

ABSTRACT OF CAPSTONE

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The Graduate School
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June 3, 2014

THE IMPACT OF FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLANNING AND
SUPPORT ON IMPROVING EDUCATORS' KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS,
PRACTICES, AND DISPOSITIONS WHEN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES

Abstract of capstone

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
At Morehead State University

By

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Morehead, Kentucky

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THE IMPACT OF FOCUSED PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PLANNING AND SUPPORT ON IMPROVING EDUCATORS' KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, PRACTICES, AND DISPOSITIONS WHEN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Focused Growth Planning and Support System (Focused GPS) was designed to support school leaders in their efforts to pinpoint effective strategies that promote the achievement of students with disabilities. The Focused-GPS process is designed to identify systemic strengths and weaknesses within the school and improve teachers' and school leaders' effectiveness based on their unique strengths and needs. The steps in the process began with the identification of achievement gaps through focused data analysis. Once the data analysis was completed, the researcher conducted observations and evaluations of the classroom experiences and supports that were provided to students with disabilities. Following the observations, the researcher prepared an analysis of root causes for achievement gaps and met with school/district leaders to report on the analysis of current data and instructional practices. During that meeting, the researcher and school/district leaders synthesized the findings, selected strategies to address identified needs, and developed focused professional development plans for school staff. Professional learning opportunities and coaching were provided based on the plans and professional development that were selected by district and school staff. The Focused GPS study was limited to two high schools, 2 district leaders, 5 school

leaders, 55 teachers and approximately 900 students. The Focused GPS study focused on improving teaching and learning practices that had resulted in 50 students with disabilities scoring below proficiency on the on-demand writing portion of the state assessment. Of the fifty students with disabilities that participated in the on-demand writing assessment, zero scored proficient or better on the assessment. These schools were placed in “Focus Status” due to gaps in achievement between students with and without disabilities in the content area of on-demand writing. Professional development in the two schools focused on strategies to improve on-demand writing responses and co-teaching methods and strategies. A model co-teaching classroom, focused on on-demand writing, was initiated at each school. The Focused-GPS System provided ongoing internal and external coaching, professional development, and resources.

KEYWORDS: focus school, achievement gap, classroom experiences, coaching, supports

Candidate Signature

Date

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DEDICATION

To my wife Teresa, critical friend, advisor, and partner on life's journey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Focused GPS System was designed by Eddy Wilder, Special Education Director-Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative. Conducting this study has been an adventure that revealed the passion, drive and commitment that educators have for the work they do and the children they serve. The teachers and administrators, at Prestonsburg High School and South Floyd High School, were actively involved in planning and implementating this project. My colleagues at the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative have been indispensable. Mary McCloud and Brenda Combs spent hours working in the schools, sharing their knowledge and expertise with the teachers and school leaders. Jeff Hawkins spent hours talking with me, encouraging and challenging my ideas, and applying his expertise from conducting his pilot study *Perpetuating Excellence in Teaching, Leadership and Learning*.

This work was greatly influenced by my many colleagues across Kentucky through their dedicated work with the Kentucky Special Education Cooperative Network. Support from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) was critical and greatly influenced the design of the support model. Toyah Robey led the state design team in the development of the *Co-Teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC)* Initiative, one of the key interventions chosen by both schools involved in this study.

As a member of Morehead State University's (MSU) Doctoral program, I have benefitted from opportunities to hear from many proven educational leaders, collaborate with a brilliant group of doctoral candidates and receive wonderful support and guidance from the MSU faculty.

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Chapter 1

Executive Summary

Table 1

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| <p>FOCUSED GPS Conceptual Framework <i>Focused Growth Planning and Support System</i></p> |
| <p>Goal:</p> <p>To provide school and district leadership with a system to improve educators’ knowledge, skills and dispositions to enhance the achievement of students with disabilities.</p> |
| <p>Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess system effectiveness with specific focus on the Special Education Program (SWOT Analysis) • Collaborative planning to integrate findings into school plans • Educators commitment to the plan • Professional Learning Opportunities and supports provided to educators • To provide coaching for educators based on follow-up observations and data analysis |
| <p>Expected Outcomes:</p> <p>School: Exit “Focus Status” and continue systemic improvement initiatives in the following years</p> <p>Educators: Increase knowledge of effective strategies and practices to support student learning, skills to implement those strategies effectively, and dispositions to ensure that students with disabilities are engaged in learning</p> <p>Students with Disabilities: Increase attention, engagement and achievement</p> |

What is the core of the capstone?

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) recently charged the Kentucky Association of Education Cooperatives (KAEC) across the Commonwealth to provide support to the Focus Schools that were identified in their respective regions. The KDE provided each regional cooperative with a list of focus schools, within their borders, to support in their efforts to close achievement gaps by improving academic outcomes for the subgroup identified to have an achievement gap. The Focused Growth Planning and Support System (Focused GPS) was developed in response to school and district needs for a systemic approach to close achievement gaps for their students with disabilities. The Focused GPS System was developed to evaluate system effectiveness with specific focus on the current status of the school's special education system. This evaluation consists of an examination of the programs, supports, and interventions that are available to students with disabilities by conducting school and classroom observations. The Focused GPS System was developed specifically to address achievement gaps for the students with disabilities subgroup through a school-wide approach to systemic program improvement. The Focused GPS System included identifying the root causes for achievement gaps through a combination of data analysis, school and classroom observations and teacher surveys. Once root causes were identified, the researcher and school administrators developed a plan with specific interventions and supports focused on improving instructional practices that lead to improved academic outcomes for students with disabilities. Those plans

were incorporated into the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) in a 30/60/90 day planning format. Updating the CSIP to address achievement gaps is a state requirement for schools that receive the designation of Focus School in Kentucky.

In today's global economy, students graduating from America's schools will have to compete for employment with graduates from around the globe. Often, educators find themselves in a state of confusion due to continuous changes in expectations that are slow to trickle down to the classroom level. This confusion is exacerbated by a flood of new requirements placed on educators through high stakes accountability, ever-increasing standards for student achievement, and new college and career readiness standards with emphasis on twenty-first century skills. In the context of these rapid changes in expectations for all students, students with disabilities often get lost, overlooked, and left behind.

Educators in schools across Kentucky persistently seek new and better ways to prepare students for post-school success. However, attempting to find new and better ways to educate students presents great challenges for educators. There is so much data and information available, that it is hard to sort out the useful data or select effective strategies. In this context, it is easy to see why so many school leaders buy-in to programs touting research and promising quick fix solutions for better test scores over the hard work, time, and intense planning required to develop their teachers or improve their overall systems. This is even more difficult when

you throw in the diverse range of knowledge and skills teachers need to educate students with disabilities to proficiency. The Focused GPS System is a framework to guide and assist school leaders to make informed decisions about the professional development needs of their teachers that work with students with disabilities.

The Focused GPS System study was carried out in southeast Kentucky. This region of the state, rural Appalachia, has traditionally had some of the lowest per-capita income levels in America and has recently seen a great exodus of coal mining jobs, some of the best paying jobs in the region. In fact, Congressman Hal Rogers reported in August 2013 that the area had lost more than 6,000 mining jobs. This adds to the despair and hopelessness that many in the area are feeling, compounding the challenges that educators already face. The coal mining jobs, that many of the students aspired to, are rapidly leaving the area and hopes to find work in the traditional coal related job fields (e.g., truck driver, logger, sawmill worker, etc....) have been greatly diminished.

The Focused GPS system was developed in response to school and district needs for guidance to close achievement gaps for students with disabilities. The Focused GPS study was conducted in two high schools in rural Appalachia that were designated as Focus Schools, by the Kentucky Department of Education, due to gaps in writing achievement for students with disabilities when compared to their non-disabled peers. “With the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), all students, including those with learning disabilities (LD), will have increased expectations in English Language Arts (ELA) and content area

literacy” (Straub & Alias, 2013). When provided with effective supports and specially designed instruction, students with disabilities have a greater likelihood of school success and a more promising future, a future that includes higher levels of academic achievement and, ultimately, competitive employment. These are financially challenging times for Americans, Kentuckians, and especially hard hit by the economic downturn, are the families and children of rural Appalachia where this study was conducted. These circumstances increase the pressure on schools, in this poverty-ridden area, to provide all students with an education that will prepare them for college or to compete for a career in the global job market.

National and state politicians push on education agencies, with greater and greater force and persistence, to hold teachers accountable for the success of their students. In response to these pressures, the Kentucky Department of Education, like education departments across the country, constantly attempt to improve, advance, and change data systems to become ever more focused on teacher effectiveness and on groups of students that lag behind their peers on state required assessments.

The recently developed Teacher Professional Growth Effectiveness System (TPGES), in Kentucky, uses multiple measures to determine teacher growth and effectiveness. “The TPGES is based on the work of Charlotte Danielson, and is much more user friendly and effective than teacher evaluation systems of the past” (quote from Jennifer Carroll, KVEC Regional PGES Coordinator, Feb. 21, 2014). The work to prepare principals for the TPGES has been estimated to take around forty hours. Today’s school leaders are so inundated with change that it is difficult

for them to make the informed decisions that lead to real improvements in their schools.

In Kentucky, schools are classified as either distinguished, proficient, or needs improvement. This classification is based on their percentile rank in the state (see Table 2). The harsh reality of this classification system is that seventy percent of the schools and districts in Kentucky will always be classified as operating below the proficient level and in need of improvement.

Table 2

Classification¹

- Distinguished school/district scores from the 90th to 99th percentile in the state.
- Proficient school/district scores from the 70th to 89th percentile in the state.
- Needs Improvement school/district scores below the 70th percentile in the state.
- Progressing School/District has met its AMO, participation rate for the all students group and each subgroup, and has met its graduation rate goal.

Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.
<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

Schools and districts are also ranked by rewards and assistance categories that include school or district of distinction, high performing school or district, high progress school or district, progressing school or district, focus school or focus district (see Table 3).

Table 3**Rewards and Assistance Category²**

- School/District of Distinction scores from the 95th to 99th percentile, has met its current year AMO, meets student participation rate and the graduation rate is above 60. In addition, the school/district cannot be labeled as Priority or Focus.
- High Performing School/District scores from the 90th to the 94th percentile in the state, has met its current year AMO, meets student participation rate and the graduation rate is above 60. In addition, the school/district cannot be labeled as Priority or Focus.
- High Progress School/District has met its current year AMO, participation rate and graduation rate, has a graduation rate above 60 for the prior two years and has an improvement score indicating the school/district is in the top 10 percent of improvement.
- Progressing School/District has met its AMO, participation rate for the all students group and each subgroup, and has met its graduation rate goal.
- Priority School is a school that was identified as a Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) school.
- Focus School has a non-duplicated gap group score in the bottom 10% of the state, has an individual group of students scoring significantly low or has a graduation rate less than 60 for two consecutive years. Focus schools were identified based on the 2011-12 data and the label of Focus has been carried forward into the 2012-13 reporting.
- Focus District has a non-duplicated gap group score in the bottom 10% for all districts. Focus districts are identified based on data annually. Current identification is based on 2012-13 data.

Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.
<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

Students with disabilities, as a subgroup, are consistently outperformed on state required assessments by their nondisabled peers. These gaps in performance are captured in the state data system and used to guide school efforts on closing those gaps. Schools may be identified as “Focus Schools” if one of their subgroup populations performs poorly on one of the academic areas of the state assessment (see table 4).

Table 4

Schools with an individual student subgroup within assessment grades by level with a score in the third (3rd) standard deviation below the state average for all students.

Subgroups populations are: African American, Hispanic, Native American, Students with Disabilities, Poverty, and Limited English Proficiency.

Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.

<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

The Focused Growth Planning and Support System (Focused-GPS) was designed to support school leaders in their efforts to pinpoint effective strategies that promote the achievement of students with disabilities (see Table 5). The steps include identifying achievement gaps through focused data analysis, providing observations and evaluations of the classroom experiences and supports that are provided to students with disabilities, identifying the root causes for achievement gaps, reporting of findings and recommendations to school leadership to focus school planning, and providing focused professional development and on-going coaching based on the plans and interventions selected by district and school staff.

Table 5

| |
|---|
| The Focused GPS improvement system consists of seven action steps: |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. School Identification and Selection2. School Data Analysis3. School and Special Education Program Observations by the researcher (SWOT Analysis)4. Data synthesis and written report of findings5. Collaborative planning with school and district leadership to discuss findings and select intervention methods to integrate findings into school plans6. Professional Learning Opportunities and supports provided to educators7. Maintaining intentional focus on student growth through on-going support for educators based on follow-up observations and on-going data analysis |

Step 1: School Identification and Selection

As part of step 1, schools were identified by the Kentucky Department of Education as a school in “focus status”. On December 12, 2012 the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative hosted a Focus School Summit. At this summit, numerous evidence-based and promising practices were presented, that KVEC staff would support, as options school teams could select. After being presented with those options, the two schools in this study self-selected as participants in the Focused GPS process to close achievement gaps for students’ with disabilities, in the area of on-demand writing.

Step 2: School Data Analysis

During step 2, the researcher, district leadership, and the school leadership team met, analyzed, and discussed the school data from the school report card to assist in determining the root causes that led to the school's focus status due to gaps in achievement for students with disabilities (see Appendix A- School/District Investigative Questions & Root Cause Analysis -adapted from KDE Guidance Document). Upon completion of the root cause analysis, the discussion shifted to an overview of the observation instrument (see Appendix B) and the process used to conduct the observations. Information from the root cause analysis was used to focus the upcoming observations and to personalize the observation instrument that would be used by the researcher. Upon completion of these discussions, the group scheduled dates for the school and classroom observations to occur. School leaders provided the researcher with a map of the school with teachers' room numbers, schedules, and subjects taught. The researcher utilized this information to plan and schedule observations.

Step 3: Special Education Program Observations by the Researcher (SWOT)

Step 3 of the Focused GPS system consists of a thirty-minute observation in all classrooms that teach core content classes. All core content classrooms are observed to look for common practices that occur across the school system and to observe for best practice items included on the observation instrument. The observation instrument includes fifteen specific "look for" items that the researcher marks either yes or no if the practice is observed or not. The fifteen areas are: IEP

Goals Available; Accommodations/Interventions Provided; Collaboration/Co-teaching; Technology/AT Available; Standards Posted (Target/“I Can” statement aligned with KCAS); High Expectations (Empathy/Sympathy); Lesson Plans Available; Lesson Plan Being Taught; Scaffolding (Step-by-Step); Formative Understanding Checks; Engagement and Attention (Random Selection); Models/Exemplars (Studied in Pairs); Questioning for Critical Thinking; Assessment of Impact; and Instructional Adjustments. The observation instrument also provides an area for additional notes for each “look for” item. In addition, if co-teaching is observed, the researcher has a list of six co-teaching methods (i.e., one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; alternative teaching; parallel teaching; station teaching; and teaming approach) that were identified by Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010).

