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A Three Part Dissertation: Evaluating A High School District Extended-period Mathematics Program Using Frequent, Unannounced, Focused, And Short Classroom Observations To Support Classroom Instruction Utilizing Classroom Observations To Inform Teaching And Learning: A Policy Advocacy Document

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A THREE PART DISSERTATION:

EVALUATING A HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT EXTENDED-PERIOD MATHEMATICS PROGRAM

USING FREQUENT, UNANNOUNCED, FOCUSED, AND SHORT CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS TO SUPPORT CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

UTILIZING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS TO INFORM TEACHING AND LEARNING: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Lawrence T. Cook

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

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DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION STATEMENT

This document is organized to meet the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership Ed.D is a professional practice degree program (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation,** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The program can be a current initiative, a grant project, a common practice, or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan,** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement with a clear target in mind. Candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell, & Rasmussen, 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document,** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state, or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane, and social critics; moral leaders; and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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This work is dedicated with love to

my Catherine

and my children

Lauryn

Trinity

Lawrence IV

Logan

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Abstract

This paper involved evaluating the extended-period mathematics program of Above Average Means High School (AAMHS, pseudonym). This study used quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry to investigate the effectiveness of the extended-period mathematics courses offered at AAMHS. Specifically, statistical measures on placement test data, end-of-the-year standardized test data, and survey data to evaluate its validity were used. In addition, teacher interviews and classroom observations to find characteristics of the program beyond only measured values were conducted. Although this study showed that the students in the extended program scored higher on standardized tests, the findings were not statistically significant.

Preface

Lessons learned in year one were equitable education for all students, instructional leadership, and engaging more stakeholders in the decision making processes. Wagner's (2008) concept of the 21st century curriculum and the seven survival skills solidified my belief that educational entities should focus more on ***students learned it*** rather than ***I taught it***. More importantly, to ensure that all students learn at high levels, supports must be scaffold, the environment needs to promote equity and access, and students required to participate in the most rigorous course of study. Thus, the implementation of a high-quality core curriculum and an establishment of an accountability system with action steps is necessary for high-academic achievement for all students.

Administrators are to be seen as instructional leaders and required to engage in leadership training and coaching. In the role of the instructional leader, administrators are obligated to utilize data to implement programmatic changes, and data should be used to determine the types of professional development opportunities. In addition, qualitative and quantitative data are necessary—numbers alone do not always completely represent a concept, an idea, or a program.

Other lessons learned in year one when evaluating programs or initiating change involved engaging key stakeholders in the planning processes and recognizing the roles stakeholders would play in the process. Further, teams must consist of members with complimentary skills and be treated with dignity and respect.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the implementation of the Excellence Achievement for Some High School (EASHS, pseudonym) extended-period mathematics program increases student achievement for low-performing students in mathematics. The extended-period mathematics program caters to students who experience difficulty in mathematics. Specifically, these students are given an additional 225 minutes of instruction per week compared to a regular period of mathematics. Most of the learning, guided practice, instruction, and assessments take place in the classroom.

The Excellence Achievement for Some High School believes that when students are given more instruction and seat time, students will be actively engaged and learn more content; hence, increasing their mathematical achievement. This belief is supported by Rolfhus and Ackerman (1999) who report that it is alleged that learned intelligence has a stronger correlation to success in schools, then innate intelligence. Marzano (2004) also supports the EASHS notion when he purported that schools must dedicate the time, resources, and academically enriching experiences to enhance the academic background knowledge of students.

The single most important factor in student achievement is the quality of classroom instruction (Marshall, 2013; Marzano, Frontier & Livingston, 2011). Further, every student must have access to rigorous, grade-level curriculum and highly effective initial teaching (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010). Thus, EASHS gives students with deficits in mathematics access to grade-level and rigorous curriculum through its extended-period mathematics program. Students are provided with extended time and

other resources to learn and engage in mathematics to improve their mathematic achievement. Students are expected to follow the same scope and sequence as regular-period college preparatory level students, and they are expected to take the same common assessments and final exams. I propose to increase the awareness of the extended-period mathematics program and the impact it has on students' achievement.

Rationale

In the fall of 2004, the lowest and basic mathematics track was eliminated at EASHS. This elimination resulted in the increase range of students' ability and skill set to do mathematics. Consequently, many students failed algebra, geometry, and advanced algebra at worrying rates. Students were expected to meet rigorous academic standards with few supports in place, and teachers received little to no training in differentiated instruction. However, students and teachers were held to the high academic standards and expectation of the college preparatory mathematics curriculum.

About three years ago, the number of students who failed the core mathematics course significantly declined. It has been touted that the students who were enrolled in the extended-period mathematics courses were outperforming the students in the regular-period courses on common assessments and final exams; thus, earning better marks. At the same time, it was discussed that although students enrolled in the extended-period courses outperformed students enrolled in the regular-period course on criterion-based assessments that the extended-period students made little to no gains on norm-referenced assessments.

This program evaluation is important to me and other stakeholders because a great deal of time and other resources are invested in it. If the program is found to be

significantly impactful to the mathematical achievement of underperforming students, then the program may be replicated in the other departments where students are struggling with college preparatory curriculum. However, if the study produces findings that display no significant improvements, then recommendations for improving the program's efforts need to be communicated and provided. Parents, students, staff, administration, and at-large community members strongly presume that the extended-period program is highly effective relative to improving students' achievement.

Goals

All students should have access to rigorous mathematical standards, high expectations, and quality teachers. Currently EASHS is aligned to ACT's College and Career Readiness Mathematics Standards. The following information was extracted from the ACT College Mathematics Standards webpage.

- Basic Operations and Applications
    - Solve multistep arithmetic problems that involve planning or converting units of measure (e.g., feet per second to miles per hour)
- Probability, Statistics, and Data Analysis
    - Calculate the average, given the frequency counts of all the data values
    - Manipulate data from tables and graphs
    - Compute straightforward probabilities for common situations
- Numbers, Concepts, and Properties
    - Find and use the least common multiple
    - Order fractions
    - Work with numerical factors

    - Work with scientific notation
    - Work with squares and square roots of numbers
    - Work problems involving positive integer exponents
    - Work with cubes and cube roots of numbers
    - Determine when an expression is undefined
    - Exhibit some knowledge of the complex numbers
- Expressions, Equations, and Inequalities
    - Solve real-world problems using first-degree equations
    - Write expressions, equations, or inequalities with a single variable for common prealgebra settings (e.g., rate and distance problems and problems that can be solved by using proportions)
    - Identify solutions to simple quadratic equations
    - Add, subtract, and multiply polynomials
    - Factor simple quadratics (e.g., the difference of squares and perfect square trinomials)
    - Solve first-degree inequalities that do not require reversing the inequality sign
- Graphical Representations
    - Identify the graph of a linear inequality on the number line
    - Determine the slope of a line from points or equations
    - Match linear graphs with their equations
    - Find the midpoint of a line segment
- Properties of Plane Figures

    - Use several angle properties to find an unknown angle measure
    - Recognize Pythagorean triples
    - Use properties of isosceles triangles
- Measurement
    - Compute the area of triangles and rectangles when one or more additional simple steps are required
    - Compute the area and circumference of circles after identifying necessary information
    - Compute the perimeter of simple composite geometric figures with unknown side lengths
- Functions
    - Evaluate polynomial functions, expressed in function notation, at integer values
    - Express the sine, cosine, and tangent of an angle in a right triangle as a ratio of given side lengths

This study focuses on whether students are meeting or exceeding the ACT Mathematics College and Career Readiness Standards by the time they exit the district's mathematics program as described above. It further focuses on how the extended-period students perform on criterion-based assessments in comparison to students enrolled in traditional regular-period courses. In addition, this study observes whether extended-period courses are implemented with fidelity and whether the courses are using the same curriculum and assessments as the traditional regular-period courses. It is the expectation that these goals

will improve students' learning by identifying deficiencies for improvements and advantages for progress and sustainability.

Research Questions

The primary and secondary research questions for this program evaluation follow:

1. Does the implementation of extended-period mathematics program have a significant impact on student achievement in mathematics?

Secondary questions:

1. How did students enrolled in the extended-period course perform academically on criterion-based assessments and norm-referenced assessments compared to the students enrolled in the traditional regular-period course?
2. How does the instruction in the extended-period course differ from the instruction in the regular-period course?
3. What are the advantages and barriers to implementing the extended-period courses?

These questions form the basis for the inquiries in this study.

SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study evaluates the impact the extended-period courses have on student achievement, specifically in the area of mathematics. Limited research is available on block scheduling (Lewis, Winokur, Cobb, Gliner, & Schmidt, 2005); however, the vast majority of the measureable data is on student grades and attendance, graduation, retention, and discipline rates (Creamean & Horvath, 2000).

This research study looked at the different types of schedules at the secondary school level. Conventional block scheduling cab be defined as any restructuring of the school day schedule that results in fewer, but extended, class periods each day (Baker, Joireman, Clay, & Abbott, 2006). The schedules include the traditional schedule, the 4x4 semester block schedule, and the alternating block schedule. Within the study of the different schedules, the following will be discussed:

- Various schedules
- Scheduling observations
- Discipline and student conduct
- Instructional strategies
- Teachers' training
- Achievement data
- Curriculum

Various Schedules

In the research studies and articles evaluated, the closest schedule that parallels EASHS's extended-period format was the block schedule format. Many of the block

schedule formats described students meeting daily for 90 minutes each day for a total of 450 minutes a week. The Excellence Achievement for Some High School's extended scheduled would be considered a hybrid block or extended schedule. In the traditional schedule, students meet for six, seven, or eight periods each day for an average of 42 minutes per period. Typically, the traditional schedule is sectioned into two semesters where the students meet for an entire year. The 4x4 semester block schedule entails students taking four classes per day for a semester for a full year's credit. In the 4x4 semester block, students meet for 85-90 minutes per each class. The 4x4 alternating day/week block schedule entails classes meeting for 85-90 minutes every other day or every other week—it is also known as the A/B block schedule. Classes in the alternating block typically meet for the entire year.

Students at EASHS who are enrolled in a single-period mathematics course are scheduled to meet on Mondays and Fridays for 50 minutes each day; and on two of the other days for 81 minutes each day for a total of 262 minutes per week. For example, if a student has second period mathematics, then he or she will meet on Mondays and Fridays for 50 minutes each day and on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 81 minutes each day. The student will not meet for mathematics on Wednesdays. Students who meets for extended-period mathematics courses meet for 100 minutes on Mondays and Fridays, 50 minutes on Wednesdays, and 131 minutes on Tuesdays and Thursdays for a total of 512 minutes a week. In essence, students meet for about four hours and twenty-two minutes per week in single-period courses and for eight hours and thirty-two minutes in extended-period courses.

Scheduling Observations

Hackman, Hecht, Harmston, Plisa, and Ziomek (2001) found that there were significantly more minutes for instructions in the traditional schedule than in the block schedule, and that there were fewer sectioning conflicts for teachers and students in the traditional schedule. Theoretically, over the course of a year, students could be exposed to many more hours of instruction over the period of a year than block schedule students who meet for longer periods of time for only one semester.

Hackman et al. (2001) found that it was a significant waste of time and energy moving from six to eight times a day, and that the traditional schedule presented less opportunities for electives. In contrast, the block schedule allowed more opportunities for students to enroll in more electives or to retake failed courses quickly to keep pace with classmates (Irmsher, 1996).

Wahl (2000) emphasized that teachers in the 4x4 block schedule manage fewer classes and thus had fewer course preparations. However, the 4x4 block schedule may be deemed problematic for course sequencing—students may not engage in liked courses for a full year after completion (Van Mondfrans, 1972), and possible sequential gaps may create a retention problem for some students. Teachers of mathematics, world languages, and advanced placement courses were often apprehensive about sequencing gaps and retention.

