper article. After summarizing the article, students will design then create a visual representation of that summarized article in proper sequence. Students will then display their visuals while the rest of class analyzes the visual and draw conclusions then propose what they think the article is about.	
<b>Input</b> The vocabulary, skills, concepts, etc. that the teacher will impart to the students and how will they be communicated.	The teacher will use overhead, board, newspapers, graphic organizers, sample summaries, handouts, and lecture to reteach the following objectives: summarizing skill from Marzano's book, the basics of a newspaper article using who, what, when, where, why, how, newspaper vocabulary, and post reading skills	
<b>Modeling</b> The teacher shows in graphic form or demonstrates what the finished product looks like (a picture is worth 1000 words).	Teacher will choose a newspaper article and read it out loud. Use all methods listed above (Input) to model the steps of summarizing using chosen summarizing strategy. Teacher uses talk aloud while demonstrating method and asks for input, as independent practice will be with a buddy. Teacher will then fold a piece of butcher paper into six or eight pieces and model how to illustrate the summary to create a visual.	
<b>Guided Practice</b> The teacher leads the students through the steps necessary to perform the skill (hear, see, do).	Guided practice will occur along with the modeling process. Teacher will ask students to summarize a classroom (whole group) chosen article with a buddy/partner after modeling and before having them develop their own summary/visual.	
<b>Check for Understanding</b> The teacher uses a variety of questioning strategies to determine "Got it yet?" and to pace the lesson.	Teacher will check for understanding during modeling and guided practice by questioning, asking students to explain their process of summarizing, checking graphic organizers, listening to pair discussion, and observing entire process.	
<b>Independent Practice</b> The teacher releases students to practice on their own based on #3-#6	The students will work with a partner/buddy to choose their own current events newspaper article of average length (approximately ¼ to ½ page in length. Students will work together to read the article, and then write a paragraph summarizing the article. Students will then use butcher paper divided into sections of 6-8 to create a visual by illustrating the summary in sequence. When completed, students will use provided scoring guide to make sure all areas are completed correctly.	
<b>Closure</b> A review or wrap-up of the lesson (tell me, show me what you've learned today)	Pairs of students will then hang up their visuals throughout the room, while classmates try to draw a conclusion about their article. Students may then choose one visual to write a summary about, and then find the original summary writers and compare their work to see if the illustration provided enough information for an accurate summary.	

**Please bold or highlight all of the Bloom's Taxonomy words/phrases that you use in the lesson plan.**

Appendix R

Reflection Template

**MONTHLY FOLLOW-UP FORM**

**NAME:**

**DATE:**

<b>1. Active Learning Strategy used this month:</b>	
<b>2. Lesson Objective:</b>	
<b>3. Success experienced:</b> What worked well? What pleased you? How did students evidence success?	
<b>Student specific:</b>	
<b>4. Challenges</b> What frustrated you? What was problematic? Describe any disappointments.	
<b>Student specific:</b>	
<b>5. Critical or Interesting Incidents</b> What was unexpected? What intrigued you? What intrigued you? What questions were raised in your mind?	
<b>6. Next Time:</b> What changes would you try if you were teaching this lesson again?...this structure?	
<b>7. PIES Check:</b> P-Was a gain for one a gain for all? Was help necessary? I-Was individual public performance required? E-Was participation equal? S-What percent were overtly active at once?	

## Appendix S

### Formative Assessment Template

#### Process for CA Common Assessment

1. You will be creating a Common Assessment for CA which contains 3 sessions. The first 2 sessions will contain stories and questions about the stories; session 3 will be a writing prompt. Use the Buckle Down Form A and Houghton Mifflin Missouri Test Preparation: Communication Arts Booklets and the GLE's to check off each GLE that was covered in each test question. Using a pencil, your partner needs to write what GLE and DOK is covered beside each question while you are checking off the GLE's.
2. Make sure that you do not use more than 3 main stories when checking off the GLE's. You do not want a whole bunch of stories; it will make the test too long.
3. When you have finished checking off each question for those 3 main stories, begin adding questions to those stories to cover the remaining GLE's. Use your resources or come up with some on your own that will go with the stories you have used. You will want to make sure you have more than one question for most of the GLE's especially for those low on item analysis.
4. You may also need to add a proofreading section to cover some of your remaining GLE's, especially for writing. Check to see if you need a poetry selection to cover some of those remaining GLE's.
5. Using the 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Communication Arts model, begin typing in your stories and questions combining everything you have created into 1 test.