The observation instrument provides space to document the researcher’s conclusions from the observations of the teacher, the student, and the classroom. Each of these areas contains specific “look for” items. Specific “look for” items for the teacher were adapted from the Characteristics of Highly Effective Teaching and Learning document <http://education.ky.gov/curriculum/docs/Pages/Characteristics-of-Highly-Effective-Teaching-and-Learning-%28CHETL%29.aspx>). The characteristics are: knowledge of the content; instructional rigor and student engagement; instructional relevance; learning climate; and classroom assessment and reflection. Each area is checked yes or no, if observed or not observed. Specific “look for” items for the students were adapted from Schlecty’s work on student engagement. Schlecty

(2011) identified five levels of student engagement: authentic engagement, strategic compliance, ritual compliance, retreatism, and rebellion. For this area, the researcher captures the number of students that fall into each category. The conclusions from the classroom observation are broken into three categories that are measures of the overall learning climate. They are: highly engaged classroom, well managed classroom, and out of control classroom. During the observations, the researcher makes notes of the strengths (e.g., teacher talents, exceptional strategies), weaknesses (e.g., lack of pedagogical skill, rigor, classroom management), opportunities (missing elements that could dramatically improve teaching and learning), and threats (e.g., lack of preparation, failing to intervene with students, when needed) observed in each classroom.

Step 4: Data synthesis and written report of findings

Step 4 involves a synthesis of the data and information available from school and classroom observations. The researcher records the number of yes and no responses for each of the first 15 items and reports on the systemic strengths (e.g., 13 of 15 classrooms had “I can” statements posted), weaknesses (e.g., Co-teaching was observed in only 2 classes and the only method used was one teach, one observe), opportunities (e.g., students would benefit from formative assessment designed to give them ownership of their own learning), and threats observed (e.g., no co-teaching was observed over the course of the day). The researcher also identifies specific strengths of each teacher observed as part of the report (e.g., Ms. A: Use of

peer supports, scaffolding lessons, use of technology-amplification system, use of cell phone for random selection, student grouping-Group A teach Group B, and questioning strategies; Mr. B: Use of 21st Century Learning Skills-Critical thinking and problem solving, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity and innovation, Use of Random Selection and teaching students to defend their answers in a fun and positive learning environment that celebrates student learning; Ms. C- Demonstrates professionalism, formative assessment, and student groupings to study in pairs; Ms. D: Connecting the lesson to the “I can” statement, Stagecraft-Modeled highly expressive reading, used open-ended questioning strategies to enhance critical thinking, and demonstrated content knowledge, rigor, engagement, relevance and learning climate).

Step 5: Collaborative planning with school and district leadership to discuss findings and select intervention methods to integrate findings into school plans

In step 5, the researcher meets with school and district leadership to discuss findings and select intervention methods to integrate findings into school plans. In Kentucky, schools in focus status are required to update their Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIP) to include strategies to address the gap content area and subgroup population that led to the school being identified as a focus school. The researcher provides a copy of the written report to each member and reviews the findings with school and district leadership for discussion of the validity of the findings and to ensure that systemic practices were not overlooked or misinterpreted

by the researcher. The discussions focused primarily on opportunities for systemic improvement. After discussing findings, the researcher conducts an overview of research based on promising practices that could be adopted to address systemic issues that led to the achievement gap at the school. Then the school leadership team chooses strategies they determine to be the most feasible to address their specific needs and includes them in their CSIP. At the end of this meeting, a professional development plan and calendar was developed.

Step 6: Professional Learning Opportunities and supports provided to educators

In step 6, professional development is provided. For this study, both high schools were designated as focus schools due to achievement gaps for students with disabilities in the content area of on-demand writing. Both schools chose to have select staff trained in on-demand writing strategies and to participate in the Co-teaching for Gap Closure Initiative (CT4GC), with training provided by the Kentucky Department of Education and external coaching provided by staff trained in the CT4GC initiative at the Kentucky Valley Special Education Cooperative. Each school applied to the Kentucky Department of Education to take part in the CT4GC Initiative. A school team of co-teachers was selected and committed to the initial three-day training, along with one internal coach from the school and two external coaches provided by the Kentucky Valley Special Education Cooperative.

Step 7: Maintaining intentional focus on student growth through on-going support for educators based on follow-up observations and on-going data analysis

In Step 7, monthly observations of the co-taught classrooms by the external coaches were conducted. Coaching and debriefing sessions were provided immediately following the observations. Two external coaches were assigned to work with the co-teaching team. The researcher conducted follow-up observations on a quarterly basis to assess systemic improvement or slippage. Data from follow-up observations was reviewed and shared with the leadership teams. After the first year of implementation, summative data from the state assessment was reviewed and compared to the prior year baseline assessment data to measure efficacy of the Focused GPS system to guide school and district leaders in their selection of effective strategies to close achievement gaps.

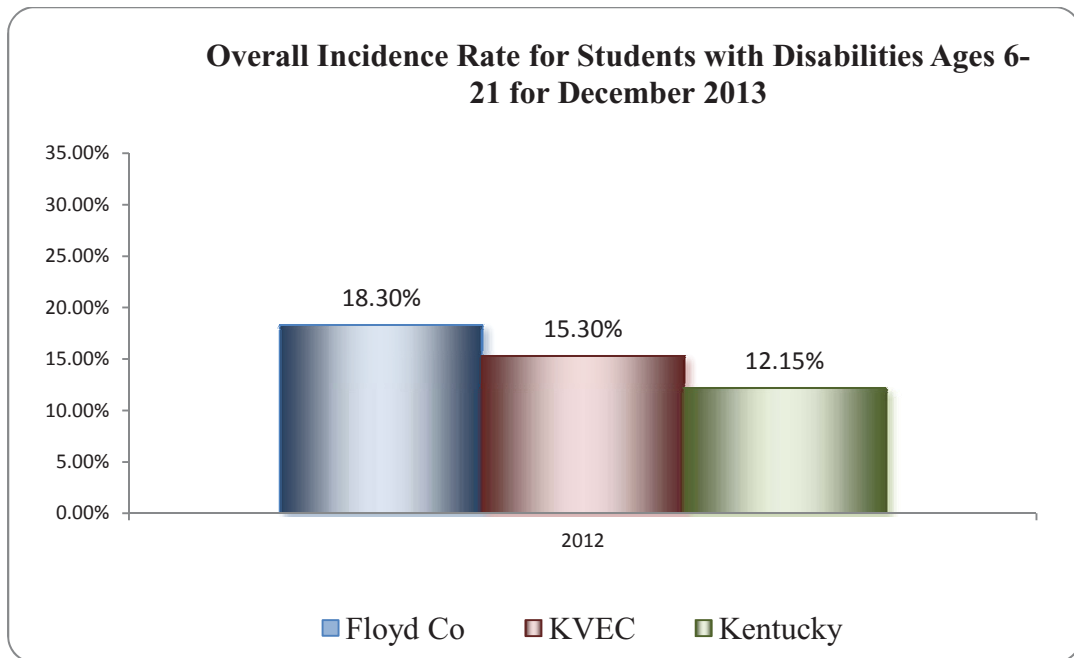
Who is the capstone meant to impact?

This study examined the impact of using a coordinated system for teacher professional growth on the educational outcomes of student with disabilities. The Focused GPS System impacted school administrators, teachers and students in the two high schools, South Floyd High School and Prestonsburg High School, both designated as Focus Schools that self-selected to participate in the study. Both schools were designated as Focus Schools due to achievement gaps between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in the area of on-demand writing. This is a content area that many high schools across Kentucky are attempting to improve. According to Straub and Alais (2013), “the standards provide an increasing ladder of complexity, which emphasizes the use of text as a reference and resource for writing compositions. Teachers will have a shared responsibility for incorporating increased writing instruction into their lessons, so that students receive increased exposure to writing tasks.”

Closing achievement gaps is especially challenging for schools in rural Appalachia, where this study was conducted. Compared to other areas across the state, schools in the Kentucky Valley Special Education Cooperative region and Floyd County have a higher incidence rate of students with disabilities (see chart 1) and a much higher incidence rate of students with intellectual disabilities (see charts 2 & 3). Teachers’ “expectations are low for students with mental retardation” Odom, et al (2005). Students that present with lower Intelligence Quotients (I.Q.) typically require more time, more repetitions, and more practice through a variety of input and

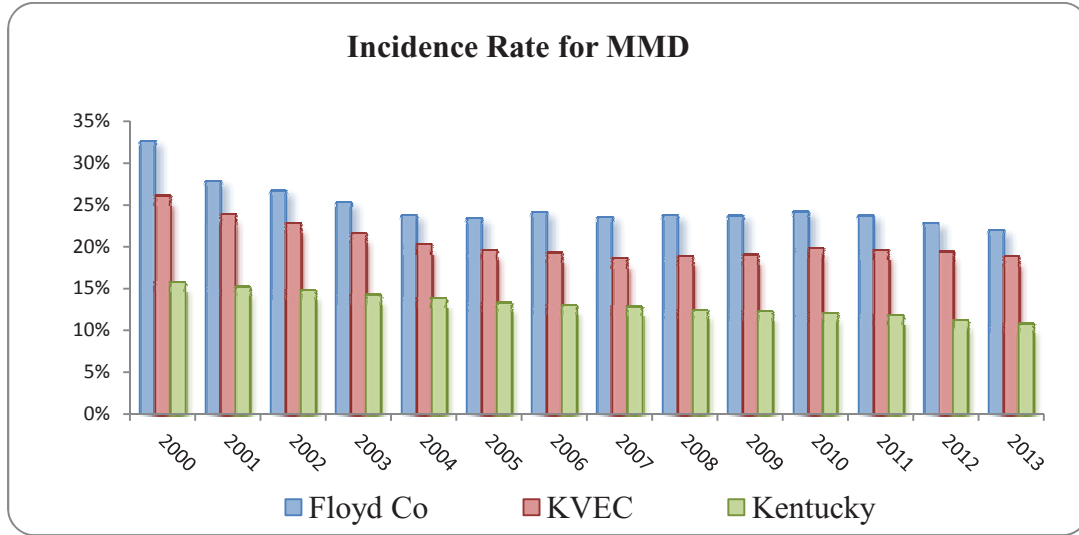
output modalities before they are able to master learning tasks, when compared to their non-disabled peers. In Kentucky, students with intellectual disabilities are classified as Mild Mental Disability if their I.Q. falls within the 55 to 70 I.Q. range and Functional Mental Disability if their I.Q. is 55 or lower.

Chart 1



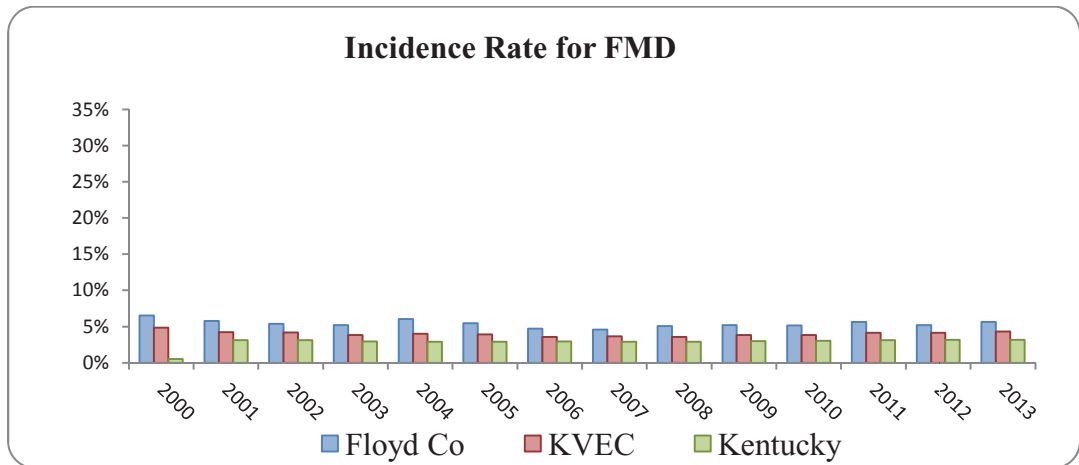
Data Source: IDEA-B, Dec. 1 Child Count

Chart 2



Data Source: IDEA-B, Dec. 1 Child Count

Chart 3



Data Source: IDEA-B, Dec. 1 Child Count

The two schools that self-selected to participate in this study are Prestonsburg High School and South Floyd High School. Prestonsburg High School has 33 teachers and serves approximately 600 students. South Floyd High School serves

around 300 students with 23 teachers. Both schools were classified as focus schools due to gaps in achievement for students with disabilities in the content area of on-demand writing.

Fuchs and Fuchs (1993) discuss “general education’s lack of will and capacity to accommodate all of its students. General Education must be fortified through fundamental changes in its teaching and learning processes. It must draw on the talents and energies of building-based special educators, Chapter 1, and bilingual teachers, and other professionals working with general educators to fashion a smarter, more supple, coordinated school program responsive to fast and slow learners alike.” One function of the Focused GPS System is to guide school leaders to take advantage of the strengths and talents of educators within their building to support and coach new, novice or struggling staff.

A major focus of this study was on developing a model co-teaching classroom that utilized multiple co-teaching methods and strategies to teach writing skills. A model co-teaching classroom was set up in each school. The model classroom was selected by considering the content area based on gap data that resulted in focus status and observation data collected during the Focused GPS process. Co-teaching teams were selected at each school, internal coaches were chosen by school principals, and an external coach was provided to each school by the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative (KVEC) leadership team. The Focused GPS study was designed to impact Floyd County district leaders that work to support the staff and students at Prestonsburg High School and South Floyd High School. It was also designed to

impact school leaders at both schools, the teachers, and all students, including those with disabilities.

How/When was the capstone project implemented?

The Focused GPS project began on December 12, 2012 with a Focus School summit that was hosted by the KVEC. Select staff from seventeen schools in the KVEC service area attended the summit. The summit included presentations of numerous evidence-based options and promising practices that schools could select from based on their identified needs. The two high schools in this study voluntarily self-selected the Focused GPS System to support their efforts in closing achievement gaps.