Discipline and Student Conduct

It was found that in the traditional schedule, an increased number of supervisions existed due to the high number of class changes, but in the 4x4 block schedule, school supervision problems may be reduced because students spent less time in highly

congested areas, such as in hallways and restroom (Canady & Rettig, 1995). Queen (2009) found that discipline referrals decreased with the successful implementation of block scheduling. If there are less discipline referrals, then many more students may be able to remain in class and receive more direct instruction.

Further, it was found that in the block schedule, less time was lost to general administrative duties such as calling roll, beginning and closing class, and getting students to an academic state of mind. However, it was recognized that absent students had to make up an equivalent of two days' worth of work for every day missed (Canady & Rettig, 1995).

Teachers Training

Specific attention must be given to staff development opportunities that focus on instructional techniques that engage students in the extended instructional blocks of time. (Wahl, 2000). Wilson and Stokes (2000) concurred that teachers, without proper training, may have a difficult time adjusting to the longer class periods. Further, Queen (2009) stated that when appropriate staff development is provided, an increase in the variety of teaching and learning strategies were improved.

Moreover, Manson (2006), documented that training teachers in appropriately implementing block schedules can have an intense effect on school progress. There needs to be ample professional development to support changes in instructional methodology. Marzano et al. (2011) stated that instructional leaders need to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses, monitor teachers' progress relative to the professional growth, and use feedback to make adjustments to growth plans to enhance students' growth.

Instructional Strategies

Wahl (2000) indicated that teachers in the block schedule cannot lecture for 80–100 minutes, but stressed that the fragmented six or seven-period courses were conducive to teacher-directed lessons. On the other hand, varied instructional strategies enabled the students in a block class to learn on many different levels—including increased individualized instruction (Manson, 2006). Hottenstein (1998) documented that teaching in the block should be active versus passive, creative versus prescriptive, interactive versus independent, exploration versus receptivity, and integration versus isolation. More importantly, it is beneficial to students for teachers to balance direct instruction with models that encourage discovery of concepts and ideas.

Freeman and Maruyama (1995) acknowledged that teachers have more opportunities to implement more varied and reliable assessment strategies, and that teachers' training should include sharing successes, failures, and observations of other teachers teaching. Cooper (1996) wrote that students working in cooperative learning groups have time to make self-discoveries that 90-minute classes allow to develop a complete idea in one setting rather than to extend it in several consecutive classes, and that assessments can feature thought-provoking, open-ended questions rather than just the multiple-choice questions.

Baker et al. (2006) reported that students can focus more time and effort on each course. Canady and Rettig (1996) described that longer class periods allowed the opportunity for students to engage in more in-depth learning. Others, such as Wilson and Stokes (2000), conveyed that the amount of busy work needed to be eliminated in the block schedule. Further, Canady and Rettig (1996) stated that doing nothing more than extending the time of courses may not do anything but increase the misery for both

teachers and students, and thus create longer periods of nonengaged students. The types of instructional strategies that would be appropriate in block schedules include cooperative learning and inquiry methods and simulations (Queen & Isenhour, 1998). Instructional strategies should emphasize interactive approaches where students are expected to become engaged in their own learning (Hottenstein, 1998).

Student Achievement

Scroth and Dixon (1995) recognized the lack of literature regarding student achievement in schools that have adopted a block schedule. Some findings included only borderline differences in students' achievement between the block schedule and the traditional schedule (Wahl, 2000). In addition, data on the relationship between block scheduling and improvement of standardized test scores is inconsistent (Baker et al). Davis-Wiley & Cozart (1996) held that no connections exist to student achievement and block scheduling. Brake (2000) and Schreiber, Veal, Finders, and Churchill, (2001) found no statistically significant differences between schedule type and student achievement.

Still, Manson (2006) found that some studies revealed achievement drops as low as 10% when moving to a block schedule. McCreary and Hausman (2001), Rice et al. (2002), and The College Board (1998) reported statistically significant differences in favor of students in traditional scheduling on mathematics test scores. Other studies have shown that schools on the block schedule recognized student achievement losses compared with students on traditional scheduling.

Queen (2009), found that with continuous staff development and increased teacher-student interaction in the instructional process that student achievement can increase dramatically. Thus, some studies revealed that students who were enrolled in the

block schedule had improved GPAs, enhanced graduation rates, and reduced drop-out rates (Baker et al.). These studies also reveal an increased number of students taking AP courses and in the number of honor roll students (Baker et al.).

Curriculum

Teachers should see the block schedule as an opportunity to cover breadth and depth of knowledge in the curriculum (Wahl, 2000). Teachers must design detailed lesson plans that include demonstrations, discussions, cooperative learning, and inquiry method (Queen & Isenhour, 1998). Some teachers commented that they do not have enough time to complete an entire course, but Wilson & Stokes (2000) reported that teachers should focus more on core learning and omit less essential materials from the curriculum. Moreover, that teachers should strive to eliminate or modify curriculums or group competencies together (Queen, 2009).

Hottenstein (1998) indicated that a curriculum should have a balance between skill development and core concepts, and that assessments should be natural parts of the educational plan. He also noted that quality time for enrichment, remediation, and cocurricular experiences must be provided. More importantly, students need to be aware of the process for learning and be critical thinkers and managers of information.

Wagner (2008) stated that a strong need exists for students to be able to think systemically, adapt to different situations, and make sense of important information. In addition, students need strong communication skills and the ability to apply scientific methods to problem-solving. In my first year as the mathematics department chair, I remembered the superintendent telling me that the curriculum in the department was a mile wide and an inch deep. The curriculum is still too shallow to provide rich

experiences for our students in all disciplines. Therefore, we need to reduce the number of concepts students are required to learn per course and ensure that all students learn the concepts prior to exciting any course.

Danielson (2007), conveyed that students need skills for evaluating arguments, analyzing information, and drawing conclusions. She stated that high levels of learning by students require high levels instruction (Danielson). She, like the previously mentioned authors, believed that teachers need to continue finding ways to develop and improve their skills; more importantly, teachers need to engage students in developing their own understanding. She added that teachers engage students in learning by teaching students to be more independent of the teacher and teaching students to use information from a variety of sources to problem solve and think critically. In addition, teachers must be able to determine which concepts and skills are essential for students to learn.

Danielson included four domains in her work—planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. She believed that teachers need to have strong knowledge of the discipline that they teach as well as a strong focus on the important concepts necessary for student achievement. Furthermore, to maximize students' success, Danielson strongly believed that teachers need to understand their students' backgrounds, interests, and skills. She indicated that classroom observations need to be done in person or through video and when observing, leaders need to determine the safety of the classroom environment.

To maximize students' learning, Danielson declared that students needed to be engaged in meaningful work that has stamina beyond unit work. Further, she documented that instructional leaders should be able to view samples of students' work and determine

the level of expected rigor. In addition, leaders should always observe a climate of hard work and perseverance on the part of the students.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

Research shows that some schools that chose an extended-period mathematics program believe that teachers may have a difficult time teaching students with different abilities in the classroom. Research also shows that when teachers received training in instructional delivery for extended-period mathematics classes, they experienced more success than teachers who did not have training. Therefore, comparing the instructional delivery of traditional curriculum classrooms to the extended-period classrooms was an important aspect in this study.

As an academic intervention, the extended-period courses are expected to increase the number of students who successfully complete algebra, geometry, and advanced algebra. It is also expected that the overall achievement relative to mathematics would improve. Data collection efforts focused on a cohort of students enrolled in the traditional regular-period course, the extended-period course, and the lowest track single-period course.

Participants

The primary stakeholders who utilize this research will be mathematics teachers, the mathematics department chair, and principal. It is important that they understand the impact of the extended-period mathematics program on students' achievement. The stakeholders would be able to implement changes, if any, and communicate results to other stakeholders.

Data collection focused on the test scores of students enrolled in the extended-period courses as compared to students enrolled in traditional regular-period courses and

lowest track courses. Data was collected from the mathematics department chair and teachers. In addition, the curriculum for algebra, advanced algebra, and geometry were reviewed and observation notes were used to determine whether the courses were taught with fidelity.

Data Gathering

Students' performance on common assessments, semester exams, the Educational Planning and Assessment System (EPAS), and local assessment systems were collected. Regular- and extended-period classes were observed over an extended period of time. Curriculum for all three courses were observed to determine whether it was rigorous and aligned to high standards. The three curriculums were compared to look for consistencies. These data will help determine the impact the extended-period classes had on students' achievement.

Observed were two teachers' extended-period classrooms for an entire 131-minute period each. I asked the department chair of assessment for EPAS and Education, Consulting, Research, and Analytics (ECRA) data for specific students. Next, course grade data for the students in this study were gathered. Data collected for the course grades were for a period of over three years of mathematics for single- and extended-period mathematics courses. Then, a multiple-choice survey for teachers (see Appendix A) was conducted and two teachers and an instructional leader interviewed (see Appendices B and C).

The survey consisted of 20 questions regarding the extended mathematics courses. Six questions pertained to collegial interactions, five questions regarded professional development, and nine questions were relative to standards, pacing,

instructional strategies, and assessments. Seven teachers, including the participating teachers, completed the survey. Completed surveys were sealed and given to the researcher's assistant until later when they could be reviewed and summarized. Thus, identity of survey participants was concealed.

A five-point Likert scale system (using a predetermined range of questions) was used for the survey. The results in frequencies were tabulated and summarized. The questions used were mainly based on and built for measurement uses. The five-point scale was used to allow for the neutral position.

The interviews were one-on-one question and answer sessions where two teachers and one instructional leader were interviewed. The environment was quiet and the recorder worked properly. During the interviews, notes and full transcriptions of the interview recordings were taken. Structured interview questions were provided where the researcher decided upon a series of questions and read the questions exactly to individuals to establish an understanding of their ideas on a topic.

Interviews were conducted and recorded verbally and in writing. Participants' names were not written on the interview; however, names were distinguished between teachers and instructional leaders' responses via headings on the written interview questionnaire. For example, one would read as teacher and the other as instructional leader. The interview consisted of six questions relative to teachers' and the instructional leaders' perceptions about the extended mathematics courses. Interviews were scheduled for 30 minutes. Some interviews, because of participants' responses, took less than or longer than the allotted 30 minutes.

Codes were used in interviews where the data was summarized into content and primary ideas. Transcripts were read first with no perceived ideas before looking for common patterns and ideas. Open coding was used where the researcher looked for single words or phrases of students' ideas before focusing on one code at a time—looking for new and overarching themes; families were developed using these themes. Finally, one set of data was compared to another. Data was analyzed consistently for both teachers and department chairpersons.

The unstructured observation notes were scripted. The researcher observed classroom instruction and wrote everything he heard and saw for 10 to 15 minutes. The researcher has used this technique often over the past 12 years when conducting full formal observations. Exceptional information was captured to share with teachers that were observed over the years.

Observations were conducted where teachers and students were observed and their behavior recorded. The observations were open-ended where activities were recorded and instructional freedom encouraged. After each observation, the researcher met with teachers to share feedback and to engage them in reflective conversations.

Data Analysis Techniques

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), t-tests, and common classroom observation themes were analyzed. Dependent t-tests were used to compare the means between the students enrolled in extended- and single-period courses. The results represented the program evaluation based on various data sources.

Two teachers were observed teaching at least once a week. The researcher observed classroom instruction and wrote everything he heard and saw for 40 minutes to

an hour. Shortly after each classroom observation session, observation notes were summarized and recorded, in writing. In addition, after each feedback session with teachers, feedback notes were recorded, in writing. Observation data was collected over a period of time relative to use of research-based instructional strategies, questioning techniques, students' engagement, and student-teacher relationships. I was intentional and systemic about scheduling observations and feedback meetings with teachers.