## Appendix T

### Curriculum Template

#### Essential Standards

Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Standard Description	Evidence of Proficiency	Prior Skills Needed	Common Summative Assessment (2 versions for reassessing)	When Taught	Enrichment

**Standard:** What is essential to be learned? Describe in student friendly vocabulary.

**Example/Rigor:** what does proficient student work look like? Example and/or description

**Prior Skills Needed:** What prior knowledge, skills, and/or vocabulary is needed for a student to master this standard?

**Common Summative Assessment:** What assessment(s) will be used to measure student mastery?

**When Taught:** Month, timeframe

**Enrichment:** Supplemental skills/activities



## Appendix V

### Communication 1

To: Elementary Staff

From: PD Team

Date: December 2, 2009

Re: PLC/Early Out

The PD Committee met this week and made a few decisions that may affect your plans for the next couple of months.

- The Common Assessment window is set for December 14-18, but you may begin administering before then if you need the time.
- For the December meeting, we will all start in the library at 12:45 for snacks.
- For the December meeting, bring Communication Arts GLE's to the table for the grade you teach or work with (Title) for use during the Grade Level time. We will be meeting as K-3 group and 4-6 group to dig down into data. [Teacher] will help lead this discussion for K-3, and [Principal] will help lead the 4-6.
- For the January Meeting, the Grade Level time will need to be from 2:00-3:15 and will involve sharing about common assessments/SMART goal progress. The next page of this document will be what we will use to guide those conversations.
- For the February or March meeting, (to be determined later) the Grade level meeting time will also need to be 2:00-3:15 and will be a follow up to the MAP from December and discussion about our new Communication Arts Common Assessment.

Thanks for your flexibility. The team feels that these changes will greatly benefit student learning, especially for MAP testing.

**Communication 2**

**Data Meetings Check List**

- \_\_\_\_\_ DIBELS parent letter  
---Mark how far they are from meeting the next benchmark
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ Progress Monitor Screener (obtain from Title I teacher)
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5-Component Continuum marked according to the child's  
ability
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ Most recent theme/integrated test
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ Any performance piece you would like to add to help us during  
our meeting.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ Strategies and Activities marked that you have tried
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ Small group instruction plan

Appendix X

**Substitute Schedule**

Dates	Team	Classroom Coverage
January 4	K, 1, 2	Sub Name Here
January 11	4, 5, 6	
January 18	K, 1, 2	
January 25	4, 5, 6	
February 1	K, 1, 2	
February 8	4, 5, 6	
February 15	K, 1, 2	
February 22	3,4, 5, 6	
March 1	K, 1, 2	
March 8	3,4, 5, 6	
March 15	K, 1, 2	
March 29	3,4, 5, 6	
April 5	K, 1, 2	
April 12	3,4, 5, 6	
April 19	K, 1, 2	
April 26	3,4, 5, 6	
May 3	K, 1, 2	
May 10	3,4, 5, 6	

## Appendix Y

### World Café

# World Cafe Responses 2005

*Assuming our focus will be moving towards math and instructional strategies, what ways would you suggest to transition from the reading/writing focus to these new areas being considered for next year?*