Once the schools were selected, school administrators were briefed concerning the components of the Focused GPS System and the actions necessary for the data collection component. The selected schools were worked with on an individual basis. The process began first at South Floyd High School and then at Prestonsburg High School, with a visit to each school by the researcher. During these visits, the researcher and the school leadership team conducted an analysis of school-level data from the school report card to focus the team on the specific reason(s) for the school's focus status and to develop a schedule for the researcher to conduct school and classroom observations to shed light on the effectiveness of the programming and instruction available to students with disabilities (see Appendix A – School/District Investigative Questions and Root Cause Analysis). Initial observations were conducted at South Floyd High School during the month of January, 2013 and at Prestonsburg High School from the end of January into early February, 2013 to gather baseline data and determine next steps (see Appendix B –

KVEC Classroom Observation Instrument and SWOT Analysis Tool). The researcher observed all content area classrooms within the school. The overall focus of the observations were guided by the schools need to improve writing instruction delivered to students with disabilities. The researcher observed the teaching practices used, the classroom experiences the students received, their response to those experiences, and the teachers' interactions with the students based on their responses. Upon completion of the observations, the researcher prepared a written report of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) associated with the overall system and the special education program. A list of evidence based options for program improvement was developed from the synthesis of the findings from the observations.

The researcher met back with the school leadership team and provided an oral summary of the findings, reviewing the written report, and discussed professional growth options to address the findings. Once a school has been identified as a focus school, they remain in that status for at least two years. The leaders at both schools were interested in strategies and practices that provide quick turnaround and make lasting improvements. While they wanted their schools to exit focus status, as quickly as possible, they also wanted to make the commitment to continuous school improvements that benefit all students. The school leadership teams selected Co-Teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC), a KDE initiative supported by the KVEC, to address the achievement gap for students with disabilities in on-demand writing.

The CT4GC Initiative requires a high level of commitment from the school team and provides intensive coaching and support to the co-teachers and the internal coach from the school. Real, long term improvement requires commitment, drive and persistence. The school leadership team incorporated a goal to close the achievement gap into their Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP). Professional development and follow-up activities were conducted throughout the process. Co-Teaching Teams were observed monthly to determine fidelity of implementation of the CT4GC initiative. The calendar below (Table 6) summarizes the Focused GPS implementation timeline.

TABLE 6**Focused GPS Implementation Calendar:**

Nov. 2012 – There were two hundred eighty-five schools in Kentucky were designated by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) as Focus Schools. Seventeen Focus Schools and one Focus District were identified in the KVEC region.

Dec. 12, 2012 – The Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative hosted a summit for Focus Schools. Schools self-select for participation. Two high schools self-selected the Focused-GPS System to support their efforts to close achievement gaps.

Jan., 2012 – School leadership and the researcher conduct data analysis.

Jan./Feb., 2013 – The researcher conducted school and classroom effectiveness observations and develops written reports on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT Analysis) observed in the school and classrooms.

Feb./March, 2013 – The researcher met with school and district leadership to report and discuss findings from the SWOT analysis and the school report card data. School leadership incorporated these findings into their Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIP) and selected appropriate strategies and professional development to address the specific needs of their staff and students.

April-Nov., 2013 – Professional development, coaching and fidelity checks were conducted in alignment with the CSIPs.

Nov., 2013 – Conduct analysis of school achievement data to measure progress over the first year of implementation.

Dec., 2013 – Survey of school personnel involved in the study. External coaches and school personnel develop plans based on the data from surveys and recently released achievement data from KDE.

Why were this capstone and related strategies selected?

Administrators in schools that received the designation of “Focus School” were required to update their Comprehensive School Improvement Plans to include a goal to address the gap that led to that status. The Focused GPS System was selected as a Capstone Project to address the needs of district and school administrators looking for solutions to close achievement gaps for students with disabilities. This project incorporates strategies that have been developed and revised over the last decade to intensify the focus on achievement gaps and accelerate student learning. This work, conducted by leadership and staff of the Kentucky Valley Special Education Cooperative (KVSEC), focused on improving outcomes for students with disabilities in southeast Kentucky through focused professional development guided by formative and summative data, root cause analysis, surveys, observations, coaching, and discussions with school and district staff.

When school administrators received their school report cards, they began scrambling to understand why they were in focus status and to find strategies and solutions with the potential to close the achievement gap for their students with disabilities. In several cases, the schools designated as Focus were otherwise high performing schools and were stunned when they received the designation of focus status. School administrators were unfamiliar with the new formula and cut scores that the KDE used to sort and classify schools (see Table 7). Kentucky’s new Assessment and Accountability System caught them off guard and ill prepared to make meaningful, focused improvements. An examination of the focus school cut

scores for the high school level indicate that a high school can only be identified as focus if either their overall achievement scores are 19.7% proficiency or lower; proficiency scores for any subgroup category on the state assessment are 9% or lower for Reading, 5% or lower for Writing, or 12.4% or lower for Language Mechanics. Math, Science, and Social Studies cut scores were all set at 0% proficiency at the high school level, so high schools could not be considered focus schools in any of these content areas in the 2011-12 school year.

Table 7**Focus School Cut Scores by School Type and Content Area: 2011-12**

| Type of Focus | Elementary | Middle | High | District |
|---|-------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Focus 10% Cut-Point (Non-Duplicated Gap Group) - Schools | 29.5 | 28.1 | 19.7 | n/a |
| Focus 10% Cut-Point (Non-Duplicated Gap Group) - Districts | n/a | n/a | n/a | 29.7 |
| Reading - Third Standard Deviation Applied Cut-Point | 11.0 | 12.1 | 9.0 | n/a |
| Mathematics - Third Standard Deviation Applied Cut-Point | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | n/a |
| Science - Third Standard Deviation Applied Cut-Point | 22.8 | 21.2 | 0.0 | n/a |
| Social Studies - Third Standard Deviation Applied Cut-Point | 10.1 | 13.3 | 0.0 | n/a |
| Writing - Third Standard Deviation Applied Cut-Point | 0.0 | 0.0 | 5.0 | n/a |
| Language Mechanics - Third Standard Deviation Applied Cut-Point | 2.4 | 0.4 | 12.4 | n/a |

The Focused GPS tools (i.e., observation instruments, root cause analysis guidance documents, survey instrument) have been developed over the last ten years to assist school and district leadership in evaluating the effectiveness of their special education programs and focused their systemic improvement efforts.

The Focused GPS System was designed to measure the overall effectiveness of the special education program in a school. “One of the major obstacles to empirical investigations of quality in organizations is the difficulty in defining what quality is. One defining framework that is widely accepted in for-profit organizations is the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award framework“(Winn and Cameron, 1998). Ford and Evans (2000), examined “seven key areas that make up the Baldrige Quality Assessment: (1) Leadership; (2) Information and analysis; (3) Strategic quality planning; (4) Human resource development and management; (5) Management of process quality; (6) Quality and operational results; and (7) Customer focus and satisfaction.” These seven key areas, taken together, form the system and provide the school leader with the ability to break the system into identifiable, assessable, and manageable parts. The Focused GPS System was used to evaluate the special education program utilizing the seven key areas identified in the Baldrige system with the primary focus on the academic outcomes for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities received their instruction and services, primarily, in general education classrooms in both high schools involved in this study. Many school and district leaders, naturally, look to blame the special education director or

special education teachers when achievement scores are low for the special education subgroup. However, with most students with disabilities (80% or greater in most schools) receiving their instruction in the general education setting, the blame can only be placed on the lack of effective instruction and supports for these students in these settings.

Both leadership teams were encouraged to apply to participate in the Co-teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC) initiative as the primary strategy to improve teachers' knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions for working with students with disabilities and closing the achievement gap. Both schools applied and were accepted into the Co-teaching for Gap Closure Initiative. Co-teaching training was provided by the Kentucky Department of Education as part of the Co-teaching for Gap Closure Initiative. Co-teaching teams (i.e., one general educator, one special educator, and an internal coach from the school) attended trainings along with the external coaches from the Kentucky Valley Special Education Cooperative. The teams of educators were selected based on their individual strengths observed during the initial observations and because they co-taught writing classes in the assessed grade level. The co-taught writing classes were developed into model co-teaching classrooms through the CT4GC Initiative. These model classrooms received continuous coaching from the internal coaches and monthly fidelity checks and coaching visits from the external coaches. Professional development was provided throughout the year based on the CT4GC Initiative and the teachers' unique needs. These strategies were selected by school leadership to address the specific growth needs of their staff

to meet the challenge of increasing the academic achievement of their students with disabilities to close achievement gaps and, ultimately, exiting Focus School status.

Impact of the capstone

The goal of Focused GPS was to close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers by increasing achievement for all students, including students with disabilities. The Focused GPS introduced a systemic process to school staff to build educators' capacity to make continuous systemic improvements and raise expectations for their students with disabilities. School report cards were made available and schools were informed of their Focus Status in November 2012. The Focused GPS System study began in December 2012, was implemented for the remainder of the 2012-13 school year, and will conclude in the spring of the 2013-14 school year.

The two schools involved in this study increased overall student achievement dramatically. At the beginning of this study, Prestonsburg High School ranked in the eighteenth percentile and South Floyd High School ranked in the twenty-ninth percentile when compared to all high schools across the Commonwealth. After the first year of the study, Prestonsburg High increased their overall percentile rank from the eighteenth to the seventy-fourth percentile and South Floyd increased from the twenty-ninth to the forty-first percentile (see Table 8).

Table 8**Kentucky High School Percentile Ranks**

| School | 2011-12 | 2012-13 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| South Floyd High | 29 th Percentile | 41 st Percentile |
| Prestonsburg High | 18 th Percentile | 74 th Percentile |

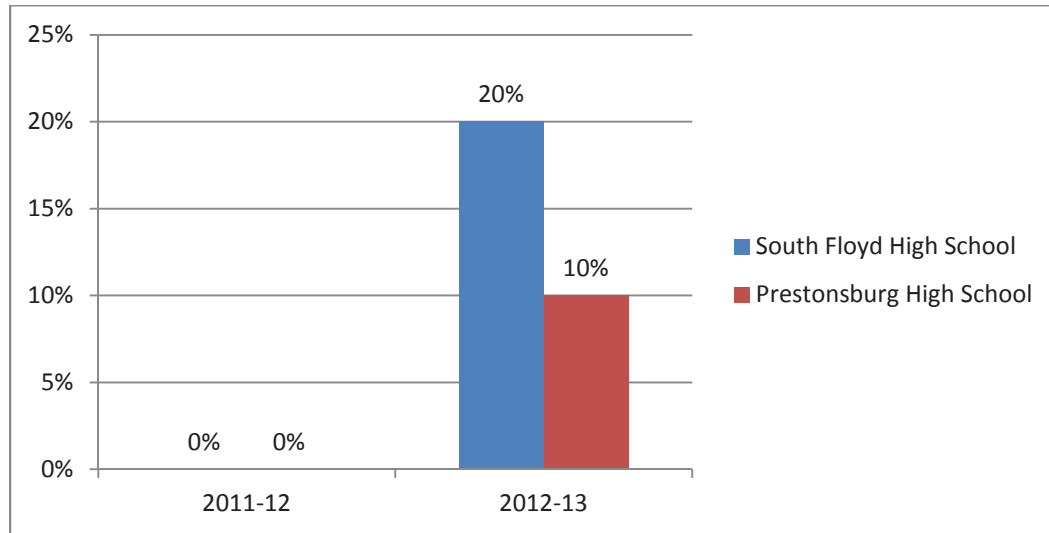
Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.

<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

When examining the achievement scores for students with disabilities on the on-demand writing portion of the state assessment, students at Prestonsburg High increased achievement from 0.0 percent of their students with disabilities scoring proficient or better in the 2011-12 school year to 10.0 percent scoring proficient or better in 2012-13. South Floyd students increased proficiency from 0.0 percent of students with disabilities scoring proficient or better in 2011-12 to 20.0 percent scoring proficient or better in 2012-13 (see chart 4).

Chart 4

Percent of Students with Disabilities Scoring Proficient or Distinguished in Writing



Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.
<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

Participants in the Focused GPS initiative were surveyed in December 2013 to assess the impact of the professional development provided over the last year on expected outcomes and client satisfaction (collecting quantitative and qualitative data). The survey was sent to 56 teachers, 2 principals and 2 assistant principals involved in the study (see Appendix-C). 24 participants responded for a 40% response rate. Responses from the survey mirrored the researcher's findings from previous observations, interviews and discussions with school and staff.

Limitations of the study

The Focused GPS System is limited to two high schools that received a designation of Focus School status due to achievement gaps between students with and students without disabilities in the area of on-demand writing. Both of these high schools are located in rural Appalachia. These schools were about twenty miles apart and both schools chose to receive the same professional development for on-demand writing.

Reflections

Over the last few years, there has been heightened focus on subgroups of students that fail to achieve to the level of their peers. Data systems have been developed to sort out specific subgroups for comparison and public reporting. These practices have driven school leaders to seek new and better ways to educate students that fall into those subgroups. Historically, students with disabilities have proven to be among the most difficult and complex of the subgroups to move to proficiency, to make meaningful gains with, to close achievement gaps with, or to educate to the level of their peers.

The experiences gained during this project clearly supports the effectiveness of the Focused GPS System to guide and focus administrators as they develop professional growth opportunities for their teachers that will impact student learning and close achievement gaps and address systemic issues. Though teachers were initially hesitant to accept outside support, they quickly came to realize that the Focused GPS system was not a punitive measure that focused on their individual inadequacies. Instead, evaluations and observations focused on the strengths and weaknesses (or missing pieces) of the system and not on the blaming of individuals. The key to the success of this system was the buy-in and commitment of everyone involved (i.e., district leadership, school leadership, co-teachers, internal and external coaches). The Focused GPS system was designed to identify current practices that could be improved and nudge the system forward based on the findings. The Focused GPS System has yielded much useful information for future study and

implementation. The work will continue with these two schools but they are rapidly becoming experts at focusing on systems improvement and the implementation of meaningful strategies that lead to increased student engagement and learning.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The Focused Growth Planning and Support System study examined the impact of using a focused system for teacher professional growth based on the combined analysis of the current services delivered to student with disabilities and their most recent performance data from the state assessment. As discussed in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the charge for educators is to ensure that “all children will have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to receive a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state assessments” (Cawthon, 2007). Since the enactment of NCLB, both general and special educators have come to realize that students with disabilities require more than simply focusing on functional skills in a resource room or just placing them in a general education classroom without differentiated supports. Both of these strategies are widely used but rarely equate to a high quality education for students with disabilities, an education that will enable them to reach proficiency on the state assessment, especially, with today’s rigorous standards.

Students with disabilities, as a subgroup, are consistently outperformed on state required assessments by their nondisabled peers. Under the NCLB mandates, gaps in performance are captured in the state data system and used to guide school efforts to close those gaps. While some of the gap in performance can be attributed to the nature of the students’ disabilities, much can be attributed to inconsistent and ineffective service delivery due to low expectations for students or too much

dependence on testing accommodations. In a study of Kentucky testing accommodations, Koretz and Hamilton (1999) reported “several possible problems with the use of accommodations, including apparently excessive use of certain accommodations, implausibly high scores for students assessed with certain accommodations, and considerable DIF (i.e., differential item functioning) for the majority of disabled students who were assessed with accommodations.” Many educators respond to students’ learning needs by giving them more of the same instruction. This repetitious, mind numbing approach to teaching and learning has led many well intentioned educators to leave the field of special education, citing burnout as the reason for their departure.