Seven teachers completed the survey. Their responses were numbered as followed: 5-strongly agree, 4-agree, 3-neutral, 2-disagree, and 1-strongly disagree. The teachers' surveys, along with the instructional leader's survey, were summarized and analyzed looking for strong patterns amongst the teachers and the instructional leader.

Within 24 hours of each interview, the researcher transcribed the information using Microsoft Word's 2013 table functions. The researcher sorted data using a graphic organizer and codes until patterns and similar conclusions were apparent—first looking for teachers' patterns of similarities and differences and then for the instructional leader's patterns before comparing teachers' responses with the responses of the instructional leader.

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Data in this section is organized both quantitatively and qualitatively. In information shows basic patterns, or themes, so that the intended users of this study can understand the results.

Findings

This study's objective involved exploring the effectiveness of the extended-period mathematics courses offered at EASHS on students' achievement. The implementation of research involved classroom observations; students' course grades; EPAS, which consisted of the EXPLORE, PLAN, and, ACT; teachers' surveys and interviews; and an Instructional Leader's interview (see Appendices A–C).

Test Score Data

The EASHS has three tiers of mathematics:

1. Academic Core (AC),
2. College Preparatory (CP), and
3. Honors (H).

Academic Core-level mathematics courses consist of the essential skills and concepts within the courses, CP consists of skills and concepts that would prepare students to compete at the college level, and H mathematics consist of the most challenging concepts and skills. Students initial enrollment recommendations are based on the Equalized Interval Score (EIS) generated from their entrance exam.

Since this study is solely about mathematics, from this point, AC will refer to students enrolled in Academic Core Algebra One as freshmen. Then, these students were enrolled in no mathematics (or in AC mathematics, extended-period mathematics, or CP

mathematics for their sophomore and junior years). Students enrolled in extended-period mathematics as freshmen are referred to as DBL. These students were enrolled in DBL or CP mathematics during their sophomore and junior years. Students enrolled in at least two extended-period mathematics courses over three years are referred to as DBL2 and finally, students enrolled in CP Algebra One as freshmen are referred to as CP.

I compared 11 enrolled AC students to 11 DBL students. The average 8th grade EIS score was 160 (see Table 1) for the students enrolled in AC and 157 for DBL students (see Table 2). The average growth from the EXPLORE to the ACT assessment for DBL students was 4 scale points; AC students' average growth was 2 scale points. The students enrolled in DBL had greater growth (M = 4), than the students enrolled in AC (M = 2). The mean difference was not significant, $t(11) = 1.931$, $p<.05$. The data in the Tables 1 and 2 show that students enrolled in AC and DBL courses grow overtime. Although students enrolled in the DBL courses grow more than students enrolled in the AC courses, the time spent enrolled in the DBL courses does not grow DBL that much more than students who are enrolled in AC courses. Further, there is no difference between enrolling a student in a DBL course and an AC course.

Table 1

AC Students for DBL Comparison

Name	EXPLORE	ACT	Difference	EIS_8thGr
Student1	8	14	6	156
Student2	13	15	2	156
Student3	10	15	5	156
Student4	13	16	3	156
Student5	14	14	0	156
Student6	14	16	2	162
Student7	10	14	4	162
Student8	15	15	0	162
Student9	15	17	2	162
Student10	16	15	-1	168
Student11	13	16	3	168
Average	**13**	**15**	**2**	**160**

Table 2

DBL Students for AC Comparison

Name	EXPLORE	ACT	Difference	EIS_8thGr
Student1	12	13	1	131
Student2	15	17	2	168
Student3	15	17	2	168
Student4	15	18	3	168
Student5	10	15	5	168
Student6	7	15	8	168
Student7	11	17	6	150
Student8	12	17	5	124
Student9	14	17	3	150
Student10	15	14	-1	162
Student11	10	16	6	168
Average	**12**	**16**	**4**	**157**

I compared 11 students who were enrolled in AC to 11 students enrolled in CP courses. The average 8th grade EIS score for the students enrolled in AC Algebra One was 160 (see Table 3). The average EIS score for the students enrolled in CP was 190 (see Table 4). The average growth for CP was 3 scale points from the EXPLORE to the ACT as compared to 2 scale point growth for students enrolled in AC Algebra One. Although the growth for students enrolled in the CP courses were 1 scale point higher, the independent t-test showed that the growth was not statistically significant. The students enrolled in CP had greater growth (M = 3) than the students who were enrolled in AC (M = 2). The mean difference was not significant, $t(11) = 0.913, p<.05$. Thus, enrolling a student in a CP mathematics course does not guarantee that he or she grows more than a student enrolled in an AC course. In all, there is no difference between enrolling a student in a DBL course and an AC course.

Table 3

AC Students for CP Comparison

Name	**EXPLORE**	**ACT**	**Difference**	**EIS_8thGr**
Student1	8	14	6	156
Student2	13	15	2	156
Student3	10	15	5	156
Student4	13	16	3	156
Student5	14	14	0	156
Student6	14	16	2	162
Student7	10	14	4	162
Student8	15	15	0	162
Student9	15	17	2	162
Student10	16	15	-1	168
Student11	13	16	3	168
Average	**13**	**15**	**2**	**160**

Table 4

CP Students for AC Comparison

Name	EXPLORE	ACT	Difference	EIS_8thGr
Student1	13	23	10	131
Student2	10	14	4	173
Student3	15	17	2	189
Student4	17	19	2	194
Student5	14	15	1	194
Student6	16	16	0	199
Student7	11	15	4	199
Student8	12	17	5	204
Student9	14	18	4	204
Student10	13	14	1	204
Student11	16	16	0	204
Average	**14**	**17**	**3**	**190**

Thirteen students who were enrolled in DBL2 were compared to 13 students enrolled in CP. The average 8th grade EIS score for the students enrolled in DBL was a 183 (see Table 5) and the average EIS score for the students enrolled in CP courses was 198 (see Table 6). The average growth for DBL was 3 scale points from the EXPLORE to the ACT versus 3 scale points growth for students enrolled in CP. There was no difference in students' growth for students enrolled in DBL2 (M = 3) compared to students who were enrolled in CP (M = 3). The mean difference was not significant, $t(13) = 0.000$, $p<.05$. Thus, although students spent more time in DBL2 courses, the mathematical achievement gained over time showed no difference. Therefore, students may be better served in a single-period course.

Table 5

DBL (Two or More) Students for CP Comparison

Name	**EXPLORE**	**ACT**	**Difference**	**EIS_8thGr**
Student1	15	17	2	168
Student2	15	18	3	168
Student3	10	15	5	168
Student4	7	15	8	168
Student5	15	16	1	173
Student6	13	15	2	173
Student7	12	14	2	189
Student8	15	16	1	189
Student9	13	16	3	189
Student10	13	15	2	189
Student11	12	14	2	194
Student12	16	17	1	194
Student13	12	18	6	214
Average	**13**	**16**	**3**	**183**

Table 6

CP Students for DBL (Two or More) Comparison

Name	**EXPLORE**	**ACT**	**Difference**	**EIS_8thGr**
Student1	10	14	4	173
Student2	15	17	2	189
Student3	17	19	2	194
Student4	14	15	1	194
Student5	16	16	0	199
Student6	11	15	4	199
Student7	12	17	5	204
Student8	14	18	4	204
Student9	13	14	1	204
Student10	16	16	0	204
Student11	15	19	4	204
Student12	15	21	6	204
Student13	14	16	2	204
Average	**14**	**17**	**3**	**198**

Sixty-one students who were enrolled DBL were compared to 61 students enrolled in CP. The average 8th grade EIS for the students enrolled in DBL was 186 (see Appendix D), and the average EIS score for the students enrolled in CP students was 210 (see Appendix E). The average growth for DBL was 2 scale points from the EXPLORE to the ACT compared to 3 scale point growth for students enrolled. The one-point growth was statistically significant with an average effect size of 0.45. The students enrolled in CP had greater growth (M = 3) than the students enrolled in DBL (M = 2). The mean difference was significant, $t(61) = 2.399, p<.05, d=0.45$. Thus, it was not by chance that when students were enrolled in CP mathematics, they achieved more than students enrolled in DBL mathematics.

Summary of Test Data

The test data in this study show that students enrolled in extended-period mathematics courses do not achieve higher learning than students enrolled in single-period mathematics courses. More importantly, although the data show that students enrolled in extended-period mathematics achieve more than students enrolled in single-period courses over time, the difference gain was irrelevant or no real difference existed.

Classroom Observations

I observed two teachers during this research study. To protect privacy, I will call teacher one, Tyler, and teacher two, Baily.

For my first observation of Tyler, I observed an extended-period mathematics course. Tyler was reviewing for a test on solving systems of equations using multiple methods. Tyler asked questions that mostly required one-response answers and were at the remembering and understanding levels of Bloom's Taxonomy Learning Domains (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Bloom's learning domains from top to bottom are creating, evaluating, analyzing, applying, understanding, and remembering. Tyler's statements often led to one correct response or to clarify procedures. Some statements referred to instructions and directions for classwork assignments. Tyler's students often responded with one-response answers.

Tyler's students were attentive and participated well for about the first thirty minutes of class. After that time, Tyler had to constantly remind students to comply with classroom climate expectations. Tyler incorporated many activities during my first observation: direct instruction, a group activity, individual seat work, a kinesthetic activity, and a partner activity. Per Tyler's explanation, this was the first day students

engaged in the group activity; however, it appeared that students had participated in the kinesthetic activity before.

For my second observation of Tyler, I again observed an extended-period mathematics course. Tyler's second observation was an introduction of operations on matrices. Tyler continued to ask knowledge based and recall type questions. During the second observation, Tyler did not ask very many questions; instead, Tyler mostly explained concepts and made more statements. Students asked many more clarifying questions, but made no statements.

Instructional strategies only included two activities—individual seat work and direct instruction. Classroom management was similar to my first observation of Tyler's class—where students were asked several times to comply with classroom expectations and were redirected to do work on several occasions.

For Tyler's third observation, I observed a course with the same learning outcomes and assessments, but was taught without the extended time. Tyler used mainly two instructional strategies for this observation: direct instruction and individual seat work. Tyler continued to ask knowledge, recall, and comprehension level questions. Tyler's statements were instructional and procedural—students were shown or told what to do. Students' statements and questions were also at basic and entry level. Students were on-task for most of the period, and Tyler seldom had to redirect students to refocus and work.

I observed Baily's class once, and it was an extended-period mathematics course. Baily asked knowledge and comprehension type questions. Baily's statements were encouraging, informative, reflective, and relevant. Baily's students did not ask any

content related questions during the direct instruction, and their statements often consisted of one response.

Baily's classroom climate was conducive to learning at all times, and all three instructional strategies were used during this observation. During the paired activity, students asked many content related questions of each other and the teacher.

The classroom observations rendered no difference in instructional strategies, other than students were given the opportunity to spend more time engaged with mathematics. The questioning and taxonomy were of low levels, and the activities did not ask students to create or justify their mathematics using previous learning mathematics. The one teacher who engaged students more successfully in the extended-period mathematics courses also equally and successfully engaged students in single-period mathematics courses. As a result, students enrolled in extended-period mathematics courses did not achieve significantly more than students enrolled in single-period mathematics courses.

Teacher Survey

I administrated a quick survey to six teachers who currently teach extended-period mathematics. Their anonymity was kept secret by not requiring names on the surveys, and the surveys were randomly collected. Appendix A details a complete copy of the survey.