- Have teachers create a portfolio of lessons they have created that demonstrate the use of different instructional strategies. We should, however, not forget about reading and writing because most students have not mastered this yet.
- Using the reading to benefit the problem solving in math.
- Work linearly, upper elementary and middle school. Don't forget basics in trying to improve problem solving. Some of the book studies apply to math areas more than others.
- How will it fit into all areas? Reading is a much broader area.
- The reading focus of this year will be easy to transfer to math areas (problem solving). Would like to see book study revolve around a more general basis...general strategies can be used in all areas.
- I would like to slow down and perfect that which is established.
- We will need a beginning point. It will be interesting on how we are going to use this in our content area.
- The transition needs to take into consideration the other duties of a teacher.
- Yea! Finally help in the area of math. Math is everywhere in life and should be easy to implement in all classrooms.
- Combining math into reading and writing and doing something integrated would be a good way to introduce math and stay focused on reading and writing.
- Use reading and writing more with math books and have team instruction.
- Keep group study groups and have similar grades work together.
- I believe it is an administrative decision, but seriously I'd like to stay with improving reading and comprehension.
- Need to ease into it.
- We could tie MAP test reading/writing to improve math performance.
- Book study to help with transition. + Teaming with teachers in nearby areas/grades.
- Incorporate reading and writing into math.
- If the focus would be on math, what would title reading teachers do? Could we have vertical teams with content areas?
- Use student data to begin starting point-work from teams. Will need math strategies to know how to teach it. Know the math GLE's. ++++
- Continue to use book studies that focus on instructional strategies. Search out more math related books.
- By using math instructional books/methods for teachers working collaboratively.
- Vertical teaming of reading, writing, and math.
- Discuss how math strategies have been implemented in your classroom/content area.
- Would like to see cross-curricular math strategies.
- Consider title people who may not have any involvement in math. Reading First teachers are scripted as to what instruction can look like. May not be able to incorporate math into instruction.

- Add the new through instructional strategies through book study and outside workshops we can send our teachers to.
- We need a beginning point for math.
- What happens to those of us not in the math area? +
- By obtaining a math research based book for book study full of different instructional activities/methods. Share different math activities with one another.
- Study groups using a math-focused book to share. Use book that has instructional strategies not necessarily research. +

Appendix Z

Study Group Session Log

**2009-2010 LEARNING FOCUS: COMMUNICATION ARTS TEAM LOG**

**Team:**

**Team Leader:**

**Recorder(s):**

**Keeper of the Clock:**

**Month: March**

Please complete after each team meeting and send electronically to [Principal].

**Book Study Reflection- Summary of Discussion**

Chapter 9- Presentation

- We liked the activity of the placemat. When displaying student work attach a picture of the student to their writing to show more ownership.
- The book stated that presentation is often overrated, but still a vital part in the writing process.
- It was emphasized in the book to focus on a neat copy not the content of what they are writing about.
- The book also reminded us to only expect writing to the best of the students ability, not perfect handwriting and organization.
- We discussed how it is very frustrating when the students think their first writing is their best and there is no need to publish their work or make a clean copy.

**Instructional Strategies –What was learned, how implemented, data used, what worked, etc.**

Implementation of Sentence Fluency

Second grade- [Teaches] completed an activity on sentence fluency by reading a selection of a story to their students and highlighting the first word in each sentence. They highlighted each different word in a different color then discussed with the students why there were so many different colors in the author's writing. Then the students highlighted the first word in each of the sentences in a story they had written.

Implementation of Organization

Kindergarten- [Teachers] read The Snowman to their students. They then had the students put pictures in order of the different steps in building a snowman.

First Grade- [Teachers] worked with their students on completing graphic organizers to assist the students in organizing their writing before they started writing their story.