Kaufman and Ring (2011) examined the reasons for the low retention rates of special educators. Their research illustrates that special educator attrition is a product of the lack of professional development designed to prepare special educators for today’s diverse learners. Their research suggests that professional development should focus on the tasks and challenges that special educators face on a daily basis. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) examined comprehensive teacher induction programs as a means improve teacher retention. Their findings suggest that teacher induction programs could potentially improve teacher retention, that is, if they don’t rely solely on mentors. The Focused GPS System takes the guesswork out of decision making by guiding school and district administrators to make informed decisions based on the most current data and information available. Information that includes systemic and

instructional strengths and weaknesses, guides administrators' selection of school-wide strategies, and personalized planning to close achievement gaps.

Often, students with disabilities require differentiated instruction that focuses on their current knowledge, abilities or their preferred learning styles. While many teachers realize the need to personalize and differentiate instruction for students with disabilities, many fail to accommodate or modify their lessons to meet the unique needs of their students with disabilities. For numerous reasons, many teachers seem to be set in their ways and unwilling to try new strategies.

Elik, Weiner, and Corkum (2010) studied 274 pre-service teachers' attitudes toward students with learning and behavioral disorders and the factors that predict their attitudes. Their study found that teachers' dispositions of open-mindedness and willingness to learn about students with learning and behavioral disabilities determined whether the teacher would respond by differentiating instruction or by punishing the students. Thornton (2006)' examined teacher quality through the lens of teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions and the trend of professional organizations, like the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBTPS), and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), to include teacher dispositions in their teacher standards. Similarly, Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, and Woods (2010) examined the NCATE standards and the relationship between the personal values and dispositions of teacher candidates and successful

teachers. Results of their study showed significant relationships between values and dispositions of teacher candidates and successful teachers.

Until recently, high performing schools in Kentucky could mask deficiencies in their special education programs. However, with Kentucky's new assessment and accountability system, schools could be high performing overall and be knocked out of receiving the Reward or Assistance Category recognition and instead be considered in focus status for one of their subgroup populations. This level of data transparency uncovers subgroup performance that was easily veiled in the public reports of earlier years and creates a heightened sense of accountability focused on those subgroups. When delivering the Division of Learning Services Update to the Statewide Special Education Cooperative Directors in Frankfort, Kentucky's State Special Education Director, Johnny Collett (March 10, 2013) stated, "the special education subgroup is the gap group that schools across the state are struggling with." He went on to say "when gaps exist, we must find strategies that accelerate the learning of the gap group beyond the learning of their peers. Otherwise, gaps will not be closed."

Schools leaders are facing increasing pressure and demands to promote learning environments that support the learning needs of all students. This is especially taxing in times of decreasing budgets, which reduces the resources available to educate students that require more intense, individualized instruction. Teachers push to cover the content area standards, attempting to prepare all students for the state assessment. The effort becomes more about teaching the standards and

less about student learning. Often, these pressures overwhelm school leaders and cause them to focus on those students that can be moved to proficiency with the least amount of time and effort, while decreasing the focus on those students that require more time, effort and expertise to educate to the level of proficiency or better. While this kind of thinking is understandable, it contributes greatly to the development and widening of achievement gaps for students with disabilities.

There are numerous procedural requirements that districts must follow and document in their management of their special education programs. The paperwork required to maintain compliance consumes a great amount of time, energy and on-going professional development to achieve excellence in the area of procedural compliance. Along with these procedural requirements, school personnel must be aware that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004) places strong emphasis on improving the achievement of students with disabilities. To meet all of these standards, the effective leader must ensure that each student with a disability has a legally compliant program that is reasonably calculated to offer educational benefit and that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) is implemented with a good faith effort. That is, if they want to avoid a complaint or due process hearing.

When a complaint is filed in today's litigious environment, the burden of proof falls to the teachers and school leaders and the outcome depends on how thorough compliance, service delivery and progress toward goal acquisition are documented. These requirements, along with generic professional growth planning,

pose great challenges and great threats for special educators and many choose to leave the profession.

Principals are often too overwhelmed with the management of building operations, ensuring positive public relations and overseeing staff and students to take the time necessary to become an expert on special education regulations or best practices for the education of students with disabilities. With this great responsibility, many school leaders fall into the trap of managing their school by reacting to one crisis after another, consuming their time and limiting their ability to work proactively to grow and develop their staff. According to Garbarino and Edell (1997), “choices are influenced by the amount of cognitive effort put forth. Two studies demonstrated that when equivalent alternatives were to be evaluated, more respondents chose the less effortful option and as effort increased more negative affect was generated. Time pressure increased negative affect and led to the choice of the less difficult alternative.” This scenario suggests that it is much easier for school leaders to accept that students with disabilities are challenging to educate to the extent that they can test proficient or better on their state assessment. This, logically, has led many a wise leader to seek the quickest and easiest solution to resolve the problem, effective or not. Some administrators are notorious for accepting the praise when things go well and placing the blame on their staff, students, or parents for subpar achievement results.

Many school districts have purchased program after program with promises of moving children with disabilities to excellence or proficiency. Others take full

advantage of the accommodations regulations to provide accommodations that give many of their students with disabilities an unfair advantage on the state assessment and an unfair disadvantage in their development as independent learners by limiting the intensity of instruction and intervention necessary to develop that independence.

Most states have recognized the potential for abuse (e.g., lower expectations, providing accommodations solely to enhance test scores) that accompanies the use of accommodations in high stakes testing and have restricted their use. The tightening down on the use of accommodations has forced district and school leaders to re-examine their practices and search for more appropriate and realistic solutions to raise student achievement and test scores. Many principals either ignore the need to personalize special education staff development or have not had enough experience in the field to realize when support is needed.

The Focused GPS system provides principals with a systemic approach that allows them to see the big picture, the system, while remaining ever aware of teacher performance and student achievement, through formative and summative data collection and analysis, and to plan staff development based on those findings. According to Sparks (2011), the focus has begun to shift toward the use of data to tailor professional development based on a teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Lee and Hemer-Patnode (2010) examined programs to develop teachers' knowledge, skills and dispositions to teach diverse students with concern for equity and diversity by comparing teacher candidates who participated in a Professional Development School during their field experience to teachers without that experience. Both of

these studies reveal the impact that making the professional development relevant for teachers has on their knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions. Whether working with adults or children, learning should be personalized for the individual, based on their strengths and needs.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedure

The Focused Growth Planning and Support System begins to examine methods to guide and focus school and district leaders to select sound, evidence-based methods and strategies that promote special educators' professional growth in the areas of knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions based on school data from the school report card and observations of current systemic practices in the school and classrooms. The goal of the study was to close the achievement gap for students with disabilities by providing professional development and coaching based on the unique needs of the educators and students in the school system. This is accomplished by focusing and improving the practices of the individuals (i.e., school/district leadership, general/special educator and students with/without disabilities) that lead, support, teach, and learn within that system. The problem is that many principals simply don't have as much experience or expertise, when it comes to educating students with diverse needs, as the special educators they are charged to support and guide.

In many districts, the Director of the Special Education position is little more than a title, a Central Office position that is required to be filled by a certified person but is given little authority when it comes the day-to-day practices of the special educators in the schools. They are, however, generally allowed to provide professional development that keeps the district in legal compliance. Recently, there has been a shift in thinking at the state and national level, away from the former

intense focus on procedural compliance and toward a system that focus on results. The question is: how do school leaders stay abreast of what special educators should know and be able to do? Leaders must know what good instruction, for students with disabilities, looks like so they can work with their teachers to plan and monitor their growth in compliance and instructional practice.

The Focused GPS System utilized a mixed method data analysis by collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data for this study. The quantitative method involved a review of achievement data for students in low performing (Focus) schools. The achievement data was retrieved from the Internet in the Open House section of the KDE website (<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/>). School Report Cards were released to the public on November 2, 2012. The School Report Cards contain detailed information on student achievement, demographics, accountability and a plethora of other useful data. Initially, summative test data was used to focus the study on tested areas that students with disabilities performed poorly on and to get a baseline on that student performance. The data was compared with data reported the following year.

The qualitative method involved using teacher surveys to rate their opinions of their schools' ability to close achievement gaps. This study also utilized school and classroom observations conducted by the researcher to identify areas of teacher talent and areas of needed growth. A single observer was used to eliminate issues with inter rater reliability.

A post-observation meeting was conducted with each teacher, immediately following each observation, to discuss the findings from the observation. The discussion format utilized the “praise sandwich” approach. Davies and Jacobs (1985) studied “predominantly positively valenced complex feedback combinations”, including “negative-positive, and negative-positive-positive. Results indicate that the positive-negative-positive (sandwich) combination was clearly the most effective.” This research made a slight modification to the praise sandwich approach by spinning what could have been a negative comment into a statement of what might be. For example, the observer would discuss an area of strength that the teacher displayed during the observation period. Then the observer would make reference to a research-based or promising practice that could have been used at an opportune time during the lesson or that was an observed practice in another classroom. To wrap-up the post observation conference, the observer would turn the discussion to another area of strength that the teacher displayed during the observation.

The qualitative data was collected through classroom observations. The observation tool was developed and tweaked over the last decade from research, hundreds of classroom observations and input from experts in the field. Data was collected throughout the school year to monitor the level of growth in knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions. Along with teacher survey data, the quantitative and qualitative data should reveal if using a coordinated system for teacher professional growth impacts educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

The overarching goal of the Focused Growth Planning and Support System is to improve educational outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities. This project examined the impact of personalized professional growth planning and support on student achievement through analysis of student achievement data, focusing primarily on achievement gaps between students with and without disabilities in Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) identified Focus Schools. Since the vast majority of students with disabilities receive their educational services in general education settings with their nondisabled peers, observations occurred in all content area classrooms to determine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that exist in the school-wide services for students with disabilities. Upon completion of the observations, data was analyzed and synthesized into a written report for district leadership. The written report of findings was shared in a meeting with school and district leadership. At this meeting, school and district leaders incorporated those findings into their Comprehensive School Improvement Plan and developed 30/60/90 day plans to address the achievement gap.

In her research on continuous school improvement, Bernhardt (2013), reports on interviews with school teachers and leaders and made a point to discuss what she did not hear in those conversations by saying “we have to study our gaps in performance using summative tests so we can make adequate yearly progress.” She makes the point that schools need to use all of their data if they are to improve student learning. Bernhardt goes on to say that “educators know, intuitively and experientially, that focusing only on gaps in performance on one summative test will

not get student learning improvements for all students, yet it is easy to get caught up in trying to make the work simpler.” The Focused GPS system is designed to guide improvement, not only with specific gap areas derived from summative data but in the system as a whole using qualitative data to focus needed supports.

Taken together school and classroom observation data, and student achievement data were used to design and personalize the professional growth plan and support system at each school. “Without a system, structure, or vision in place to guide the use of all data, there is no new learning to change teacher attitudes, behaviors, or instruction-and ultimately improve student learning” (Bernhardt, 2013). The Focused GPS System provides the structure with action steps to guide the use of data to improve teachers’ knowledge, skills, practices and dispositions and improve student learning.

At the end of the project, student achievement data, over time, was utilized for students with disabilities to infer impact of the Focused GPS System on teacher growth and student learning. Teacher surveys were conducted in December, 2012 to measure staff’s perceptions of their ability to close achievement gaps for students with disabilities and their opinion of the current effectiveness of the specific strategies that were observed as “look for” items during the initial observations. While this research focuses on closing specific achievement gaps for students with disabilities, the teaching strategies were used with all students in the co-taught classrooms. Powerful instructional strategies are beneficial for all learners, not only students with

disabilities. As with most educational research, this study only infers a contribution to student achievement not claiming total attribution.

Chapter 4

Findings/Identified Strategies and Products

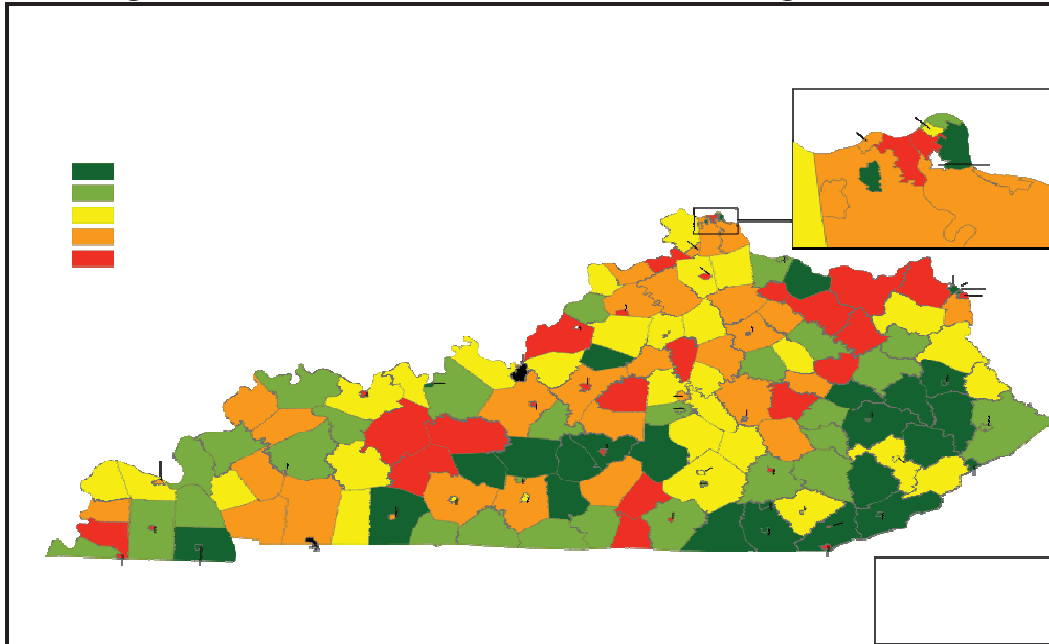
The Focused GPS System has been developed over the last decade to assist district and school leaders with special education program improvements. With the possible exception of the architecture, no two schools are the same. They all have their unique program strengths and weaknesses which creates unique opportunities and threats. The trick to this process, the Focused-GPS System, is to bring a fresh set of experienced eyes to the school to see what is working well and what is not, to help school leaders understand their school's systemic strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities that are available for improvement, the threats that need to be neutralized, and to provide them with a personalized learning plan based on their unique circumstances.