Teachers indicated that their instruction were guided by state standards. They also stated that at times, they shared lessons and discussed students' work amongst each other. Adjusting the pace of the course and assigning students to same-level and mixed-level achievement groups were strategies they used to improve instruction. Further, teachers

specified that they used localized assessment data to inform instruction, and they provided outside help for struggling students. Teachers maintained that they had conversations with other teachers about different learning strategies; and they all agreed that the curriculum, instruction, and assessment tools were aligned.

Teachers stated that they rarely asked colleagues to observe their class; thus, they rarely received meaningful feedback on their performance from their colleagues. About half of the teachers were in agreement that the professional development was sustained and coherently focused, included enough time to discuss how to apply new ideas, helped to better understand the needs of the students, helped identify strategies to better meet the needs of the students, and included opportunities to work with teachers.

In summary, the teacher surveys revealed that teachers believe that extended-period mathematics courses are aligned with the state standards. Teachers also believe that they attend meaningful and ongoing professional development relative to extended-period courses and provide their students with different and effective instructional strategies to improve students' learning. However, teachers stated that they did not visit one another's classroom instruction on a regular basis; so, opportunities for timely feedback on whether instructional strategies are effective are limited.

Teacher Interviews

I interviewed Tyler and Baily. The interviews were at most 30 minutes in duration. Within 24 hours of each interview, I transcribed the information using Microsoft Word's 2013 table functions. The data was sorted using a graphic organizer and codes until patterns and similar conclusions were apparent.

Expectations for Students' Learning

Tyler said that high expectations are communicated to all students through problem solving during class time. In addition, Tyler consistently and constantly communicated to students their capability and reminded students to seek help through the online book, teacher's support, and tutoring. Tyler also stated that pushing students to do their best and providing structure and expectations of high standards are the main strategies used to establish and maintain relationships with the students.

Baily communicated high expectations for all students by holding students accountable for their work and behavior. Explicit examples are often given to demonstrate expectations in Baily's class. Meeting students where they are and holding them to their standards is also how Baily communicates expectation of students. It is important for students to know that Baily cares about them; equally important to Baily is that the students succeed. Baily does not write very many discipline referrals, for students are expected to do a great job. Baily also contributes participating in outside activities, such as coaching or attending other school functions, as great endeavors to build effective relationships with students.

Instructional Strategies

The instructional strategies Tyler used to achieve optimum success of students were individual white boards, close observations via walking about the classroom while students worked, and students working at the board. Tyler believed that the students' maturity levels needed to improve before more strategies could be effective. To deepen students' understandings, Tyler activated students' background knowledge; however, Tyler admitted that it is mostly the teacher's responsibility to explain the higher level of thinking and to make the mathematical connections. Tyler added that looking at students'

data, visiting other teachers, conversing with other teachers, classroom management, and assessing assignments are specific ideas the mathematics chair offered as ways to improve instruction.

Baily teaches students to deepen their understanding by providing quick feedback and by encouraging students to watch videos created by Baily and others in the mathematics department. Baily uses many assessments throughout the course. Students were encouraged to advocate for themselves, seek out individual assistance, and be resourceful. Baily stated that the department chair encouraged cooperative learning, paired learning, and other varied activities.

Communications with Parents

Tyler informed parents of their student's progress by email, face-to-face conferences, PowerSchool (EASHS's informational system), and progress reports. Further, Tyler stressed that face-to-face and phone conferences occur only when necessary. Baily also calls parents, encourages parents to use PowerSchool, sends emails, and coordinates face-to-face conferences when necessary.

Instructional Leader Interviews

I interviewed an instructional leader. For confidentiality reasons, I will call this person, Dorian. The interview was conducted and recorded verbally and in writing. The interview was scheduled for 30 minutes; however, depending on the instructional leader's responses, the interview may take shorter or longer than 30 minutes. Codes were used to summarize data collected into content and primary ideas. First, transcripts were read with no perceived ideas; then, common patterns and ideas were explored. Open coding was

used to look for single words or phrases of students' ideas before focusing on one code at a time to look for new and overarching themes.

Professional Development Expectations

Dorian stated that teachers may attend and are encouraged to attend at least one professional conference a year. Information is shared throughout the year describing relevant conferences. Dorian stated that some teachers presented instructional strategies related to the areas of mathematics at conferences and at school-wide professional development days.

Instructional Strategies

Dorian also stated that a standard of instruction is expected for all extended-period algebra one courses. Teachers are expected to use common bell work assignments and class notes. Class notes consist of a sequence of questions in which all students would be exposed. Many of the teachers are trained in cooperative learning and willing to step out of their teaching comfort zone to implement instructional strategies.

Observing Classroom Instruction

When observing classes, Dorian said she looks for positive relationships between the teachers and students. Dorian also wants to see students actively engaged with the lesson as well as with one another. Further, activities need to be varied and classroom disruptions minimal. To support struggling teachers, Dorian invites teacher to observe Dorian's classroom and encourages teachers to observe one another's classroom. Again, Dorian strongly encourages teachers to attend conferences and workshops relevant to the course that they are teaching.

Interpretation

This section discusses the meaning of the results and the significance of the findings. In addition, it discusses the reasons for the results.

Meaning of the Results

Students in extended-period mathematics courses gained more average difference (M=4) from the EXPLORE to the ACT than did students enrolled in AC (M=2). This may be a direct result that students in the DBL courses spend more time learning and covering concepts and skills that prepare students for college level work. On the contrary, students in the AC courses spend less time doing mathematics, and the focus is on basis concepts and skills.

Students enrolled in DBL2 gained the same average difference (M=3) from the EXPLORE to ACT than the students enrolled in CP (M=3). Both sets of students were exposed to the same college preparatory curriculum; however, DBL2 students spend more time on-task and often incorporated varied instructional strategies to achieve learning objectives. Students are probably achieving the same gains because they are held to the same standards, projects, and other assessments.

SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section discusses the positive, negative, and unintended results relative to the primary and secondary questions presented in this study. In addition, actions are added to the analysis, interpretation, and judgments regarding recommendations in this study.

Judgment

Does the implementation of extended-period mathematics program have a significant impact on student achievement in mathematics, represents the primary question for this research. Although this study showed that achievement gains on standardized assessments were not statistically significant for extended-period students as compared to single-period students, I believe that the gains are large enough to warrant the continuation of the extended-period mathematics courses.

Students, who traditionally achieved low in mathematics may or may not make any gains in single-period mathematics courses. The instruction in the extended-period courses is delivered similarly to the delivery of instruction in single-period courses—except there is more time on-task for independent work in the extended-period courses. Also, in extended-period courses, students were more likely to be engaged in multiple instructional strategies than in a single-period course.

Teachers collaborate with one another and are trained in different learning strategies at least once a year. Teachers who teach the extended-period courses tend to be teachers who have been in education for 5 years or more. Teachers are willing to teach the extended-period courses.

About ten years ago, many more students were failing algebra, geometry, and trigonometry than the number of students who are failing today. Extended-period

mathematics has given students the opportunity to be exposed to 3 years of mathematics. For the most part, students are excited to take extended-period mathematics and to have the opportunity to take mathematics for 3 years and be successful all 3 years.

Recommendations

I recommend that EASHS continues offering extended-period mathematics to its students. Overall, the students in extended-period mathematics gain the same number of scale points on the EPAS; thus, the overall achievement gains are about the same between the single- and extended-period courses. Students in the extended-period courses are exposed to the same college preparatory courses as their single-period counterparts.

Wahl (2000) stated that specific attention must be given to staff development opportunities that focus on instructional techniques that engage students in the extended instructional blocks of time. Wahl (2000) and Queen (2009) stated that when appropriate staff development is provided, an increase in the variety of teaching becomes evident and learning strategies improve. Thus, I recommend that EASHS teachers should be developed specifically, frequently, and appropriately.

Varied instructional strategies enable the students in a block class to learn on many different levels, including increased individualized instruction (Manson, 2006). Hottenstein (1998) documented that teaching in the block should be active versus passive, creative versus prescriptive, interactive versus independent, exploration versus receptivity, and integration versus isolation. Hence, a portion of the staff development should address varied instructional practices, and the practices should lean to active and creative learning.

Types of instructional strategies that would be appropriate in block schedules include cooperative learning and inquiry methods (Queen & Isenhour, 1998). Instructional strategies should emphasis interactive approaches where students are expected to become engaged in their own learning (Hottenstein).

Teachers should see the extended-period schedules as opportunities to cover breadth and depth of knowledge in the curriculum (Wahl, 2000). Teachers must design detailed lesson plans that include demonstrations, discussions, cooperative learning, and inquiry method (Queen & Isenhour). Moreover, teachers should strive to eliminate or modify curriculums or group competencies together (Queen, 2009). Thus, EASHS teachers should really look at the mathematics curriculum to find out what to eliminate and what to teach in more depth and breath.

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Appendix A: Extended-Period Mathematics—Teacher

Teacher Multiple-Choice Survey

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this survey will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

For each question or statement below, please circle your response.

1. My classroom instruction is guided by state standards.
   a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

2. I discuss lessons that were not very successful with my peers.
   a. never b. rarely c. sometimes d. frequently

3. I share and discuss my students' work with my peers.
   a. never b. rarely c. sometimes d. frequently

4. I adjust my pace in the unit for the entire class to address the needs of struggling students.
   a. never b. rarely c. sometimes d. frequently

5. I use same-level achievement grouping to address the needs of struggling students.
   a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

6. I use mixed achievement grouping to address the needs of struggling students.
   a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

Appendix A: Extended-Period Mathematics—Teacher (continued)

7. I use individualized instruction during class to address the needs of struggling students.
   a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

8. I provide individual assistance outside of class to address the needs of struggling students.
   a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

9. I use localized assessment data to make informed instructional decisions.
   a. never b. rarely c. sometimes d. frequently

10. Professional development for this course has been sustained and coherently focused.
    a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

11. Professional development for this course includes enough time to discuss how to apply new ideas.
    a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

12. Professional development for this course has helped me better understand the needs of my students.
    a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

13. Professional development for this course helped me identify strategies to better meet the needs of my struggling students.
    a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

Appendix A: Extended-Period Mathematics—Teacher (continued)

14. Professional development includes the opportunities to work with teachers.
    a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

15. My instructional strategies enable students to construct their own knowledge.
    a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

16. How often have you had colleagues observe your classroom?
    a. never b. rarely c. sometimes d. frequently

17. How often do you receive meaningful feedback on your performance from colleagues?
    a. never b. rarely c. sometimes d. frequently

18. How often have you visited other teachers' classrooms to observe instruction?
    a. never b. rarely c. sometimes d. frequently

19. How often have you had conversations with colleagues about what helps students learn best?
    a. never b. rarely c. sometimes d. frequently

20. I focus on developing the essential concepts of this course.
    a. strongly disagree b. disagree c. neutral d. agree e. strongly agree

Appendix B: Extended-Period Mathematics—Instructional Leader

Instructional Leader Interview

Thank you for participating in this research study. This interview will last about twenty minutes. With your permission, I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. Your interview will be recording to accurately note the information you provide; it will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being audiotaped but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I will turn off the recorder at your request. If you wish to discontinue the interview, you can stop at any time. I expect to conduct only one interview; however, follow-ups may be needed for added clarification. If so, I will contact you by telephone or email to make such a request.

Data collected from this interview will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

1. What input do teachers have in planning for professional development and growth?

2. What standards do you use for instructional practices? How are they defined for teachers?

3. How do you discuss or approach instructional issues with teachers?

4. How often and what do look for when you observe your teachers?

5. What is your role in teachers' planning meetings?

6. How do you support struggling teachers?

Appendix C—Extended-Period Mathematics—Teacher Interview

Teacher Interview

Thank you for participating in this research study. This interview will last about twenty minutes. With your permission, I will audiotape and take notes during the interview. Your interview will be recording to accurately note the information you provide; it will be used for transcription purposes only. If you choose not to be audiotaped, I will take notes instead. If you agree to being audiotaped but feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, I will turn off the recorder at your request. If you wish to discontinue the interview, you can stop at any time. I expect to conduct only one interview; however, follow-ups may be needed for added clarification. If so, I will contact you by telephone or email to make such a request.