**Grade Level Discussions – Curriculum, Assessments, Interventions, Data, etc.**

**Sharing of Student Work – November, January, March**

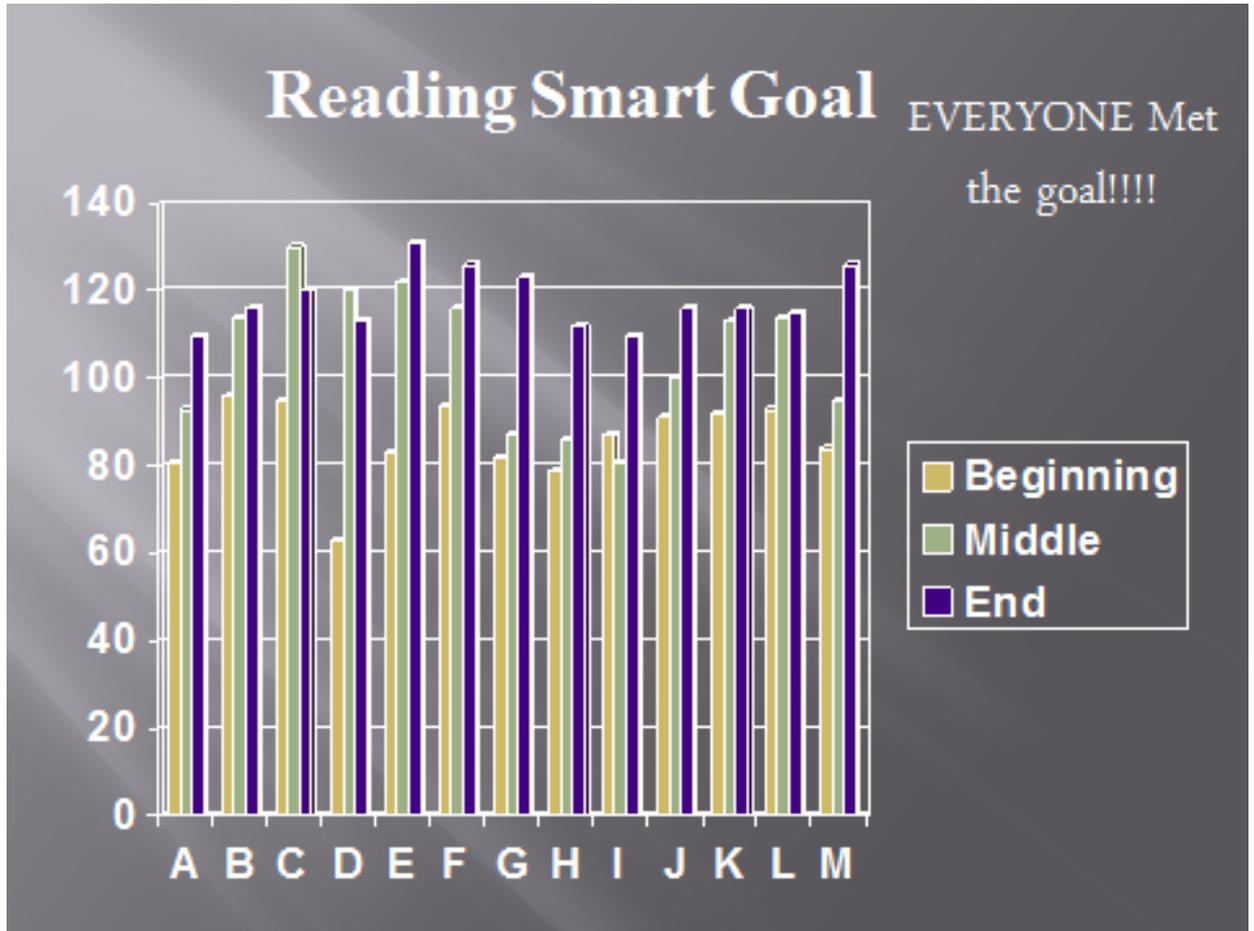
Second Grade- The teachers were both pleased with their student work, but felt like the students still did not want to go back and edit their writing even after they noticed they were starting their sentences the same way.

First Grade- Both teachers believed the graphic organizers really helped their students, especially their students who struggle in writing. [Teacher] also shared that with her higher level writers, she worked with them in a small group to encourage them to add more to their writing than they just put on their organizer.

Kindergarten- The teachers felt like their students struggled with sequencing the pictures. They felt like either the student got it or they were completely off.