Over the last couple of years, students with disabilities, as a subgroup, in the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperatives (KVEC) service area have outperformed their disabled peers across the state as evidenced in Map 1 below. Kentucky reports these proficiency data for students with disabilities in quantiles. Quantiles, or cut off points are used to sort districts into five categories from the lowest performing 20% of districts to the highest performing 20% of districts for the achievement of students with disabilities. Kentucky set these cut off points by taking the total number of school districts in the state, divided that number of districts into five groups. One group is composed of 33 of the lowest performing districts with overall proficiency rates from 2.3% to 12.2% for students with disabilities. The

next lowest group is composed of 34 districts with proficiency rates from 12.3% to 15.5% for students with disabilities. The third group is composed of 35 districts with proficiency rates ranging from 15.6% to 18.7% for students with disabilities. The fourth group is composed of 34 districts with proficiency rates ranging from 18.8% to 25.3% for students with disabilities. The fifth and highest performing group is composed of 34 districts with proficiency rates ranging from 25.4% to 75.1% for students with disabilities.

Map 1

Percentage of Students with Disabilities Proficient/Distinguished in Quantiles



Dark Green Q1: 25.4 - 75.1% (Statewide-34 Districts/KVEC-8 Districts)
 Light Green Q2: 18.8 - 25.3% (Statewide-34 Districts/KVEC-4 Districts)
 Yellow Q3: 15.6 - 18.7% (Statewide-35 Districts/KVEC-3 Districts)
 Orange Q4: 12.3 - 15.5% (Statewide-34 Districts/KVEC-0 Districts)
 Red Q5: 2.3 - 12.2 (Statewide-33 Districts/KVEC-0 Districts)

A portion of this regional success can be attributed to earlier efforts to

coordinate professional development opportunities across the region. The KVEC Special Education service area consists of fifteen school districts, located in Southeastern Kentucky. Those districts are Breathitt County, Floyd County, Hazard Independent, Jackson Independent, Jenkins Independent, Knott County, Lee County, Leslie County, Letcher County, Magoffin County, Owsley County, Perry County, Pike County, Pikeville Independent, and Wolfe County. These school districts are located in some of the most poverty stricken counties in America and yet their students with disabilities perform quite well, on state assessments, when compared to their peers with disabilities across Kentucky. Of the 291 students that attend South Floyd High School, 208 students or 71.5% qualify for free lunch and another 26 students or 8.9% qualify for reduced lunch rates. Taken together, 234 students or 80.4% qualify for free or reduced lunch rates at South Floyd High. Of the 594 students that attend Prestonsburg High School, 294 students or 49.5% qualify for free lunch and 58 students or 9.8% qualify for reduced lunch rates. Taken together, 352 students or 59.3 % qualify for free or reduced lunch rates at Prestonsburg High. Statewide, 51% of students qualify for free lunch and 6.7% qualify for a reduced lunch rate. Taken together, the statewide percentage of students that qualify for free or reduced lunch rates is 57.8% (see Table 9).

Table 9**Percent Qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch Status**

| | South Floyd High | Prestonsburg High | Kentucky |
|-----------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Free | 71.5% | 49.5% | 51% |
| Reduced | 8.9% | 9.8% | 6.7% |
| Combined | 80.4% | 59.3% | 57.8% |

Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.

<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

An examination of race membership reveals that the student population at both schools primarily consists of white students. South Floyd High School's white student membership makes up 97.9% of the total population and Prestonsburg High School's membership is 98.7% white. Race membership for white students in Kentucky is 80.6% of the total student population (see Table 10).

Table 10**Percent of Total Membership by Race**

| Race | South Floyd High | Prestonsburg High | Kentucky |
|--|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| White | 97.9% | 98.7% | 80.6% |
| African American | 1.4% | 0.8% | 10.6% |
| Hispanic | 0.0% | 0.0% | 4.7% |
| Asian | 0.0% | 0.3% | 1.4% |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.1% |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.1% |
| Two or More Races | 0.7% | 0.2% | 2.5% |

Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.

<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

Over the last decade school districts located in the Kentucky Valley Special Education Cooperative service area have focused intently on the use of data to improve academic outcomes for students with disabilities. The focus over those years was primarily on compliance and improving academic outcomes for students with disabilities in the content areas of reading and math, which were of primary importance on the state assessment. However, recent changes to the state assessment and accountability model revealed other gap areas and caught many school and district leaders off guard. This was especially true for the students with disabilities subgroup in the area of on-demand writing. Even though, school and district leaders had been informed that schools could receive a designation of Focus

Status for other content areas, there was little attention given to those areas.

Probably due to the fact that their students had achieved quite well in the areas focused on and measured by the former state assessment, prior to the introduction of the new Kentucky Core Academic Standards and the new state assessment model.

In November 2012, the Kentucky Department of Education released their list of Focus Schools to the educational cooperatives. Across the state, two hundred eighty-five schools were designated as focus schools. These schools remain in focus status for at least one biennium. There were seventeen schools in the KVEC region that were identified as focus schools. Of those seventeen, two high schools (i.e., Prestonsburg High School and South Floyd High School) in Floyd County committed to the Focused GPS System to close achievement gaps. The percent of students identified as students with disabilities varies greatly from school to school. South Floyd High School identifies a large percentage (i.e., 23 percent) of students, as students with disabilities. Prestonsburg High School identifies a much lower percentage (i.e., 13.1 percent) of students as students with disabilities. This places Prestonsburg High School slightly below the state average of 13.2 percent of students identified as students with disabilities (see Table 11).

Table 11

Percent of Students Identified as Students with Disabilities

| | South Floyd High | Prestonsburg High | Kentucky |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Disability | 23% | 13.1% | 13.2% |

Initial observations were conducted in all the classrooms at South Floyd High using the KVSEC SWOT Analysis and Observation tool (see Appendix B) to identify special education program strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Special educators were observed in seven co-taught classrooms and were highly involved in providing intervention and support to students with disabilities through a one teach, one assist model. Dr. Marilyn Friend has been brought to Kentucky numerous times over the last several years to work with special education consultants to revamp Kentucky's co-teaching initiative. Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010), break co-teaching into six unique methods with differing levels of effectiveness. They are: one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; alternative teaching; parallel teaching; station teaching; and teaming approach. They suggest that teachers should plan together and select two or three of these co-teaching methods, which naturally fit with the content of the lesson and the needs of the students, during a class period. All fifteen classrooms had LCD projectors installed and eight classrooms made use of them during the lesson, increasing the likelihood that students would be engaged in the lesson through a preferred learning mode. All fifteen classrooms had "I can" statements posted and four of fifteen referenced them at the beginning of the lesson. "I can" statements are used to break the standards into student friendly language that identifies what the students should know and be able to do upon completion of the lesson. The use of "I can" statements has become common practice, across Kentucky, since the rollout of Kentucky's Core Academic Standards (KCAS), first in English/Language

Arts classrooms and then in Mathematics classes. The new Science and Social Studies Standards trainings are currently underway across the state for teacher leaders from those content areas. Of the fifteen general education classrooms observed, one classroom had two students with disabilities that had access to I-Pads as an accommodation and used them during independent work time. The findings from these observations were compiled and analyzed. Data was then synthesized in a school report that was shared with school and district leaders (see Table 12).

Table 12

Special Education Program SWOT Analysis-South Floyd High- Jan. 2013

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Strengths | Most general educators are very knowledgeable about the content they teach. "I can" statements are posted consistently. Most special educators are very knowledgeable about the content area they co-teach in. Special educators are highly involved in the teaching of lessons in their co-taught classes. Administration is very knowledgeable of the strengths and weaknesses within the building. |
| Weaknesses | Substitute teachers are not provided with lesson plans. Scheduling for special educators should put them in one classroom at a time. No instructional adjustments were observed. There were a few instances where students were off task and no intervention was attempted. |
| Opportunities | Opportunities to improve student engagement and learning across the school are to increase the use of Bell-Ringers, formative checks (e.g., in math students show their answers using dry erase boards so teachers can immediately see if students are mastering the content), opportunities for students to work in pairs or teams, and the use of exit slips. Students need to know where they are in the learning, relative to their peers, through formative learning checks. Relevance and learning could be improved by having the students use the skills they have just learned, as soon as possible after learning the new skill or content. This could be accomplished by having students teach the new content to another student. Both general and special educators would benefit from professional development focused on a variety of co-teaching methods (e.g., one teach, one observe; alternative teaching; parallel teaching; station teaching; teaming approach and skills groups) through the Co-Teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC) initiative offered through the Kentucky Department of Education and supported through by local education cooperative. |
| Threats | The greatest threat observed is the lack of lesson plans being left for substitute teachers. This creates a lack of consistency for student learning and creates the opportunity for unruly behavior. Scheduling for special educators should be more specific. |

At the beginning of this study, South Floyd High School ranked in the twenty-ninth percentile when compared to all high schools across the Commonwealth. South Floyd High School serves 291 with 23 teachers. After the first year of the study, South Floyd High School increased their overall percentile rank from the twenty-ninth to the forty-first percentile (see Table 13). They also increased the percent of students with disabilities scoring proficient or distinguished in writing from 0% to 20.0%.

Table 13

High School Percentile Rank

| School | 2011-12 | 2012-13 |
|------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| South Floyd High | 29 th Percentile | 41 st Percentile |

Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.
<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

The researcher met with school and district leadership to report and discuss findings from the SWOT analysis and the school report card data. The school leadership team incorporated the findings into their Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIP), and selected appropriate strategies and professional development to address the specific needs of their staff to close the achievement gap for students with disabilities. Once the plans were in place at South Floyd High School, the researcher contacted school and district leadership and began implementing the initial steps of the Focused GPS System at Prestonsburg High School.

At the beginning of this study, Prestonsburg High School ranked in the eighteenth percentile when compared to all high schools across the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Prestonsburg High School serves around 594 with 33 teachers. After the first year of the study, Prestonsburg High School increased their overall percentile rank from the eighteenth to the seventy-fourth percentile (see Table 14). They also increased the percent of students with disabilities scoring proficient or distinguished in writing from 0% to 10.0%.

Table 14

High School Percentile Rank

| School | 2011-12 | 2012-13 |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Prestonsburg High | 18 th Percentile | 74 th Percentile |

Source: Kentucky School Report Card – Profile tab.
<http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/Profile.aspx>

Twenty classrooms were observed at Prestonsburg High School. Recipients of the observations consistently started their classes with Bell-Ringers. All twenty classrooms had “I can” statements posted and twelve of the twenty made reference to them during the observations. Several classes used exit-slips to close out the lesson and most all of the students were on-task for the duration of the class (see Table 15).

Table 15**Special Education Program SWOT Analysis-Prestonsburg High-Feb. 2013**

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Strengths | Most general educators are very knowledgeable about the content they teach. “I can” statements are posted consistently. Most all teachers incorporate the use of Bell-Ringers, formative assessment strategies, and exit slips to enhance teaching and learning. Most special educators are very knowledgeable about the content area they co-teach in. Special educators show up for their co-taught classrooms. Special Educators displayed excellent teaching strategies and knowledge of the curriculum in Resource Rooms and Special Classes. Most, if not all, students were on-task during the observations. |
| Weaknesses | Collaboration is occurring, co-teaching is not. Special Education staff stand back (in a corner in most cases) and only intervene when students raise their hand or ask for help. Co-teaching roles and responsibilities have not been defined in any classrooms observed. |
| Opportunities | Both general and special educators would benefit from professional development focused on a variety of co-teaching methods (e.g., one teach, one observe; alternative teaching; parallel teaching; station teaching; teaming approach and skills groups) through the Co-Teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC) initiative offered through the Kentucky Department of Education and supported through by local education cooperative. Students would benefit from reviewing their own data, knowing where they are in the learning, relative to their peers, through formative learning checks. Students would also benefit and take ownership for their own learning through the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) process. |
| Threats | The greatest threat observed is the lack of effective co-teaching methods. |

Both schools that participated in Focused GPS study applied to participate in the Co-teaching for Gap Closure Initiative led by the Kentucky Department of Education and supported by staff at the Kentucky Valley Special Education Cooperative. The researcher and two external coaches were assigned to support

school principals, an internal coach at each school, and a team of co-teachers that teach together in the content area that was identified as the gap area that led to the school being identified as a focus school. The co-teachers and internal coach were also selected because they were considered to be among the most talented and driven teachers at the school, based on observations by the researcher and conversations with school leaders and external coaches.

The external coaches and school teams received three days of initial training shortly after being accepted to the CT4GC Initiative. However, the Prestonburg High School co-teaching team (i.e., one general educator and one special educator) was rescheduled to be trained during the Summer of 2013 due to scheduling conflicts. Once trained, co-teachers began implementing the co-teaching strategies. The internal coach conducted regular observations in the model co-teaching classroom. The external coaches conducted monthly observations and coaching sessions with each co-teaching team (i.e., one co-teaching classroom in each school). During each monthly school visit, external coaches met with the school leadership team to debrief and set the agenda for the next month of internal coaching to ensure fidelity of implementation of the CT4GC Initiative in the model classroom.

The researcher conducted follow-up visits at each school during the months of May and September, 2013 and conducted additional observations in all of the classrooms that were initially observed by the researcher during the months of January and February. During the May observations at South Floyd High School,

numerous improvements were noted in teachers knowledge, skills, and practices (see Table 16).

Table 16

Special Education Program SWOT Analysis-South Floyd High-May 2013

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Strengths | <p>General educators are very knowledgeable about the content they teach. “I can” statements are posted in all classrooms observed. Most general educators make reference to “I can statements at the beginning of the lesson and several were observed making additional references to the “I can” statement at opportune times during the lesson (e.g., as instructional adjustment, when students needed to be refocused). Special educators are very knowledgeable about the content area they co-teach in. Special educators are actively involved in the teaching of lessons in co-taught classes. The one teach, one assist co-teaching method is still the most frequent method observed. However, several other methods were observed (i.e., station teaching, parallel teaching, and one teach, one observe) in several classes. Most teachers have incorporated Bell-Ringers at the beginning of the lesson and several were observed using exit slips when time allowed. A few teachers were observed using formative checks during their lessons. Several student engagement strategies were observed (e.g., random selection, proximity prompts, use of technology). Substitute teachers were provided with lesson plans and were checked on by administrators and, in one of the three classrooms with a substitute teacher, a general educator from a neighboring class supported the substitute by introducing the lesson and addressing behavioral expectations with students.</p> |
| Weaknesses | <p>Overall, high expectations need some focus. Teachers are very caring, which is a strength. However, they should begin to fade supports for students with disabilities as those students progress in knowledge and skills. While, students should not be allowed to fail, they should be expected to be persistent enough to learn the content, based on their individualized needs for support.</p> |
| Opportunities | <p>Opportunities to improve student engagement and learning across the school are to increase the use formative checks (e.g., in math students show their answers using dry erase boards so teachers can immediately see if students are mastering the content). Students need to know where they are in the learning, relative to their peers, through formative learning checks. Including a relevance statement to the “I can” statement and referencing it at the beginning of the lesson could improve relevance and learning. Both general and special educators would benefit from</p> |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| | <p>professional development focused on a variety of co-teaching methods (e.g., one teach, one observe; alternative teaching; parallel teaching; station teaching; teaming approach and skills groups) through the Co-Teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC) initiative offered through the Kentucky Department of Education and supported through by local education cooperative. These strategies should be ramped up and extended to classrooms outside of the CT4GC model classroom. All classrooms should begin implementing the PDSA process to start the process of students taking ownership for their learning. The PDSA process provides a framework for students to have a clear understanding of what they are learning, why they are learning it, and opportunities for input into the strategies they will use to learn the content.</p> |
| Threats | <p>The greatest threat observed is the lack of fading of supports as students make progress in knowledge and skills.</p> |

During the May observations at Prestonsburg High School, numerous improvements were noted in teachers knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions (see Table 17).