Data collected from this interview will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

1. How do you communicate high expectations for all students?

2. What strategies do you use to help students effectively interact with new knowledge?

3. How do you teach students to deepen their understanding of new knowledge?

4. Describe the methodology you use to evaluate the progress of your students?

5. How are parents informed of your students' progress?

6. What, if any, specific ideas have your department chair given to you to improve your instruction?

7. How do you engage students in a lesson?

8. What do you do to establish and maintain effective relationships with students?

Appendix D: DBL Students for CP Comparison

Name	EXPLORE	ACT	Difference	EIS_8thGr
Student1	12	17	5	124
Student2	12	13	1	131
Student3	11	17	6	150
Student4	14	17	3	150
Student5	15	14	-1	162
Student6	15	17	2	168
Student7	15	18	3	168
Student8	10	15	5	168
Student9	7	15	8	168
Student10	15	16	1	173
Student11	13	15	2	173
Student12	15	15	0	173
Student13	14	16	2	173
Student14	11	14	3	173
Student15	10	15	5	178
Student16	13	16	3	178
Student17	13	15	2	178
Student18	14	14	0	178
Student19	14	15	1	178
Student20	15	16	1	178
Student21	15	16	1	184
Student22	13	16	3	184
Student23	15	17	2	184
Student24	14	15	1	184
Student25	15	17	2	184
Student26	14	17	3	184
Student27	17	15	-2	184
Student28	12	14	2	189
Student29	15	16	1	189
Student30	13	16	3	189
Student31	15	16	1	189
Student32	13	18	5	189
Student33	13	18	5	189
Student34	13	15	2	189
Student35	14	16	2	189

Name	EXPLORE	ACT	Difference	EIS_8thGr
Student36	8	15	7	189
Student37	14	16	2	189
Student38	16	20	4	194
Student39	14	14	0	194
Student40	19	21	2	194
Student41	13	17	4	194
Student42	12	14	2	194
Student43	16	17	1	194
Student44	15	17	2	199
Student45	10	16	6	199
Student46	15	16	1	199
Student47	14	14	0	199
Student48	15	17	2	199
Student49	16	16	0	199
Student50	15	15	0	199
Student51	15	16	1	199
Student52	12	16	4	199
Student53	14	15	1	199
Student54	14	16	2	214
Student55	12	18	6	214
Student56	13	19	6	229
Student57	14	20	6	229
Student58	14	15	1	256
Average	**14**	**16**	**2**	**186**

Appendix E: CP Students for DBL Comparison

Name	EXPLORE	ACT	Difference	EIS_8thGr
Student1	13	23	10	131
Student2	10	14	4	173
Student3	15	17	2	189
Student4	17	19	2	194
Student5	14	15	1	194
Student6	16	16	0	199
Student7	11	15	4	199
Student8	12	17	5	204
Student9	14	18	4	204
Student10	13	14	1	204
Student11	16	16	0	204
Student12	15	19	4	204
Student13	15	21	6	204
Student14	14	16	2	204
Student15	13	17	4	209
Student16	15	16	1	209
Student17	16	16	0	209
Student18	18	19	1	209
Student19	15	17	2	209
Student20	15	16	1	209
Student21	16	15	-1	209
Student22	15	15	0	209
Student23	15	17	2	209
Student24	14	17	3	209
Student25	17	16	-1	209
Student26	14	17	3	209
Student27	15	15	0	209
Student28	15	25	10	209
Student29	11	15	4	209
Student30	15	20	5	209
Student31	15	16	1	209
Student32	16	17	1	214
Student33	17	20	3	214
Student34	15	17	2	214
Student35	16	17	1	214

Name	EXPLORE	ACT	Difference	EIS_8thGr
Student37	14	16	2	214
Student38	15	18	3	219
Student39	15	17	2	219
Student40	15	18	3	219
Student41	15	22	7	219
Student42	11	16	5	219
Student43	16	16	0	219
Student44	14	17	3	219
Student45	15	19	4	219
Student46	16	18	2	219
Student47	14	16	2	219
Student48	14	16	2	219
Student49	15	16	1	219
Student50	15	17	2	224
Student51	17	19	2	224
Student52	15	19	4	224
Student53	14	16	2	224
Student54	16	22	6	224
Student55	16	17	1	224
Student56	15	16	1	224
Student57	15	20	5	224
Student58	15	20	5	224
Average	**15**	**17**	**3**	**210**

USING FREQUENT, UNANNOUNCED, FOCUSED, AND SHORT CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS TO SUPPORT CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This paper examines the need to do more frequent, short (10- to 15-minute), unannounced, and focused classroom observations to support classroom instruction. Currently, the state requires at least one to three classroom observations per teacher; the number of observations is based on tenured and rating status. Classroom observations consist of at least a 15- to 30-minute preobservation, a 30- to 60-minute observation, and a 30- to 45-minute postobservation. The diagnostic framework of Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell, and Rasmussen's (2006) systemic change plan was used. The process looked at current (As-Is) and future (To-Be) status of an organization and uses Wagner's 4Cs—context, culture, conditions, and competencies—to achieve sound and purposeful change.

Preface

Lessons learned in year two were sustained, change, and adaptive leadership systems and behaviors. To sustain change, the change needed to be meaningful by starting slow and progressing tenaciously. To further sustain it, leadership needs to be distributed and dependent on many leaders at many different levels. It also requires diverse investigations and research. The talents of individuals need to be developed and the systems to maximize the collaborative influence created. In addition, groups must be organized to inventory strategies, keeping the strategies that work and discarding those that do not.

Change and adaptive leadership are about establishing a culture of compassionate leaders who use organizational power and personal relationships to solve problems. Taking a flexible approach when facing challenges and taking smart calculated risks are necessary attributes for change leadership.

Change also needs to be systemic. The research conducted by Wagner et al. (2006; 4Cs change system) was highly effective. The four components of his system are competency, conditions, culture, and context. It asks leaders to state the problem, build frameworks for analysis, conduct further refinement, and consider what is impeding progress. The As-Is analysis was effective. The process truly forced the review of the 4Cs relative to organizational change and acted as a starting point for addressing the 4Cs of where the organization was headed (To-Be).

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

I began my career in the fall of 1993 as a high school mathematics teacher and athletic coach in a major metropolitan city. This school was one of 15 schools in the district and it held about 1,200 students. The majority of the students were Black and qualified for free and reduced lunch. There was a principal, three assistant principals, a part-time athletic director, four counselors, approximately seventy teachers, and 30 instructional assistants.

My first day on the job, I was given my keys, books, and class rosters and was told to go teach. For the first two years of my career I was very worried for my students and for me. I relied heavily on my collegiate training to develop curriculum (mostly from textbooks), to give instruction (all lectures), and to write and give assessments. There were mathematics department meetings, but I do not recall any discussions relative to standards, common assessments, instructional strategies, or best practices.

In addition, I relied heavily on my preservice training during my first two years of teaching because of the support and feedback that I received from the principal—the only person who observed me during classroom instruction. For classroom observations, he would quietly walk into my classroom, sit down, and observe my instruction for about fifteen minutes. Later that week, in passing, we would have a casual conversation about what he observed and he would describe my performance as outstanding, encouraging me to keep up the good work. I remembered being observed two more times during my first year using the same observational process and was provided the same feedback. During my second year on the job, the principal did not observe me at all. There were no

preobservations or formal postobservations during the first two years of my teaching career.

After my second year, I moved to a suburban district about thirty minutes outside another major metropolitan area in a different state. I spent 7 years at this district as a mathematics teacher, coach, and assistant athletic director. There were three schools in this district. When I first began, the student body was about 50% White, 40% Black, and 10% Others. The building had about eleven hundred students, a principal, two assistant principals, an athletic director, six department chairs, approximately eighty teachers, and 35 instructional assistants. During my first year, I was assigned a mentor who helped me adjust to the new building/district and assisted me with departmental matters throughout the year. The mathematics department often worked in teams and shared curriculums, instructional strategies, and assessments.

For each of my first two years at the second district, I was observed three times by my department chair and once by another administrator. The observation process was more of a directive process where the observer set the parameters with little input from me. At the end of my first 2 years, I was placed on a cycle consisting of three observations by my department chair and another observation by a different administrator every other year. In addition, the process became more collaborative where we both discussed parameters about the actual observation and recommendations for growth.

The structure of the observation system I participated in at the second district consisted of a preobservation, an observation, and a postobservation. The preobservation was a 15- to 30-minute meeting with the observer and me. Parameters of the observations, the tools the observer was going to use, and the data that the observer was

going to collect were the foci of the meeting. The observer observed my lesson for 45 to 50 minutes per observation and collected data relative to the described parameters set during the preobservation. The postobservation was a 30- to 40-minute meeting between the observer and me. The observer would share his or her observational notes, then encourage me to reflect on the lesson and make suggestions for improvements.

Through this process, I learned how to improve my management system and how to better pace the lesson. Mostly, I was told that I was doing an excellent job and that I should proceed as usual. As I reflect on my experience, there were very few discussions and recommendations about how to improve my instruction, instructional strategies, student engagement, and/or questioning techniques. I now believe that my overall instructional delivery and management could have tremendously improved with many more observations and discussions relative to classroom instruction and strategies.

In 2015, I began my 14th year at Above Average Means High School (AAMHS, pseudonym), which is about 15 minutes from my previous school. It is a suburban school that is located about thirty minutes south of a major metropolitan area. At this high school, I was a dean of students for 1 year, a mathematics department chair for 5 years, and an assessment chair for 3 years. Currently I am in my fourth year as an assistant principal.

I began my career at AAMHS about fourteen years ago as a dean of students and held that position for one year. As a dean of students, my main responsibilities were student behavior, climate control, and student attendance. I mostly interacted with students, parents, and families; hence, I had very little face-to-face interaction with teachers. For the next 5 years, I was the mathematics department chair. I observed

teachers and taught a class. I had to observe nontenured teachers at least twice a year for 4 years, who were also observed by another administrator designated by the principal or superintendent at least once a year. Tenured teachers were observed at least three times every other year: twice by me and once by a designated administrator. Tenured teachers had the option to forego multiple observations and work on a personal professional growth plan. Teachers who opted for this plan were observed only once a year by me. Since I taught a class, I was also observed at least once a year by a designated administrator every other year.

The observation system used at the AAMHS was similar to the three tiered observational system used at my most recent district. Teachers met with an observer for preobservation, observation, and postobservation. During the preobservation, experienced teachers were strongly encouraged to suggest the type of data they would like the observer to collect. Also during the preobservation, the observer and teacher would talk about the tool(s) used to collect the data. At the end of the observation, the observer would give the teacher a copy of his or her unedited notes so that the teacher could review them prior to the postobservation.

Further, the observer and the teacher shared a tool that listed best practices in the areas of planning, behavioral management, and instructional delivery. Prior to the postobservation, the observer and the teacher were to individually review the observer's notes to look for patterns related to the preobservation, observation, and postobservation. At the postobservation, the observer and teacher were to share their findings. They shared their belief(s) relative to the teacher's performance—they look at teaching patterns and

areas for improvements. At the end of the postobservation, the observer would list recommendations for improvement.

Following my 5 years as the mathematics department chair, I was the assessment chair for 3 years. I was charged with coordinating the following major assessments: the freshmen placement assessment, the fall all-school assessments, the spring all-school assessments, and advanced placement assessments. I was also responsible for working with department chairpersons to review and analyze data reports. Lastly, I was assigned to observe 10-15 teachers in various departments using the observation process.