Appendix AA

SMART Goal Reflection Tool



Appendix BB

Professional Learning Proposal

<p>Team Focus: Comprehension</p> <p>Team: (please indicate) <b>K-2</b> 3-6 Title</p> <p>Resource/Title of Book: <i>7 Keys to Comprehension</i></p>		<p><b>Elementary PDC Monthly Overview 2010-2011</b></p> <p>*Team logs are located on the Y:drive</p>		<p>Member: <b>Combe</b> Color: Gold</p> <p>Member: <b>Mercer</b> Color: Gold</p> <p>Member: <b>Hill</b> Color: Blue</p> <p>Member: <b>Wheeler</b> Color: Orange</p> <p>Member: <b>Washburn</b> Color: Blue</p> <p>Member: <b>Walters</b> Color: Gold</p> <p>Member: <b>Lewis</b> Color: Gold</p>
<p><b>August 17</b></p> <p><b>10:00-10:15</b> Needs Assessment Review and Review of Structures</p> <p><b>10:15-10:30</b> Plan Your Year (Common Assessments Administered August 19-27: Writing Prompt, Orton Assessment, Math Common Assessment, CA Common Assessment and DIBELS Beginning Benchmark Assessment (Aug. 23-Aug. 27); team norms, teacher leader schedule and plan book study readings</p> <p>Refer to reading series and 7 Keys to Comprehension to determine a plan for intensifying comprehension work for students throughout the year</p>	<p><b>September 22</b></p> <p><b>1:00-2:30</b> SMART Goals and MAP/Terra Nova Review (all groups in library)</p> <p><b>2:30-3:15</b> Book Study Chapter 1: Reading for Life Chapter 2: Motion Picture of the Mind</p> <p>Key 1: Sensory Images</p>	<p><b>October 6</b></p> <p>Book Study: Chapter 3: Making Connections</p> <p>Key 2: Background Knowledge</p> <p>Instructional Strategy (literature responses, collaborative lessons, consultations, data analysis, etc.): Create a collaborative lesson on sensory images and background knowledge</p> <p>2:15-3:00 Grade Level Meetings and Sharing of Student Work</p> <p>3:00-3:15 Whole Group Reflection Time</p>	<p><b>November 10</b></p> <p>Mike Mattos</p>	<p><b>December 8</b></p> <p>Administer Common Assessments December 13-17: Writing Prompt, Orton Assessment, Math Common Assessment, DIBELS</p> <p>Book Study: Chapter 4: Why, What, Where, Who, and How</p> <p>Key 3: Questioning</p> <p>Instructional Strategy... (literature responses, collaborative lessons, consultations, data analysis, etc.): Create a collaborative lesson on questioning</p> <p>2:15-3:00 Grade Level Meetings and Sharing of Student Work</p> <p>3:00-3:15 Whole Group Reflection Time</p>
<p><b>January 3</b></p> <p>Book Study: Chapter 5: Weaving Sense into Words</p> <p>Key 4: Drawing Inferences</p> <p>Instructional Strategy... (literature responses, collaborative lessons, consultations, data analysis, etc.): Create a collaborative lesson on drawing inferences</p> <p>2:15-3:00 Grade Level Meetings and Sharing of Student Work</p> <p>3:00-3:15 Whole Group Reflection Time</p>	<p><b>February 9</b></p> <p>Book Study:: Chapter 6: What's Important and Why</p> <p>Key 5: Determining Importance</p> <p>Instructional Strategy (literature responses, collaborative lessons, consultations, data analysis, etc.): Create a collaborative lesson on determining importance</p> <p>2:15-3:00 Grade Level Meetings and Sharing of Student Work</p> <p>3:00-3:15 Whole Group Reflection Time</p>	<p><b>March 16</b></p> <p>Book Study: Chapter 6: What's Important and Why</p> <p>Key 6: Synthesizing</p> <p>Instructional Strategy (literature responses, collaborative lessons, consultations, data analysis, etc.): Create a collaborative lesson on synthesizing</p> <p>2:15-3:00 Grade Level Meetings and Sharing of Student Work</p> <p>3:00-3:15 Whole Group Reflection Time</p>	<p><b>April 13</b></p> <p>Administer Common Assessments April 25-May 6th: Writing Prompt, Orton Assessment, Math Common Assessment, DIBELS</p> <p>Book Study: Chapter 7: Cultivating Awareness</p> <p>Key 7: Fix-Up Strategies</p> <p>Instructional Strategy (literature responses, collaborative lessons, consultations, data analysis, etc.): Create a collaborative lesson on fix-up strategies</p> <p>2:15-3:00 Grade Level Meetings and Sharing of Student Work</p> <p>3:00-3:15 Whole Group Reflection Time</p>	<p><b>May 4</b></p> <p>Elementary and High School Whole Group Wrap-Up</p> <p>SMART Goal Sharing</p> <p><b>Grade Level Meeting Groups</b></p> <p>Combe, Mercer, Lewis, Nold</p> <p>Hill, Wheeler,</p> <p>Washburn, Walters, Law</p> <p>Nickell, Gilbert, Tunks</p> <p>Biondo, Duley, Valenti, Rice</p>