Table 17

Special Education Program SWOT Analysis-Prestonsburg High-May 2013

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Strengths | Prestonsburg High School has a strong tradition of success and doesn't accept failure gracefully. Educators that were initially resistant to outside support have become open, willing, and welcoming. Most general educators are very knowledgeable about the content they teach. "I can" statements are posted consistently and were observed being referenced in most classrooms. Most teachers incorporate the use of Bell-Ringers, formative assessment strategies, and exit slips to enhance teaching and learning. Prestonsburg High School draws its students from some of the most affluent families, which usually indicates a higher level of community and family support for student learning. Most special educators are very knowledgeable about the content area they co-teach in. Special educators show up for their co-taught classrooms. Special Educators displayed excellent teaching strategies and knowledge of the curriculum in Resource Rooms and Special Classes. Most, if not all, students were on-task during the observations. Internal and external coaches have received training in the Co-teaching for Gap Closure Initiative. |
| Weaknesses | Collaboration is occurring, co-teaching is not. Special Education staff stands back (in a corner in most cases) and only intervene when students raise their hand or ask for help. Co-teaching roles and responsibilities have not been defined in any classrooms observed. Due to scheduling conflicts, the co-teaching team has not received the initial Co-teaching for Gap Closure Training. However, this has been scheduled to occur over the summer. |
| Opportunities | Both general and special educators would benefit from professional development focused on a variety of co-teaching methods (e.g., one teach, one observe; alternative teaching; parallel teaching; station teaching; teaming approach and skills groups) through the Co-Teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC) initiative offered through the Kentucky Department of Education and supported through by local education cooperative. Students would benefit from reviewing their own data, knowing where they are in the learning, relative to their peers, through formative learning checks. Students would also benefit and take ownership for their own learning through the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) process. |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Threats | The greatest threat observed continues to be the lack of effective co-teaching methods. |
|----------------|---|

The researcher visited South Floyd High School in September, 2013 and conducted follow-up observations in all of the classrooms that were initially observed by the researcher during the months of January and May. During the September observations at South Floyd High School, numerous improvements were noted in teachers knowledge, skills, and practices (see Table 18). Teachers in the model co-teaching classroom have made a lot of progress in using multiple co-teaching methods and implementation of the PDSA process. Students were highly engaged in both the PDSA process and actively involved in the learning process.

Table 18

Special Education Program SWOT Analysis-South Floyd High-Sept. 2013

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Strengths | <p>Strong linkages are made between the “I can” statements, relevance statements, and the lesson being taught. “I can” statements are posted in all classrooms.</p> <p>Most educators make reference to “I can statements at the beginning of the lesson and at opportune times during the lesson. Formative assessment is used to guide instructional adjustments in most classrooms. Special educators are very knowledgeable about the content area they co-teach in. Special educators are consistently making use of multiple co-teaching methods. However, the one teach, one assist co-teaching method continues to be the most frequent method observed. Most teachers continue to use Bell-Ringers at the beginning of the lesson and exit slips when time allowed. Several student engagement strategies were observed (e.g., random selection, proximity prompts, use of technology).</p> <p>The CT4GC model classroom is operating smoothly. Multiple methods of co-teaching were observed and teachers were using the PDSA process with fidelity. Students were making use of their writing notebooks to reinforce the learning the writing process for on-demand prompts. Overall student knowledge of the on-demand writing process, skills to manage their own learning and engage in the writing process have improved greatly over time. This should be reflected in higher test scores for all students in on-demand writing and increase the percent of students with disabilities that score proficient or better.</p> |
| Weaknesses | <p>Educators still need to begin to fade supports for students with disabilities as those students make progress in knowledge and skills. While, students should not be allowed to fail, they should be expected to be persistent enough to learn the content, based on their individualized needs for support.</p> <p>The RTI programs observed did little more than help students make sure they completed assignments and homework. RTI programs are areas that need intentional focus.</p> |
| Opportunities | <p>Students need to know where they are in the learning, relative to their peers, through formative learning checks. Relevance and learning could be improved by beginning to spread the PDSA process into all classrooms.</p> <p>The PDSA process provides a framework for students to have a</p> |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| | <p>clear understanding of what they are learning, why they are learning it, and opportunities for input into the strategies they will use to learn the content.</p> <p>Both general and special educators would benefit from professional development focused on a variety of co-teaching methods (e.g., one teach, one observe; alternative teaching; parallel teaching; station teaching; teaming approach and skills groups) through the Co-Teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC) initiative offered through the Kentucky Department of Education and supported through by local education cooperative.</p> |
| Threats | <p>The greatest threat observed is the lack of fading of supports as students make progress in knowledge and skills.</p> |

The researcher visited Prestonsburg High School during the month of September, 2013 and conducted follow-up observations in all of the classrooms that were initially observed during the months of February and May. During the September observations at Prestonsburg High School, numerous improvements were noted in teachers knowledge, skills, and practices (see Table 19). Teachers in the model co-teaching classroom continue to make significant progress in using multiple co-teaching methods, student engagement strategies and implementation of the PDSA process. Students were observed to be highly engaged in both the PDSA process and actively involved in the learning process.

Table 19**Special Education Program SWOT Analysis-Prestonsburg High-Sept. 2013**

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Strengths | <p>The CT4GC team (i.e., internal coach and model classroom teachers) has made significant progress in using multiple co-teaching methods, student engagement strategies and implementation of the PDSA process. These teachers are a dynamic duo. During one observation of the model classroom, one teacher was dressed as a notebook and the other as a pencil as they interchanged the use of parallel teaching, one teach-one assist, and teaming approach. Students were highly attentive and highly engaged through the PDSA process and throughout the lesson. The teachers demonstrated excellent relationships with the students and expectations were very high. Though somewhat resistant to outside support initially, educators at Prestonsburg High School have demonstrated both willingness and ability to do whatever it takes to help students become successful.</p> <p>Across the school, most teachers incorporate the use of Bell-Ringers, formative assessment strategies, and exit slips to enhance teaching and learning. Most special educators are very knowledgeable about the content area they co-teach in.</p> |
| Weaknesses | <p>Co-teaching, while excellent in the model classroom, needs continued focus and improvement across the school. The use of multiple co-teaching methods are beginning to spread to additional classes. However, this needs to be an area of intentional focus.</p> <p>RTI programs need focus. The RTI programs observed did little more than help students make sure they completed assignments and homework.</p> |
| Opportunities | <p>Both general and special educators would benefit from professional development focused on a variety of co-teaching methods (e.g., one teach, one observe; alternative teaching; parallel teaching; station teaching; teaming approach and skills groups) through the Co-Teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC) initiative offered through the Kentucky Department of Education and supported through by local education cooperative. Students would benefit from reviewing their own data, knowing where they are in the learning, relative to their peers, through formative learning checks. Students would also benefit and take ownership</p> |

| | |
|----------------|---|
| | <p>for their own learning through the Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA) process. The PDSA process is going well in the model classroom. Teachers would benefit from observing this classroom and learning to implement the PDSA process.</p> |
| Threats | <p>The greatest threat observed continues to be the lack of effective co-teaching methods across the school, with the exception of the model classroom.</p> |

In December, 2013 teachers were surveyed to assess their opinions of the status and effectiveness of the systemic practices in the school. Several items included in the survey are statutory requirements. Other items are based on best practices or areas identified for focus during the initial observations by the researcher. By the time the survey was sent out, both schools had participated in the Focused GPS System for nearly one year. Of the sixty possible respondents, twenty-four completed the survey. Surveys were sent to all participants via SurveyMonkey to protect the identity of the respondents. Each item on the survey provided a statement about the school and prompted the respondent to to select either not at all; somewhat; very much; or couldn't be better (see Table 20).

Table 20**Focused GPS Survey Results in Percent and averaged on a 4 point scale****Rating Scale:** (1=not at all, 2=somewhat, 3=very much, and 4=could not be better)

| In the School | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Mean |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| 1. Data drives instruction | 0.0% | 4.2% | 75.0% | 20.8% | 3.17 |
| 2. Common planning time for Professional Learning Community meetings | 0.0% | 4.2% | 62.5% | 33.3% | 3.63 |
| 3. Response to Intervention for Reading | 0.0% | 56.5% | 43.5% | 0.0% | 2.43 |
| 4. Response to Intervention for Math | 0.0% | 50.0% | 50.0% | 0.0% | 2.50 |
| 5. Response to Intervention for Behavior | 16.7% | 41.7% | 37.5% | 4.2% | 2.33 |
| 6. Collaboration/Co-teaching | 4.2% | 62.5% | 29.2% | 4.2% | 2.33 |
| 7. Administrator walkthroughs/Classroom observations by administrators | 0.0% | 8.3% | 66.7% | 25% | 3.17 |
| 8. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) | 4.2% | 54.2% | 25.0% | 16.7% | 2.54 |
| 9. School-wide consistent rules and consequences | 0.0% | 20.8% | 66.7% | 12.5% | 2.92 |
| 10. Support system for new or novice teachers | 8.3% | 54.2% | 37.5% | 0.0% | 2.29 |
| 11. Support system for substitute teachers | 16.7% | 62.5% | 20.8% | 0.0% | 2.04 |
| In the Classroom | | | | | |
| 12. IEP goals made available | 0.0% | 12.5% | 62.5% | 25.0% | 3.13 |
| 13. Specially Designed Instruction provided to students with disabilities | 0.0% | 8.3% | 79.2% | 12.5% | 3.04 |
| 14. General/Special Educator share responsibility for student learning/co-teaching | 4.2% | 33.3% | 50.0% | 12.5% | 2.71 |
| 15. Availability of assistive technology | 0.0% | 37.5% | 45.8% | 16.7% | 2.79 |
| 16. Posting of Learning Targets | 0.0% | 4.2% | 54.2% | 41.7% | 3.38 |
| 17. Discussion of Learning Targets with students | 0.0% | 8.3% | 66.7% | 25.0% | 3.17 |
| 18. Discussion of the Relevance of the Learning Targets | 0.0% | 34.8% | 47.8% | 17.4% | 2.83 |
| 19. Students with disabilities receive the same rigorous content as their | 0.0% | 16.7% | 66.7% | 16.7% | 3.00 |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| peers | | | | | |
| 20. Scaffolding Instruction | 0.0% | 16.7% | 75.0% | 8.3% | 2.92 |
| 21. Frequent use of Formative Assessment | 0.0% | 4.3% | 87.0% | 8.7% | 3.04 |
| 22. Instructional adjustments based on learning styles, modalities, etc. | 0.0% | 29.2% | 62.5% | 8.3% | 2.79 |
| 23. Student engagement strategies (e.g., random selection) | 0.0% | 4.2% | 79.2% | 16.7% | 3.13 |
| 24. Pairing of students for instruction (e.g., grouping and regrouping) | 0.0% | 12.5% | 66.7% | 20.8% | 3.08 |
| 25. Effective questioning strategies (e.g., circular questioning) | 0.0% | 16.7% | 70.8% | 12.5% | 2.96 |
| 26. Students required to defend their answers | 0.0% | 41.7% | 45.8% | 12.5% | 2.71 |
| 27. Intervention occurring when students are not engaged | 0.0% | 8.3% | 79.2% | 12.5% | 3.04 |

The survey data collected in December 2013 suggest that school personnel at schools participating in the Focused GPS System perceived considerable impact on several practices that were chosen as best practice indicators of systemic improvement. Across the two schools, 24 participants responded for a 40% response rate. On average, respondent reported more than “somewhat” and a little less than “very much” when asked their opinions of the status and effectiveness of the systemic practices in the school, with an average rating of 2.85 (on a four-point scale).

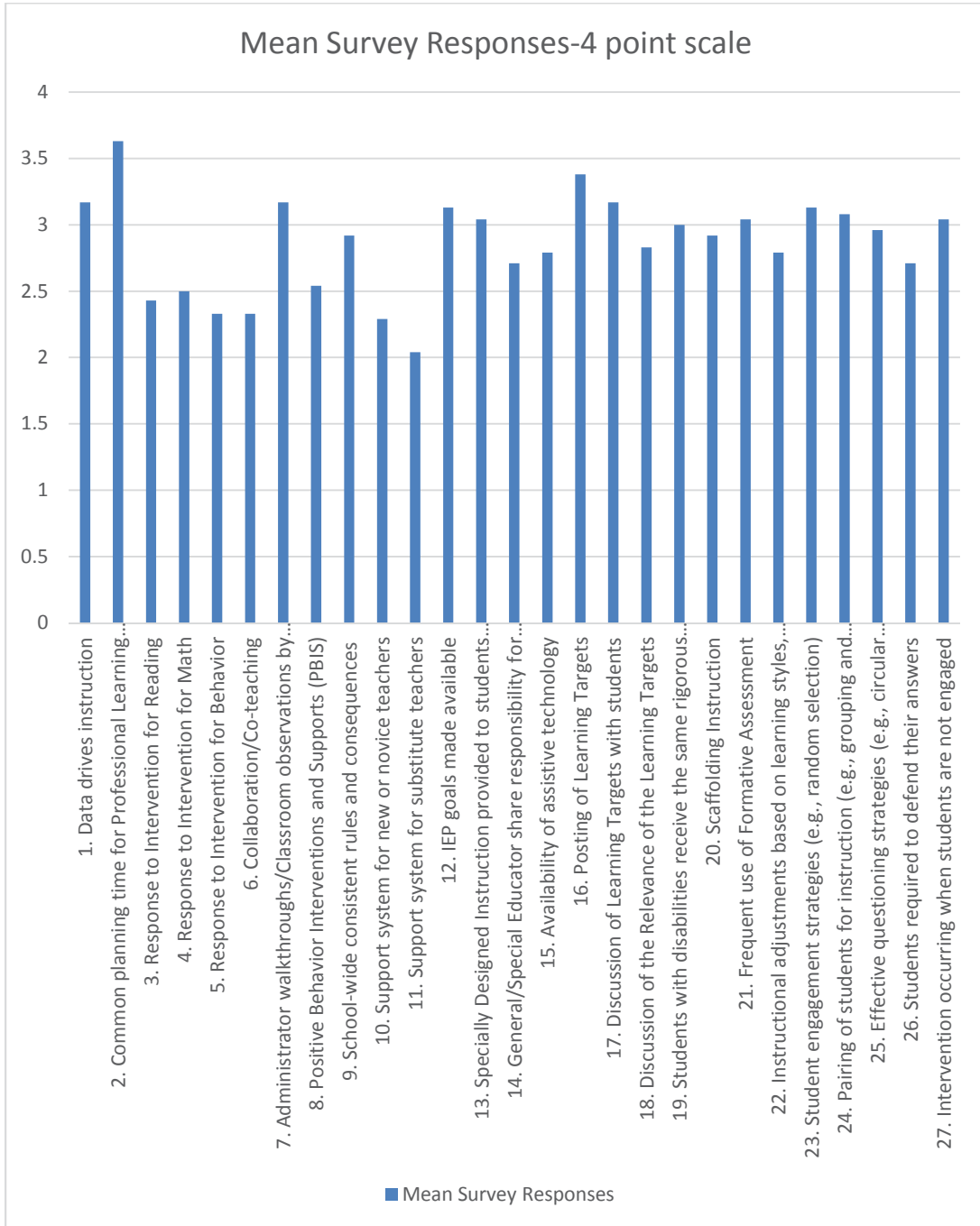
Participants’ perceptions varied greatly across items.