As an assistant principal, my main duties included supervising the dean of students, observing classroom instruction, supervising the in-school detention program, supervising the internal alternative program, coordinating the summer school program, and overseeing Section 504 procedures. Supervising the deans consisted of conversing with deans when major decisions needed to be made or to support their efforts in other difficult situations. The teachers I observed were assigned to me by the principal and the superintendent.

Thus, for more than 13 years, I have been responsible for observing classroom instruction, and I always used the three-tiered system of preobservation, postobservation, and observation. However, I have come to agree with many authors in this study: that observers can obtain good data from short observations and instructional leaders must be intentional and systematic about visiting classrooms.

The classroom observations I conducted were too infrequent and too deferred. Therefore, I rarely to almost never scheduled timely follow-up visits with teachers to observe whether they tried recommendations or whether they were successfully

progressing. I now strongly believe that with more frequent classroom visits, I can better support teachers, establish improved and trustworthy relationships, and better understand what is going on in the school.

The single most important factor in student achievement involves the quality of classroom instruction (Marshall, 2013; Marzano et al., 2011). Further, Marshall stated that one way to support teachers' professional growth involved engaging teachers in examining their own practices through informal classroom observations. He stated:

> Supervisors and coaches who become welcome guests in the classroom do so not by directing or being critical of the teacher, but by forming a partnership with the teacher. The value of supervisors and coaches getting out and about lies in the opportunity to provide teachers with occasions to reflect on their classroom practices through the objective data collected in informal observations. (Marshall, 2013, p. 9)

Hence, supervisors and coaches forge improved relationships with teachers by providing teachers with information to ponder on a regular basis. Also, teachers' value supervisors and coaches input when the relationship is deemed a partnership—a *we are all in this together* attitude.

In addition, Marshall encouraged instructional leaders to conduct frequent and short classroom observations throughout the year. He proclaimed that instructional leaders only need to do short classroom observations, considering that after 5 to 10 minutes of an observation, the number of new observational insights level off and decline for the remainder of the class. Not to mention, teachers want to be trusted by their instructional leaders and instructional leaders want to be trusted by their teachers.

Marshall also described a good classroom observation system as one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching involves, a focus on students' learning, and teachers as active participants of the process. He believed that frequent miniobservations

should be used to provide feedback to affirm good teaching and/or be used to recommend professional growth opportunities. Wagner (2008), in agreement with Marshall, expressed that teachers and instructional leaders need to identify and discuss elements of good teaching practices and classroom observation criterion prior to beginning short and informed observations, which he termed "learning walks" (p. 130).

Marshall added that teachers need specific and constructive feedback to improve their expertise, and that the feedback needs to be given in a nonthreatening way to allow for openness and two-way communication. Wagner stated that teachers need to receive feedback to improve instruction, and leaders should document visits and be systematic. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) concurred with Marshall and Wagner when he stated that "observations and feedback are fully effective when leaders systemically track which teachers have been observed, what feedback was given, and whether that feedback has improved practices" (p. 62). Marzano et al. (2011) published that feedback should involve only a few elements for teachers to focus on to improve student learning.

Wagner et al. (2006) stated that informal observations should not be evaluative, but a sampling of what is taking place in the classroom; however, it should be an accurate way of assessing students' learning in their classrooms through focused observations. Marzano et al. recommended that good classroom observational practices and outcomes are more likely to occur when it is supported in a positive environment. Fullan (2008) added that "people do not function well (at least not for very long) when they are scared and angry" (p. 58). The focused observations should include learning objectives, learning activities, questioning techniques, and students' engagement.

Furthermore, Marzano et al. stated that focused practices involved a systematic process for developing expertise instructional practices. He also stated that instructional leaders needed to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses, monitor teachers' progresses relative to the professional growth, and use feedback to make adjustments to growth plans to enhance students' growth. Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston, Jr. (2004) believed that through frequent and short observations, leaders can become familiar with teaching patterns and decisions made by teachers, and leaders would have a more accurate understanding of the teaching practices of their building or district.

Downey et al. (2004) reasoned that teachers must be mindful of the observational process, and that follow-up should be a time for active reflection. In addition, instructional leaders can identify common areas of decisions that might prove valuable for group staff development, and growth in the classrooms through teachers' actions will produce improved changes in students' achievement. More importantly, Downey et al. believed that focus should be primarily on factors affecting higher student achievement and teacher development. The authors agree that leaders need "to act more like coaches and mentors" (Downey et al., p. 12).

In 2015, I began my 23rd year in education and 5th year as an assistant principal at AAMHS. Through the many observations, discussions, sharing sessions, implementation, and reflection of the many lessons I observed over the past years, I have learned much about teaching and learning. However, these conversations and learning experiences have taken place with many individual teachers over long time spans. Thus, if our district is going to support teachers at high levels, we need to frequently visit their classrooms to establish great relationships and to collect information for how to better

support our teachers. I believe that instructional leaders can better support the quality of classroom instruction and therefore student achievement through more frequent classroom observations. If conducted carefully and professionally, a systemic classroom observations system could help identify teachers' needs, support good teachers' habits, give actionable and measurable feedback, and maintain rapport and trust amongst instructional leaders and teachers.

During my first 2 years of teaching, I did not learn much more beyond my collegiate training; therefore, I was limited in the instruction I could provide to my students. Currently, I am at an institution where common assessments, common language, common curriculum, and varied instructional strategies are stressed. I believe a good observation process is in place at AAMHS but the process could be enhanced and teachers could be supported with more frequent and short observations with timely feedback; thus, all students can achieve at high levels.

As instructional leaders, we are all responsible for observing instruction through the observational process—preobservation, observation, and postobservation. The system that we use was developed by Jerry and Eleanor Bellon (Bellon, Eaker, Huffman, & Jones, 1982). Their system is a synergetic process where the preobservation conference is used to discuss and clarify lesson objectives and outcomes, careful observations by a skilled supervisor, and a postobservation conference where the teacher and supervisor jointly analyze the data collected during the observation phase (Bellon et al., 1982).

The Bellons described the preobservation conference as a time for active listening and clarifications, formatted to emphasize student learning expectations (Bellon et al.). Preobservations should be held within 24 hours of the observation, should be held in an

instructional setting, should strengthen the collegial relationship, should provide for instructional adjustments, and should focus on curriculum and instruction. The classroom observation length and time should be clearly understood by the teacher and observer. The observer's position and movement in the classroom should be considered, and the observation data should only be used and discussed by the teacher and the observer.

The postobservation conference should be held within 24 hours of the observation, held in an instructional setting, and conducted collegially. In addition, recommendations should be data based and future oriented. Lesson reconstruction through sharing and reviewing the data the observer collects during the observation and pattern identification should be the focus of the postobservation conference. There should be planning for future instruction and concentration should be placed on patterns that most significantly cause instructional interference. About twelve years ago, AAMHS instructional leaders were trained to effectively implement Bellon's system (Bellon et al., 1982). Follow-up training relative to using the system was offered about seven years ago.

Beyond the description of the system, over the course of 4 years, a nontenured teacher is observed 12 times, representing 12 times out of about thirty-two hundred opportunities—less than 1%. Tenured teachers may be observed three times every 2 years or once every 2 years for those opting to create a special project relative to their professional growth. Thus, a tenured teacher could be observed less than a tenth of a percentage point over the course of 2 years.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) wrote, "By receiving weekly observations and feedback, a teacher develops as much in one year as most teachers do in twenty (p. 61)." Instructional leaders need to observe teachers teaching more than 1% of the year to

assist teachers who need to improve and to praise those teachers who are performing well. Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) stated that, "Observers gain by identifying faculty strengths in specific areas of instruction, curriculum, and/or classroom management. They also determine specific needs of faculty support, mentoring, and/or professional development (p. 8)." Additionally, Marshall (2013) stated that "Effective teachers won't get authentic praise and affirmation. Marginal and ineffective teachers won't get the help they need to improve." (p. 22). I believe that more frequent and shorter teacher observations with actionable and obtainable feedback is the necessary change needed to move our district to the next level relative to student achievement.

Successfully initiating the change plan to increase the frequency of classroom observations will require attention paid to the biggest barriers to such changes: time management and relational trust. The time commitment it will take to successfully implement more frequent and short informal observations may be a tremendous obstacle in executing the plan. Instructional leaders are obligated by the district and/or the state to spend time elsewhere; we must do at least one full observation (preobservation, observation, and postobservation) for teachers who are on the evaluation cycle. Some instructional leaders are charged with reviewing, revising, writing, and monitoring curriculum instruction and assessments. Others are engaged in multiple weekly meetings that occur on Mondays, Tuesdays, and/or Thursdays from one to two hours each day. Still others are engaged in other duties such as coordinating summer school and annual events, running registration, and reviewing or creating 504 plans or Individualized Educational Plans. Moreover, instructional leaders are charged with daily events that may

unexpectedly occur in the department or building but take away from supporting classroom instruction.

To initiate systemic change at AAMHS, the research uses the 4Cs framework—competency, conditions, culture, context (Wagner et al., 2006).

The 4Cs framework is a systematic process that looks at the whole system while working with various parts of change. The systematic change I plan to share with AAMHS regards the implementation of more frequent informal observations with timely feedback sessions. This change is necessary because frequent classroom observations support classroom instruction at high levels, generates data for relevant professional development opportunities, helps establish trusting relationships amongst teachers and instructional leaders, and helps maximize student achievement for all students.

I will share with the administration the need for less meetings, believing that we can accomplish items discussed in weekly meetings on a biweekly or monthly meeting schedule. Many of the items on the agenda are management items that occur annually or monthly, such as homecoming, security at events, supervision of events, textbook adoption process and deadlines, parent-teacher conferences, open houses, back to school night, and adoption of new courses. Monthly meeting discussions should include items such as student learning, professional learning based on sharing of classroom observation data, school climate and cultural needs, increasing parental and community involvement, and other programs related to student achievement. Following is a brief overview of the 4Cs model and 4Cs in relation to AAMHS (Wagner et al.).

Wagner's 4Cs Model

Real and significant change can be difficult and time consuming. Change is difficult because, "When change involves real or potential loss, people hold on to what they have and resist the change" (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 22). The potential or real loss that teachers perceive with the implementation of more frequent informal observations is their summative evaluation rating. Currently, the summative rating rank orders teachers based on ratings and establishes a reduction-in-force list—this is a new process. Teachers who are low on the list would be removed from their department from the bottom up. In the past, the reduction in force list was solely based on tenure and the number of years of services. So, teachers are worried that with more frequent informal observations, that instructional leaders will judge them more harshly and unfairly instead of supporting their efforts and providing resources for growth. The potential or real loss that teachers perceive is loss of career.

This fear was evident in 2011 when in my first year as an assistant principal at AAMHS, the principal encouraged all department chairs and other administrators who did formal observations to carry out an informal observation for all or a significant number of teachers. I sent an all-school email to teachers informing them that I was conducting informal observations. After the first few, teachers with whom I had great rapport with informed me that teachers were complaining to their union and superintendent that the informal observations were not wanted and went against the formal contract agreement between the teachers union and the board of education.

In 2012, I sent an all-school email to staff informing them that I would be conducting informal observations focusing on student engagement and teachers' questioning. This time, teachers complained to their union, the principal, and the

superintendent. There was much distrust between the teachers union, their department chair, and the principal from the previous year. The principal blamed my email for the distrust that was created. He nullified the fact that prior to the second year of informal observations, several teachers had filed grievances because they were dissatisfied with their summative rating.

Implementing more informal classroom observations at AAMHS will be challenging and time consuming. The new reduction in force format and distrust amongst teachers and instructional leaders are main reasons to the challenges for the change. Therefore, I plan to use the 4Cs systemic approach to the change that is necessary to initiate and sustain the change (Wagner et al., 2006).