Appendix CC

**Implementation Continuum**

*2011-2012 Professional Development  
Communication Arts  
King City Elementary*

*3-6 Reading Textbook Decision (complete)*



*Curriculum Mapping (continuing)*



*Gap/Spiral Conversation (begins September 26)*



*Essential Outcomes (follows Gap Conversation)*



*Chunk Common Assessment/Create Benchmarks*



*Proposal (2012-2013)*



*Data Meetings (2012-2013)*

## Appendix DD

### **Agenda: Additional Collaboration Time**

#### **AGENDA – DECEMBER 7**

12:45-1:15 The Leader in Me Book Study

- Discussion of Chapter 2 and Assign Chapter 3 and Discussion Questions

1:15 – 3:00 Certified Staff Essential Outcome Work

Bring your laptops, all of your curriculum map and essential outcomes work, your patience, and your collaborative spirit!!

- We will begin a PK-6 gap conversation including the following:
  - Determination of the semantics of the essential outcomes (detailed vs. broad,) what should be on curriculum map versus part of placed on the essential outcome document, assessments for outcomes
  - Starting at PK and building upon, sharing, collaborating, discussion of determined outcomes – make additions or deletions as we build (scope and sequence)

**Please remember that the most important part of this process is the conversation, and it is a conversation that will most likely not be finished in 2 or even 4 hours. Curriculum work is an always growing/continuing process.**

#### **AGENDA – January 3**

All staff will meet in the library for our Leader In Me training from 8:30 – 3:00 (will let you know if that time changes a bit after our December 5 session). Lunch will be provided by the Leadership Team (Soups, Relish trays, etc.) Feel free to bring any leftover Christmas candy/cookies you wish to get rid of as we will be glad to help you get rid of those, I am sure!!

#### **AGENDA – JANUARY 9**

- Leader in Me Book Study – Discuss Chapter 3 and Assign Chapter 4 and Discussion Questions
- SMART Goals – 1<sup>st</sup> Semester Sharing and Writing of Second Semester Goals

## Appendix EE

### Response to Intervention Monitoring Survey

#### **Response to Intervention Services**

- 1. Do you feel students that received additional help through RTI benefited from the service? If so, what allowed for the benefit? If not, what hindered the benefit?**
- 2. After experiencing one year of trial in implementing a service to students lacking mastery on specific skills, what ideas do you have to allow for RTI to be effective for students?**
- 3. Monthly data meetings were a form of RTI. Did coming to the table with the Title I staff, monthly, to review student work and performance, benefit your instructional process? If so, why? If not, what hindered the benefit?**
- 4. After experiencing one year of trial in implementing this data analysis process, what ideas do you have to allow for such a process to be effective for teachers and students?**

## VITA

Jennee M. Gregory was born in Albany, Missouri, where she currently resides today. She received her B.S. in Elementary Education in 1997 from Northwest Missouri State University. Gregory continued her education at Northwest and completed a Master's in Educational Administration in 1999. In 2012, Gregory earned an Ed. D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri—Columbia.

Gregory began her career in education in 1997, teaching second grade and fourth grade for the King City R-I School District. She assumed the elementary principal's position in 2000, and continued serving as building principal for 8 years. Following her service with King City, Gregory accepted a principal position with the St. Joseph School District. At present time, she works as a school improvement consultant for the Northwest Missouri Regional Professional Development Center, located on the NWMSU campus. Through her consultant work, Gregory serves as a regional coordinator for the Missouri Administrator Mentoring Program and facilitator for the Missouri Satellite Leadership Academy. In addition to these roles, Gregory works with Northwest Missouri school leaders on school improvement concepts, including: (a) development and sustainability of intervention systems, (b) principles of Professional Learning Communities, (c) leadership team training, and other duties pertinent to school improvement.

In 2006, Gregory and her staff were awarded the Commissioner's Award of Excellence for Professional Development. This recognition and the opportunity to work for the Northwest Regional Professional Development Center opened the door for Gregory to present at numerous conferences on the topics of learning communities and intervention systems in today's schools. In 2007, Gregory's experiences leading high-quality professional development processes were published in a case study titled, *Coaching a Learning Team*.