Ninety percent or more of the survey respondents chose very much to could not be better in their school for items: 1 (Data drives instruction); 2 (Common planning time for Professional Learning Community meetings); 7 (Administrator walkthroughs / Classroom observations by administrators); 13 (Specially Designed Instruction provided to students with disabilities); 16 (Posting of Learning Targets);

17 (Discussion of Learning Targets with students); 21 (Frequent use of Formative Assessment); 23 (Student engagement strategies) and; 27 (Intervention occurring when students are not engaged). These results mirror the researcher's findings from the September, 2013 observations and debriefing sessions that occurred at both schools.

Items that received the lowest rankings were: 3 (Response to Intervention for Reading); 4 (Response to Intervention for Math); 5 (Response to Intervention for Behavior); 6 (Collaboration/Co-teaching); 8 (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports); 10 (Support system for new or novice teachers) and; 11 (Support system for substitute teachers). For these items, 50% or more of the educators chose not at all or somewhat on the survey. The results from these items also mirror the schoolwide observation data collected by the researcher in September, 2013. However, debriefing sessions with school leaders reveal a mismatch in the responses and leaders perceptions of the efficacy of these subsystems in their respective schools. This was especially evident in their perception of their RTI programs for reading and math. There was a greater degree of agreement concerning RTI for behavior, co-teaching, PBIS, and support systems for new teachers and substitutes (see Chart 5).

Chart 5



Chapter 5

Conclusions, Actions, and Implications

In the 2011-12 school year, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) introduced a new accountability model of rewards and sanctions for schools and districts, including a new category-Focus School. A school was determined to be in focus status if one of their subgroup populations scored significantly low. The two schools in this study had significantly low scores for students with disabilities in the content area of writing. Principals in these schools were expected to update their Comprehensive School Improvement Plans to include a goal to address the achievement gap for the identified subgroup. Although principals understood the need to close the achievement gap, they were not well prepared to close them.

The rapid advances in technology are “placing unique requirements on people in the workplace, compelling a sharp focus on training and education. One of the most persuasive factors is the shrinking half-life of knowledge” (Gonzales, 2004). Gonzales describes the half- life of knowledge as “the time from when knowledge is gained to when it becomes obsolete.” The impact of the ever-shrinking half-life of knowledge on education practitioners is obvious as stark differences in classroom practices may be observed from one school to another or from one class to another in the same building. These are exciting and stressful times for educators that strive to stay abreast of best practices and incorporate them in their daily practices. Increasingly more transparent data collection and reporting systems are yielding

results that differentiate between effective and ineffective teachers. It is no longer an option for educators to be satisfied with the status quo and do little, intentionally, to improve classroom practices. These days, results matter. No longer can teachers just close their door and teach whatever...or however. Transparent data systems (Big Brother) will expose them. All educators must work intentionally and diligently to hone and improve their knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions, if they are to be successful in the competitive environment that education has become. The Focused GPS System provides guidance that utilizes the expertise of the Special Education Director in the district to coach school personnel to improve the special education services in their schools and close achievement gaps for students with disabilities.

Over the last few years, there has been heightened focus on subgroups of students that fail to achieve to the level of their peers. Data systems have been developed to sort out specific subgroups for comparison and public reporting. These practices have driven school personnel to find new and better ways to educate students that fall into those subgroups. Overall, students with disabilities have proven to be among the most difficult and complex of the subgroups to achieve meaningful gains and move to proficiency. Hattie (2012), in a synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses of over 52,000 studies focused on achievement, found that students' prior cognitive ability had the greatest effect size on student achievement when the source of influence was the student. This is especially true in the content area of writing.

Across Kentucky, 285 schools were identified as focus schools. Many of them were identified for the students with disabilities subgroup and, at the high

school level, it was often in the content area of writing. The KDE, lacking the personnel and resources to support so many schools, called on the regional educational cooperatives to support the focus schools in their respective regions. The Focused GPS System was developed at the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative to assist school leaders in their effort to close achievement gaps at their schools.

At the beginning of this research project, I hypothesized that achievement gaps could be closed if educators' knowledge, skills, practices and dispositions improved when working with students with disabilities. This study was designed to measure the efficacy of the Focused GPS System to guide school leaders to select and implement effective strategies that result in improvements in the achievement of students with disabilities in identified achievement gap areas.

The Focused GPS System supported school leaders with a framework to guide their actions through a seven step process (i.e., identifying achievement gaps through focused data analysis, providing observations and evaluations of the classroom experiences and supports that are provided to students with disabilities, identifying the root causes for achievement gaps, reporting of findings and recommendations to school leadership to focus school planning, and providing focused professional development and on-going coaching based on the plans and interventions selected by district and school staff). Successful implementation of the Focused GPS System required persistence, continuous planning, observation, analysis, coaching, and debriefing designed to focus and improve classroom instruction to close achievement gaps for students with disabilities. For the Focused GPS System to work

effectively, district and school leaders must begin to take advantage of the expertise of the district Special Education Director to coach staff and improve learning opportunities for students with disabilities.

School leaders at both high schools were very open and receptive to outside guidance and support from highly trained and experienced consultants. Initially though, teachers were not so receptive to having someone come into their classroom to observe their teaching practices. This was a very understandable response and, in hindsight, should have been resolved before the visits occurred. Teacher misconceptions about the purpose of the observations were easily resolved during the debriefing sessions.

The necessity for maintaining focus on students with disabilities, can not be overstated. Left to their own devices, frustrated or struggling students will often tune out or give up on trying to learn. This is especially true, when these students are in rigorous content classes with nondisabled peers that seem to learn the content so quickly and easily. This leads many students to act out...better to look tough and ornery than slow. Few, if any, students want to be perceived as a slow learner by their peers, especially at the high school level.

The model co-teaching classrooms played a large role in increasing proficiency for students with disabilities in the area of on-demand writing. Numerous factors contribute to the complexities involved in developing and implementing an effective co-teaching classroom. Teacher's relationships with each other, developing an understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and common-planning time are

among a few. Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010) identified the still emerging understanding of co-teaching, inconsistent implementation, lack of professional preparation, and the lack of a supportive school culture as a few factors contributing to the ambiguity of co-teaching. The Co-teaching for Gap Closure Initiative provided a highly structured and highly supportive environment for teachers to hone their co-teaching practices and develop close working relationships. This initiative also provided school leaders with a system of supports from outside experts and a framework for developing their own internal coaches.

The experiences gained during this project clearly supports the effectiveness of the Focused GPS System to guide and focus administrators as they develop professional growth opportunities for their teachers that will impact student learning and close achievement gaps. Though teachers were initially hesitant to accept outside support, they quickly came to realize that the Focused GPS system was not a punitive system that focused on their individual inadequacies. Instead, evaluations and observations focused on the strengths and weaknesses (or missing pieces) of the system and not on blaming individuals. The key to the success of this system was the buy-in and commitment of everyone involved (i.e., KDE leadership, district leadership, school leadership, co-teachers, internal and external coaches). The Focused GPS system was used to identify current practices that could be tweaked to nudge the system forward based on the specific findings at each school. The Focused GPS System has yielded much useful information for future study and implementation. The work will continue with these two schools but they are rapidly

becoming experts in focusing on systems improvement and the implementation of research-based strategies that lead to increased student engagement and learning.

Personalizing a schoolwide learning plan that encompasses systemic improvements and individual teacher growth requires a high degree of cooperation, commitment, and persistence from everyone involved, if it is to be implemented successfully. Although many activities can contribute to successfully closing achievement gaps, a system is needed that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of schoolwide and individual classroom practices and strategies. A system that recognizes opportunities to implement new strategies and practices that have the potential to nudge the school or classroom in a positive direction to closes achievement gaps for students with disabilities.

This study has shown that the Focused GPS System may be used to guide and inform educators to make effective decisions that lead to closing the achievement gaps for students with disabilities. Over the course of this project, the practices that were observed to improve the most were the teachers discussions of the “I can” statements with their class, their use of formative assessment strategies that ensured that all students were engaged and progressing, providing intervention when students were off task or falling behind, and their use of questioning strategies (e.g., open-ended questions, circular questioning strategies that require students to think deeply about their answers and be able to defend them). A few teachers have begun to turn the ownership of the learning over to the students by having students keep data notebooks and participate in the selection of the classroom strategies that will be

used. These practices, along with many others have contributed to the success of the Focused GPS System to close achievement gaps. As in chaos theory, sometimes the smallest change in teacher practice can have a huge impact on teaching and learning.

Over the course of this study, I observed this change being played out in several classrooms. A change in questioning strategies, increased use of formative assessments, and providing interventions, when needed, were the most common practices that appeared to have the greatest impact on student attention, engagement, and learning. These findings closely align with the synthesis of research conducted by Hattie (2012). His analysis found that the influencers that have the greatest impact on achievement, when the teacher was the source of the influence, were feedback, instructional quality, direct instruction and remediation with feedback. For future studies, I would suggest that a few items be removed from the observation tool (i.e., IEP Goals Available, Lesson Plans Available, and Lesson Plans Being Taught), unless those items are deemed critical to the the specific school system. These items have become somewhat outdated in most classrooms. Lesson Plans have been replaced with class goals and “I can” statements. IEP goals continue to be relevant, but with the adoption of standards based IEPs and the development of personalized learning for all students, IEPs have become more of a compliance measure than a learning plan. That is, for the 80% or more of students with disabilities that receive their services in the general education setting. In fact, when asked about students with disabilities in their classroom, most teachers were aware of the students needs and provided specially designed instruction and supplementary aides and services

when the students needed them. If we are to see positive results for all students, teachers must incorporate methods and strategies that have been proven to have the greatest impact on student achievement.

The Focused GPS Study consisted of an analysis of the function of the overall system. Initially, achievement data from the school report cards were analyzed and a root cause analysis was conducted with leadership teams at each school. These action steps were completed to inform the observer and focus the observations on content area classes with the potential to close achievement gaps for students with disabilities. School and classroom observations were conducted using the KVSEC Classroom Observation Instrument and SWOT Analysis tool to look for patterns in organizational behaviors and instructional practices that promote and enhance learning and those that do not. This research could be used to guide schools and districts in their efforts to raise test scores for all students and increase the achievement of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities must be exposed to the same rigorous content, as their non-disabled peers, if they are expected to learn that content. Teachers must let go of any preconceived notions they have about students with disabilities and maintain high expectations for them. Students benefit from frequent formative assessments paired with instantaneous feedback on their learning.

The Focused GPS System was developed to improve academic achievement for students with disabilities through a systems evaluation and improvement process. Observations focused on the seven key areas that make up the Baldrige Quality

Assessment (see Table 21) and on the concept of visible learning developed by John Hattie (2012). For learning to be visible, students need to know what it is they are to learn and the strategies they are going to use to learn it. This plays out in the classroom when the teacher discusses the learning targets (e.g., I can statements, relevance statements, and strategies) with the students. In this process, students are given some ownership by allowing them to have input into the strategies the class will use by utilizing the plus/delta process. Plus/delta is a debriefing activity used to determine what works for them and what needs to be improved. This process builds students metacognitive skills and makes the learning visible for students and teachers.

Table 21

Focused GPS System Quality Assessment-Baldrige Quality Assessment-adapted

| Key Areas | Look fors |
|---|---|
| Leadership | Clear vision and expectations |
| Information and analysis | Use of data to guide practice |
| Strategic quality planning | Class Goals/I can statements |
| Human resource development and management | High expectations for all students, teacher practices (e.g., formative assessment, random selection, etc...) |
| Management of process quality | Classroom observations by principal, PLCs, teacher monitoring and documenting student performance and making instructional adjustments. |
| Quality and operational results | Communicating learning targets, Use of PDSA process, incorporating plus/delta with students |
| Customer focus and satisfaction | Awareness and response to student needs |

Over the course of this study, teaching and learning became much more visible for all students. The Focused GPS System could be used to increase

achievement for any gap group or for whole school improvement. Learning improvement basically comes down to good instruction and good leadership. Using the Focused GPS System could help any school, from the best to the worst, through the framework that focuses on improvement of the system or any of the subsystems in a school by making all the parts visible to leaders, teachers, and students.

After the first year of implementation, the percent of students with disabilities that scored proficient or better on the on-demand writing portion of the state assessment increased at both schools. At South Floyd High School, proficiency rates for students with disabilities increased from 0.0% proficient in the 2011-12 school year to 20.0% proficient in the 2012-13 school year. At Prestonsburg High School, proficiency rates for students with disabilities in on-demand writing increased from 0.0% proficient in the 2011-12 school year to 10.0% proficient in the 2012-13 school year (see Table 22).

The two schools involved in this study increased overall proficiency rates for all students. At the beginning of this study, Prestonsburg High School ranked in the eighteenth percentile and South Floyd High School ranked in the twenty-ninth percentile when compared to all high schools across the Commonwealth. After the first year of the study was completed, Prestonsburg High increased their overall percentile rank from the eighteenth percentile to the seventy-fourth percentile and South Floyd increased from the twenty-ninth percentile to the forty-first percentile (see Table 22).