The 4Cs process usually starts with identifying a problem and making a commitment to improve it. It should be something one should truly be interested in improving, and related to improving instruction and achievement for school-related endeavors. Thus, if informal observations were conducted on a more frequent basis with specific and actionable feedback, then good teaching could be observed on a more consistent basis, professional development opportunities could be specific and useful, and rapport between teachers and instructional leaders could be enhanced.

The 4Cs include context, competencies, conditions, and culture (Wagner et al.). Under competencies, every teacher and administrator at every level needs to develop their competencies regularly through ongoing development opportunities and professional development. Conditions are the observable arrangements of time, space, and money and culture is shared values, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, and behaviors related to students' learning and teachers' teaching.

The 4Cs provides a systemic process that helps organizations move from As-Is (problem you have identified) to To-Be (what would result if you accomplished your goal; Wagner et al., 2006). It is a system that helps systems remain focused on the results it wants to establish. More importantly, using the idea of culture, context, conditions, and competencies, systems can identify what it is doing to move from where it is to where it would like to be. Section Two explains how I plan to use the 4Cs and its different components to identify a problem and its implementation for improving instruction (Wagner et al.).

Rationale

Marshall (2013) and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser's (2012) literature has motivated the need for more frequent, focused, and unannounced classroom observations. Both believe that to improve classroom instruction and increase students' achievements, administrators need to frequently observe teachers' teaching. They also stressed that limited and actionable feedback is necessary to improve classroom instruction and student achievement.

For 13 of the past 23 years of my educational career, I have observed hundreds of teachers teaching. I have learned that good teaching consists of excellent planning, teachers' knowledge and competency, teachers' and students' relationships, the creation of lessons, activating students' background knowledge, the students' engagement, informative assessments, and good questioning and discussion techniques. However, I have mostly noticed that standards for students' conduct are clear and that teachers tended to respond appropriately to students' behaviors; thus, the overall classroom environment has been safe and conducive to learning. Teachers have also done a good

job maintaining and sharing information relative to students' academic progress. Therefore, it is extremely important that educators concentrate more efforts on academic achievement and learning outcomes. This could be achieved through more dialogue amongst educators in the building through frequent and unannounced observations.

Goals

If AAMHS incorporates more frequent miniobservations, then it would accomplish the following, as described by Marshall: Administrators and instructional leaders would be in classrooms more and observe everyday teaching in action, teachers would get frequent feedback and coaching, administration would be better equipped to address mediocre and ineffective teaching, student learning would be central to the process, and administration and teachers would have a shared understanding of good teaching (p. 41).

In addition, in the contract agreement, language will support more frequent informal observations and many more focused and informal observations will be conducted throughout the entire school year. Emphasis will be placed on good instructional practices and instructional growth. Furthermore, teachers will receive the support needed to support their students. Consequently, students will receive the necessary tools needed in a good learning environment to grow to their maximum potential. As well, more trusting relationships will be forged between teachers and instructional leaders.

Further, additional time would be allocated for instructional leaders and academic related endeavors and the focus would be more on students' learning outcomes. Meetings, whether once a week or once a month, would consist of data collection and

analysis relative to students' achievement. Finally, AAMHS will resist waiting until the end of the year or the end of a semester to look at global student achievement. Instead, there will be an ongoing discussion and sharing of observational and data collection.

Demographics

Above Average Means High School is a suburban school located about thirty minutes south of a major metropolitan area. The average student count for the past 5 years has been about 2,800 students. During that same time frame, the percentage of White students has fallen from 32% to 25%, while the percentage of Black students has risen from 58% to 63%. The percentages of Hispanic and Asian students have remained steady at 5% and 1% respectively.

Students with disabilities have remained steady, around 13%. The percentage of students from families with low income has risen from 14% in 2009 to 24% in 2013, and the percentages of English Language Learners and homeless students have remained low. Further, students' average mobility rate has remained relatively low over the past 5 years, at about 5%.

Since 2010, the percentage of students who met or exceeded AAMHS's state achievement exam has fallen from 64% to 51%. Over the past 5 years, the average achievement gap between Black and White students has been 28% in reading and 34% in mathematics. Over the same span of time, the average achievement gaps in reading and mathematics for students with disabilities and nondisabled students have been forty and forty-three percentage points respectively. A 23% gap existed between students from families with low income and students not from families with low income in reading; and a 25% gap in mathematics.

Above Average Means High School's five-year ACT average for all students is a 21.2. In that time frame, Black students scored an average of 19.6 scale points and White students scored 24.5 scale points. Thus, White students outscored Black students by almost five scale score points. Overall, AAMHS students who are Black, disabled, and from families with low income perform well below White students in the district.

Above Average Means High School has about 160 teachers, 36 instructional assistants (assisting mostly in the special education department), 24 clerical assistants, and 35 specialists. There are 23 teachers in the mathematics department, 19 in the physical education department, 6 in the reading department, 18 in the special education department, 21 in the science department, 17 in the social science department, 12 in the world language department, 8 in the applied academic department, 26 in the English department, and 9 in the fine arts department.

Above Average Means High School's specialized areas consist of three school psychologists, four social workers, five dean of students, eight guidance counselors, two college counselors, two librarians, two nurses, four permanent security personnel, one occupational therapist, and one full-time and one part-time speech pathologist. In addition, it has one superintendent, one principal, two assistant principals, one director of human resource, one director of technology, one director of athletics, one director of activities, one director of finances, one director of curriculum and instruction, one director of special education, one director of operation and maintenance, and 11 department chairpersons.

In 2005, the demographics at AAMHS were about 65% White and about 35% minority students. However, since 2010, the average student count has been about 2,800

students per year. Over the same time span, the percentage of White students has fallen from 32 to 25% while the percentage of Black students has risen from 58 to 63% percent. The percentages of Hispanic and Asian students have remained steady at 5% and 1% respectively.

SECTION TWO: ASSESSING THE 4CS

I plan to use the 4Cs' systemic approach to the change necessary to initiate and sustain the change (Wagner et al., 2006). It starts with identifying the problem and working to improve it. A problem at AAMHS is infrequent classroom observations that result in insufficient and timely feedback. So, when more classroom observations are conducted with specific and actionable feedback, then good teaching could be observed often, professional development opportunities could be specific learning goals, and rapport between teachers and instructional leaders could be enhanced.

The 4Cs include context, competencies, conditions, and culture (Wagner et al., 2006). Context is viewed as impactful external elements deemed to be beyond organization's control. Every educator, at every level needs to develop his or her competencies on a regular basis. Professional learning could be accomplished through ongoing focused and job-embedded professional development opportunities. Conditions encompass the allocations of time, space, and money. Culture is understood as the shared values, beliefs, and behaviors related to students' learning and teachers' instructional practices.

The 4Cs involves a systemic process that help organizations move from As-Is (identified problem) to To-Be (end results, intentional and unintentional; Wagner et al., 2006). It is a system that keeps the focus on the results it wants to establish and can be monitored through using culture, context, conditions, and competencies (see Appendix C for AAMHS' As-Is to To-Be Chart).

Context

Wagner and Kegan (2006) described context as external educational factors that are beyond the control of the organization and that deeply impact the work of the organization. Content also describes knowing the world for which educators prepare students. The major external factors that may be beyond AAMHS's control consist of the teacher evaluation system mandated by the state, contractual obligations between the teachers union and the Board of Education, and heavy focus on standardized testing results (mainly ACT results) and its implications of a district's success.

Currently, as part of the mandated observation system, the state requires that nontenured teachers be observed at least three times a year and tenured teachers be formally observed from one to three times every other year. By the fall of 2016, the number of observations required by state law is as follows: tenured teachers in good standings must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle, and one of the observations needs to be formal; tenured teachers in poor standings must be observed at least three times during the year of the rating, and at least two of the observations need to be formal; and nontenured teachers must be observed at least three times a year, with at least two of the observations being formal.

Presently, the teachers' contract agreements dictate that nontenured teachers be formally observed at least three times a year. Nontenured teachers could be observed at least once every other year if following a professional growth plan, or observed at least three times every other year if without the professional growth plan component. At this time, language does not exist in the AAMHS contract stipulating informal observations.

Standardized test results and its perceived relationship reported through the media represents another external factor that influences the decisions made or not made at AAMHS. Above Average Means High School tends to react to reports by focusing more on standardized test preparation and minimal standardized assessment achievement gains.

The external pressures of the state law are not as prevalent as the contract agreement between the teachers union and the board of education. The state law stipulates at least one full formal observation for tenured and nontenured teachers alike with the option to do more informal observations with written feedback. Hence, the language and the practice of the contract agreement could follow the ideas of the state law and strive to do only one full formal observations with teachers or more when necessary, and execute frequent and shorter informal observations over the course of the entire year.

Above Average Means High School needs to ensure that an effective and coherent curriculum is implemented amongst all of the departments. Its concentration and efforts need to focus on good teaching practices and instructional strategies. Instructional leaders and teachers need to agree on what good teaching looks like and develop shared language around the notion of good teaching. Thus, when instructional leaders perform more informal observations and give constructive, yet nonjudgmental feedback, then AAMHS could begin growing its staff professionally and supporting instruction for all students.

If the systemic changes occur for the context component, then there will be less focus on ACT scores and language in the contract agreement to support more frequent informal observations. American College Testing (ACT) scores will still matter and scores will continue to be analyzed and reported, but there will be less stress on the data

and the performance of AAMHS. Instead, more emphasis will be placed on good instructional practices and growth. Teachers will receive the support they need in order to support their students and students will receive the necessary tools they need in a good learning environment to grow to their maximum potential. In addition, when the systemic change relative to informal observations occurs, then the language in the contractual agreement will include parameters to maintain many more informal observations with feedback throughout the year.

Culture

Organizational culture is described as the patterns, assumptions, beliefs, and interpretations that shape the behavior within the organization. Presently, instructional leaders are contractually obligated to only conduct full formal observations for tenured and nontenured teachers. Each observation consists of a preobservation, observation, and postobservation; hence, it takes at least two hours to complete each full observation. The observations are performed as soon as possible and only the minimum number of observations are conducted. Therefore, most if not all observations are encouraged to be completed by the beginning of February of each school year. So oftentimes, for three full months, instruction is not observed and teachers tend to not receive viable feedback to support instructional practices.

The principal of AAMHS strongly encourages instructional leaders to conduct a considerable number of informal observations per department. He strives to informally visit each teacher at least once throughout the school year. The informal observation consists of making time to move about the building and dropping into classrooms where

there appears to be highly engaged instruction through high levels of active participation and cooperation.

Instructional leaders are encouraged to keep track of informal observations by listing the teachers they observed and the type of feedback that was shared with the teachers. If every instructional leader informally visited every teacher, then teachers could be informally observed at least 12 additional times throughout the year. However, most instructional leaders only see about 25% of teachers throughout the year; thus, teachers are only observed about an additional four times a year. Also, no mechanism is in place for instructional leaders to share what they observed during the informal visits.

If the culture component of Wagner and Kegan's (2006) 4Cs is achieved, then instructional leaders would conduct only one full formal observation per teacher. In addition, instructional leaders would conduct many more informal observations from the start of the school year to the end of the school year. Informal observations would be focused and short and followed-up with face-to-face feedback sessions. Teachers and instructional leaders would be in agreement with good teaching instructions and strategies. Other possible outcomes of the informal observations would be the development of trust and rapport between teachers and instructional leaders. More classroom observational data would be collected to assist instructional leaders and teachers with creating prescriptive professional development.

Conditions

Conditions are the visible allocations of time, space, and money. As an institution, AAMHS could focus more on how we spend time with teachers and students. Currently, instructional leaders have many more noninstructional obligations to occupy their time.