Table 22

Focused GPS System Results

| School | Percentile 2011-12 | Percentile 2012-13 | SWD Writing 2011-12 | SWD Writing 2012-13 |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| South Floyd High School | 29 th Percentile | 41 st Percentile | 0% Proficient | 20% Proficient |
| Prestonsburg High School | 18 th Percentile | 74 th Percentile | 0% Proficient | 10% Proficient |

South Floyd High School increased their overall percentile rank, compared to all high schools in Kentucky 12 percentile points and increased proficiency rates by 20 percent for students with disabilities on the writing portion of the state assessment.

Prestonsburg High School made remarkable progress in their overall percentile rank, increasing by 56 percentile points and increased proficiency rates by 10 percent for students with disabilities on the writing portion of the state assessment.

Currently, the Focused GPS System is in the second year of implementation at the two original high schools and in the first year of implementation at two middle schools in Floyd County. The two middle schools are focusing primarily on the achievement gaps of students receiving free or reduced lunch. The principals at these schools reported that the Focused GPS System has yielded valuable data and guidance to close achievement gaps for students receiving free or reduced lunch.

Future plans for the Focused GPS System are to begin training and coaching with directors of special education in the KVEC region so they can begin to take on the role of trainer and coach within their respective districts. Overall, special

education directors are sorely underutilized as trainers and coaches in the schools they represent. In Kentucky, the special education director gets the blame when things aren't going so well and gets no credit during good times. These folks have a huge responsibility and little authority out in their schools. This leads to a system that is responsive to problems, after they occur, but lacks the proactive training and coaching necessary for continuous improvement. The Focused GPS System provides a framework for special education directors to impact all teachers in the school through data analysis, observation, staff training and coaching.

Recommendations for further studies

This study of the implementation of the Focused GPS System was limited to two rural high schools that were in focus status for students with disabilities in on-demand writing. The Focused GPS System is currently in its second year of implementation at both high schools. Recently, the principals at two K-8 schools in Floyd County requested data analysis and observations be conducted at their schools. Neither of these schools were designate as focus schools but wanted to address achievement gaps for their students that receive free or reduced lunch. Observations have been conducted, a written report of the synthesis of the data and observations was developed, and plans were developed. Research at these two schools is just beginning and plans are to continue through the next testing cycle. Future research could be expanded by conducting a study in elementary or middle school setting and could focus on another content area (e.g., reading, math, science) or another subgroup of students (e.g., Limited English Proficiency, Free or Reduced Lunch, African

American, Hispanic). The Focused GPS System was designed to be very flexible and could be used in a variety of schools (e.g., urban, rural), with a variety of subgroups, or with a variety of disciplines.

Teachers are held accountable for the learning of all students. Students with disabilities are expected to achieve as well as their peers on state assessments. The Focused GPS System was designed to focus the efforts of educators on improving the quality of learning experiences that students with disabilities receive across their school day. This was accomplished by observing every classroom in the school for evidence of the use of systemic practices (e.g., I can statements, random selection, frequent formative assessment with feedback) and to determine if there was a culture of high expectations for students with disabilities. Data from the school report card focused the work on the students with disabilities subgroup in the writing content area. This study had a specific focus on the development of one model co-teaching classroom in each school utilizing Kentucky's Co-teaching for Gap Closure Initiative. Future studies could be conducted on the efficacy of the Co-teaching for Gap Closure Initiative to close achievement gaps between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. The Focused GPS System was used to guide both schools to select the CT4GC Initiative to provide intense focus on the gap students and the gap content area and those students showed marked gains in proficiency (i.e., 10% in one school and 20% in the other).

The Focused GPS System guided both schools to improve systemic focus and practices in the schools and classrooms. Both of the schools in this study showed

gains in their overall percentile ranks when compared to other high schools across Kentucky.

The Kentucky Department of Education has begun to shift their focus away from special education program compliance, focusing more intently on systemic program improvement. New IDEA-B grants (i.e., 2014-15 school year) for regional cooperatives require the development of a Regional Systemic Improvement Plan (RSIP). The Focused GPS System will be used as the framework for the Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative's RSIP to identify, guide, and support the schools in the KVEC service area. To satisfy the KVEC's IDEA-B grant, additional research will be conducted with schools with achievement gaps for students with disabilities.

The Focused GPS System study has created many questions that could be answered with additional research. Research could focus on the use of the plan, do, study, act (PDSA) process to measure the impact on the achievement of students with disabilities. Research could also focus on the use of frequent formative assessment with feedback on the achievement of students with disabilities. Both of these practices appeared to be very promising for further research.

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Appendix - A

School/District Investigative Questions & Root Cause Analysis (adapted from KDE Guidance Document)

General Questions

- Has the district met the state APR target this year?
- Has there been progress or slippage in AYP data since last year?
- What have been the AYP trends been in the last four years (up or down trend line)?
- Where is it going well and where is it not going well? District strengths and concerns?
- What patterns are there?
 - Schools
 - Teachers
 - Degree of co-op involvement
 - Staffing (i.e., administrator changes, central office changes, teacher retirement)
 - Low expectations for students with disabilities

Specific Questions

- Is the district or school tracking assessment trend line data on students with disabilities and nondisabled students from year to year?
- Has the district or school analyzed assessment data based on where students with disabilities receive services (i.e., collaborative classroom, resource, self-contained etc.)?

Regarding Core Content

- Access to KCAS and Core Content
 - Do all students have access to the core content and higher levels of instructional practices?
 - Do students with disabilities receive core instruction plus intervention (specially designed instruction designed to target the specific area of weakness).
 - Is there a focus on evidence-based interventions?
 - Is the district/school implementing a system of Response to Intervention?
 - Is common planning/PLC time available?
 - Are teachers knowledgeable of the five components of reading and how they interrelate?

- Do students receive high quality, evidence-based writing instruction? How do you know?
- Do students receive high quality, evidence-based math instruction? How do you know?
- Do all collaborative and resource classes have the same high level of instruction and higher order thinking skills as typical general education classes?
- Does the district have a plan for evaluating the fidelity of KCAS implementation?
 - How is the fidelity of implementation of research-based programs assessed?
 - Who assesses the fidelity of implementation?
 - How often is program fidelity assessed?

Regarding Assessment

- How does the district ensure content being taught is aligned to core content?
- Do principals ever collect classroom assessments for review?
 - Do school administrators use the data to help teachers meet the needs of students (e.g., staff development, change curriculum, professional growth plans)?
 - Is feedback on classroom assessments given to individual teachers?

Regarding Instructional Practices

- How is individual student progress monitored? How frequently?
- Are the strongest teachers with the weakest students?
- Has the district or school identified those students (by individual student not group) within your district and schools who are not meeting benchmarks?
- How do teachers vary instructional practices based on individual student need and ongoing progress monitoring?
 - Which instructional strategies do teachers use systematically with all students?
- Which research-based intervention strategies or programs do teachers use with targeted students?
- How do teachers use data to vary their instructional practices?
 - When there is a discrepancy between a student and peers, are students provided targeted instructional supports?
 - Is Mastery Learning a required practice?

- Does the district engage in practices of tracking students by ability level?
 - Are all lower students tracked into the same classroom or classes throughout the day? Why?
 - Do teachers or staff have lower expectations for some students and instruct them differently?

Regarding Monitoring and Expectations

- Does district and school leadership know students who are not meeting benchmarks by name?
- Does district and school leadership monitor to ensure all teachers can identify students who are not meeting benchmark by name?
- Does district or school leadership monitor classroom instructional practices to ensure teachers are varying strategies based on individual student need?
 - To what degree have teachers received training on implementation of selected research-based instructional practices?
 - Do teachers receive feedback on general principles of effective instruction such as high rates of engagement, frequent positive feedback, immediate error correction, opportunities for students to make active responses, etc.?
 - Does the district have a coaching process in place to determine the extent to which teachers demonstrate effective instructional practices
- Does district and school leadership determine PD based on assessment data?
 - To what degree have teachers received training on applicable research-based curricular programs?
 - Has ongoing professional development addressed the problem areas?
 - What other types of PD follow-up activities are implemented?
 - Is comprehensive and on-going professional development in curriculum, instruction, measurement, and problem solving offered to staff as part of a continuous improvement process?

Regarding Individual Students

- Does the district or school identify struggling students?
- What criteria are used to determine if a student is struggling?

- What is different about the way you teach students who have been identified as struggling?
 - Are the likely 'root causes' of the student's academic or behavioral difficulties (e.g., skill deficit, lack of motivation) determined and intervention strategies chosen that logically address those root causes.
- Does the district or school identify areas where students are weak? Does the district or school identify student errors on the K-prep?
- Does the district or school identify students who are almost to apprentice, almost to proficient, or almost to distinguished so they give them the little extra they need to move up in performance level?
- Are data analyzed at the student level to inform decision-making, etc.
- What does leadership do with this information?
 - Are resources allocated to instructional staff based on student needs documented by progress monitoring data (e.g. staff with more needs have more resources)?
- What are teachers expected to do with the information?
 - Do grade level teaching teams meet to discuss student progress and instructional changes on a systematic basis?

Appendix – B

KVSEC Classroom Observation Instrument & SWOT Analysis

Room # _____ Subject _____

Observer _____

| Effective Lessons | | Notes |
|--|-----------|---|
| IEP Goals Available | Yes No | |
| Accommodations/Interventions Provided | Yes No | |
| Collaboration / Co-Teaching | Yes No | _One teach, one observe; _One teach, one assist; _Alternative teaching; _Parallel teaching; _Station teaching; _Teaming approach |
| Technology / AT Available | Yes No | |
| Standard Posted (Target “I Can” from KCAS) | Yes No | |
| High Expectations (Empathy/Sympathy) | Yes No | |
| Lesson Plan Available | Yes No | |
| Lesson Plan Being Taught | Yes No | |
| Scaffolding (Step-by-step) | Yes No | |
| Formative Understanding Checks (describe) | Yes No | |
| Engagement & Attention (Random Selection) | Yes No | |
| Models/Exemplars (Studied in pairs?) | Yes No | |
| Questioning for Critical Thinking | Yes No | |
| Assessment of Impact | Yes No | |
| Instructional Adjustments | Yes No | |
| Conclusions from observations: Teacher | | 1. Knowledge of Content Yes___ No___ 2. Instructional Rigor and Student Engagement Yes___ |

| | | |
|---|--|--|
| | | No___ 3. Instructional Relevance Yes___ No___ 4. Learning Climate Yes___ No___ 5. Classroom Assessment and Reflection Yes___ No___ |
| Conclusions from observations: Students (record the number of students at each level) | | 1. Rebellion-Disengaged/Bothering others___ 2. Retreatism-No attention/No commitment___ 3. Ritual Compliance-Low attention/Low Commitment___ 4. Strategic Compliance-High attention/Low Compliance___ 5. Authentic Engagement-High attention/High engagement___ |
| Conclusions from observations: Classroom (circle one) | | 1. Highly Engaged Classroom 2. Well Managed Classroom 3. Out of Control Classroom |
| | | |

Date _____

Sp. Ed. Program SWOT Analysis (e.g., Behavior, Achievement, LRE, Scheduling, IEP/ILP, Realistic Expectations)
Gen. Ed. Program (e.g., KCAS use and alignment, PLC, RtI tiers, SIS use and documentation, Formative and Summative assessments, Mastery Learning, PGES, PBIS, Communication Systems, CCR, 4Cs of 21st Century Learning- (Critical thinking and problem solving, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity and innovation)
Describe Strengths:

Describe Weaknesses:

Describe Opportunities:

Describe Threats:**Standards for an Effective School**

- 1. Highly Engaged Classrooms**
- 2. Satisfactory Student Achievement**
- 3. Common Understanding of What Students Should Know and Be Able To Do**
- 4. Organize Knowledge To Appeal to Students**
- 5. Link Tasks to Performances and Products About Which Students Care**
- 6. Communicate Standards for Work**

Appendix-C

Focus School Survey

Check the box that best describes your role in the school.

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Administrator | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| General Education Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Special Education Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Directions

Consider your school’s ability to close achievement gaps, between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.

Then rate how each of the following strategies and practices are working in your school.

Rating Scale

(1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, 3 = very much, and 4 = could not be better)

Check the box that best describes your opinion.

| In the School | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Common planning time for Professional Learning Community meetings | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Response to Intervention for Reading | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Response to Intervention for Math | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Response to Intervention for Behavior | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Collaboration/Co-teaching | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Classroom observations by administrators | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. School-wide consistent rules and consequences | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Support system for new or novice teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. Support system for substitute teachers | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| In the Classroom | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. IEP goals made available | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Specially Designed Instruction provided to students with disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. Special Educator available for co-teaching | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. Availability of assistive technology | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. Posting of Learning Targets | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 16. Discussion of Learning Targets with students | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 17. Discussion of the Relevance of the Learning Targets | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| 18. Students with disabilities receive the same rigorous content as their peers | | | | |
| 19. Scaffolding Instruction | | | | |
| 20. Frequent use of Formative Assessment | | | | |
| 21. Instructional adjustments based on learning styles, modalities, etc... | | | | |
| 22. Student engagement strategies (e.g., random selection) | | | | |
| 23. Pairing of students for instruction (e.g., grouping and regrouping) | | | | |
| 24. Effective questioning strategies (e.g., circular questioning) | | | | |
| 25. Students required to defend their answers | | | | |
| 26. Intervention occurring when students are not engaged | | | | |

VITA

EDDY D. WILDER

EDUCATION

| | |
|----------------|--|
| December, 1995 | Bachelor of Science Eastern Kentucky University Richmond, Kentucky |
| May, 1999 | Master of Arts Eastern Kentucky University Richmond, Kentucky |
| May, 2002 | Rank I Eastern Kentucky University Richmond, Kentucky |
| Pending | Doctor of Education Morehead State University Morehead, Kentucky |

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

| | |
|--------------|--|
| 1977-1988 | Underground Coal Miner Shamrock Coal Company, Inc. Beverly, Kentucky |
| 1988-1989 | Surface Reclamation-Heavy Equipment Operator S and S Contracting, Inc. Stinnett, Kentucky |
| 1989-1992 | Underground Coal Miner Andalex Coal Company, Inc. Beverly, Kentucky |
| 1995-2000 | Teacher Stinnett Elementary School Stinnett, Kentucky |
| 2000-Present | Educational Consultant/Special Education Program Director Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative Hazard, Kentucky |

HONORS

1995 Most Outstanding Graduate in the field of Learning and
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1995 Magna Cum Laude