For instance, department chairs are obligated to meet every Wednesday for 2 hours. In my opinion, a high percentage of the meeting is spent on noninstructional or nonacademic dialogue. Over the past few months, the department chairs have discussed activities and events such as freshmen registration, parent association meetings, first semester exam procedures, the structure of institute (professional development), textbook adoption procedures and deadlines, academic showcase logistics, all-school testing format and structure, and parent/teacher conference logistics. While this list is not exhaustive of the typical discussions at these department chair meetings, it shows that a lot of time is spent discussing nonacademic endeavors.

Some of the academic endeavors AAMHS has committed to during this same time period include cognitive coaching, summer curriculum projects, and evaluation updates. Cognitive coaching focuses on improving instructional leaders dialogue with teachers relative to collected classroom observation data and student assessment data. Summer curriculum projects include proposals made by teachers and departments to improve the school climate, classroom instruction, and use of technology. Currently, AAMHS is in the process of changing its evaluation process. A big part of the change includes focusing more on student learning and engagement. The department chair meetings are also attended by the principal, the two assistant principals, the director of curriculum and instruction, and the director of special education.

On Tuesdays, the principal, the two assistant principals, the director of technology, the director of athletics, the director of operation and maintenance, the director of activities, the department chair of assessments, and the department chair of guidance meet. For the past few months, the agenda items included security at basketball

games, snow removal and other building and ground issues, the structure for parent/teacher conference, the format for open house, climate related issues, athletics and activities updates, and the logistics of freshmen registration, freshmen parent meetings, scheduling students' courses, and all-school testing. We rarely discuss instructional practices or other academic endeavors that directly impacts students' learning in the classroom.

On Mondays, the superintendent, the principal, the two assistant principals, the director of special education, the director of technology, the director of operation and maintenance, the director of finance, the director of human resource, and the director of athletics meet to review the Tuesday and Wednesday meetings, athletic events, any updates relative to school business, committee updates, national and local policy updates, and resource allocation.

Another issue that needs addressing under this category is the notion of I *taught it* versus I *learned it*. We need to switch our focus to more of what students are learning rather than teachers taught it. For the past 10 years, after receiving the end of the year all-school assessment results, AAMHS has spent an enormous amount of time ensuring that the information that students were supposed to learn was embedded in the curriculum. Our defense for those items that students missed is to show that we taught it and that it was indeed in the curriculum. For a long period of time, many students often failed classes multiple times. The teachers defense in these scenarios was that I taught it and the students did not learn it.

My classroom observational training, consistent with other instructional leaders, consisted of looking for good teaching habits. These habits include:

- collecting, recording, and interpreting student data;
- ongoing assessments that occur before, during, and after instruction;
- expectations that determine classroom and task structures;
- activities that relate directly to learning objectives;
- having established rules, procedures, and consequences;
- making sure that the overall classroom climate is supportive, orderly, and predictable;
- using routines to maintain a predictable flow of events;
- using interactions that are content related;
- teaching new information incrementally using examples;
- emphasizing important points; and
- integrating new information with a student's prior knowledge.

Often, many of these habits are used sparingly. Having few to no follow-up visits does not give the observer information on whether teachers have improved on these habits.

If the condition component is achieved, then more time can be allocated for instructional leaders and academic related endeavors, more time can be allocated for more instructional/academic endeavors at meetings, and the focus can be more on students' learning outcomes. Meetings, whether once a week or once a month, consist of data collection and analysis relative to students' achievements. By resisting waiting until the end of the year or the end of a semester to look at global student achievement, there can be an ongoing discussion and sharing of observational and data collection. The transition to students learned it mentality would be evidenced through the following observations:

- students will accept teacher's insistence on work of high quality;
- teacher's purpose for the lesson is clear;
- teacher's explanation of content connects with student's knowledge and experience;
- teacher's questions are of high quality and respond time is appropriate for students' learning outcomes;
- teachers successfully engage all students in the discussion;
- students are fully aware of criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated; and
- teacher's feedback is timely and actionable. (Danielson, 2007)

Competencies

Competencies are termed as the collection of skills and knowledge that influence student learning, and the need for focused, continuous, and collaborative professional development endeavors. The other aspect of competency includes leadership and communication styles. Currently, instructional leaders have little formal training regarding informal observations. Leaders need to learn and be able to implement components of effective informal classroom observations. Some of these components are outlined through very informal observation studies. Marshall (2013) stated that informal observations need to be frequent and focused. He believes that a good observation system is one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching is and focuses on student learning outcomes. Finally, Marshall suggested that informal observations should be short and nonjudgmental. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) stated that school leaders could assist in maximizing student learning through observations and meetings with

teachers on a regular basis. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser also stated that informal observations should be in conjunction with the collection and analysis of interim academic assessment data. Further, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser stated that leaders should systemically track which teachers have been observed, what feedback was given, and whether that feedback has improved practice. In essence, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser feel that teachers need to be active participants in the process of thinking about their teaching.

SECTION THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

For this research, I worked with five teachers and observed their classroom instruction at least once every other week. I focused on teachers' questions, students' engagement, learning objectives, and/or teachers' feedback to students. Four of the five teachers I observed were tenured—two teach science, one teaches English, one teaches social science, and one teaches mathematics. I observed, collected, and shared data with each teacher at least biweekly. I met with each teacher individually to discuss the expectations of the informal observations, which include unannounced, short, and frequent observations focused on questioning students' engagement and formative assessments and face-to-face feedback sessions.

At the beginning of the process, I surveyed participating teachers and department chairs relative to AAMHS's current observational process (see Appendices G and H). I interviewed participating teachers and department chairpersons in the middle of the process and interviewed participating teachers at the end of the process to gain their input about the overall process, shortcomings, and recommendations for improvements (see Appendices E, F, I, and J).

My observational design was motivated by the work of Marshall (2013), Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012), and Danielson (2007). Therefore, observations were brief, unannounced, and frequent. I provided nonjudgmental and nonthreatening feedback to encourage two-way communication. During this process, my comments were positive and specific. Teachers shared the strategies they were trying to employ in their classrooms. Since the majority of the teachers I worked with were tenured, with more

than 6 years of teaching practice, I used a collaborative/indirect approach during feedback sessions. Moreover, I encouraged teachers to reflect on the portion of the lesson that I observed.

I met with every participating teacher at least once a week and listened intently to each teacher's lesson. Further, I wrote important observational reminders after each observation and shared that information with teachers through face-to-face feedback sessions that occurred within 24 hours of the observation. I provided praise and reinforcement for good teaching and, when necessary, suggestions for improvements. The frequent and short informal observations should give me a more representative sampling of the participating teachers' work.

I discussed, encouraged, reinforced, validated, and suggested good teaching practices during my feedback sessions. I focused my attention on the following areas of teaching, but were not limited to these areas:

- Awareness of students' learning needs
- Instructional outcomes
- Use of assessments
- Teachers' questioning techniques
- Students' engagement
- Teachers' feedback
- Differentiated instruction

Participants

The key participants in this study were teachers and department chairpersons. I asked these individuals to volunteer their time to be a part of this study. Research

findings were shared with the principal and superintendent. I worked with five teachers from various departments, observing, encouraging, sharing, and occasionally recommending good teaching practices to participating teachers.

At the beginning of the study, I shared with the participating teachers and department chairpersons best instructional practices regarding student engagement, questioning techniques, teachers' feedback, and learning objectives (see Appendix K). According to Danielson (2007), students need skills for evaluating arguments, analyzing information, and drawing conclusions; and that high levels of learning by students require high levels of instruction. Thus, teachers need to engage students in developing their own understanding. Furthermore, teachers engage students in learning by teaching students to be more independent of the teacher and teaching students to use information from a variety of sources to problem-solve and think critically. She also stated that teachers need to be able to determine which concepts and skills are essential for students to learn.

Danielson (2007) believes that teachers need to have strong knowledge of the discipline they teach and a strong focus needs to exist regarding the important concepts necessary for students' successes. Furthermore, to maximize students' successes, she also believes that teachers need to understand their students' backgrounds, interests, and skills. In addition, Danielson indicates that classroom observations needs to be done in person or through video. When observing, leaders need to determine the safety of the classroom environment—for example, that students' behaviors are cooperative and the physical space is conducive to learning. To maximize students' learning, Danielson stated that students needed to be engaged in meaningful work that has stamina beyond unit work—important background information can be successfully incorporated in the current

lesson. Instructional leaders should be able to view samples of student work and determine the level rigor expected from students. Moreover, leaders should observe a culture of hard work and perseverance on the part of the students and where high expectations for all students are evident.

Fisher and Frey (2011) discussed the difference between learning outcomes and learning activities, citing that "when students understand the purpose of a lesson, they learn more" (Fisher & Frey, 2011, p. 3). In addition, they discussed how to formulate questions to check for understanding and inform instruction. Brookhart (2014) discussed strategies for engaging students in higher order thinking and performance. I shared best teaching practices relative to writing learning outcomes, formulating questions, and engaging students in higher-ordered thinking when meeting with each teacher and department chair. I also summarized the findings from listed studies and shared these findings both verbally and in writing (see Appendix K).

I explained to the participants my focus of the informal observations and how feedback sessions were to be open and reflective. Teachers and department chairpersons completed a 20-question, multiple-choice survey regarding the current observation process and experiences. I interviewed teachers and department chairpersons relative to classroom observations. In addition, I interviewed teachers regarding the informal observation process conducted in this study, sharing the results of the study with the participating teachers, department chairpersons, principal, and superintendent of the district.

Data Collection Technique

As mentioned, I provided a 20-question survey to participating teachers and department chairpersons regarding the current formal and informal observations process at AAMHS. Eight of the 20 questions were relative to feedback, 3 regarded frequency, and 9 concerned the functionality of the classroom observations. Once participants completed the survey, it was sealed by the participant and given to the researcher's assistant. As the researcher's assistant collected the surveys, she gave it to the researcher in a sealed envelope. Thus, each survey participant's identity was concealed. The only identifying item on the surveys were the distinction of the teachers from the instructional leaders.

The survey used a four-point Likert scale system using a predetermined range of questions. Results were tabulated and summarize in frequencies. The questions used were mainly based on and built for measurement uses. The four-point scale allowed the researcher to eliminate or avoid the neutral position and forced the respondent to take a positive or negative view.

The interviews consisted of one-on-one question and answer sessions where the five teachers and seven department chairpersons were interviewed for 20-30 minutes. The environment was quiet and the recorder worked properly. Further, the researcher took notes during the interviews as well ascertained full transcriptions of the interview recordings. The researcher provided structured interviews via a series of questions, which were read to individuals to establish an understanding of their ideas on a topic.

Interviews were conducted and recorded verbally and in writing by the researcher. Participant's names were not written on the interview; however, a distinction was made

between teachers and instructional leaders' responses via a heading of *teacher* or *instructional leader* placed on the written interview questionnaire itself. The interview consisted of six questions relative to the teachers' and instructional leaders' perceptions about classroom observations and its frequency, relation to professional development, relationship to students' learning, and teachers' support. Interviews were scheduled for 30-minute intervals; however, some interviews took shorter or longer than the allotted 30 minutes.

Codes were used in the interviews to summarize data into content and primary ideas. The researcher first read the transcripts with no perceived ideas before looking for common patterns and ideas. Open coding was used for single words or phrases of students' ideas, then one code at a time to look for new and overarching themes and developing families using these themes. Finally, one set of data was compared to another and data was analyzed consistently for both teachers and department chairpersons.

The unstructured observation notes were scripted. Classroom instruction was observed and everything heard and seen for 10-15 minutes was written down. The researcher has used this technique for 12 years as a way to record and collect data during a full formal observation. This method offers the ability to capture exceptional information to share.

Observations were conducted where teachers and students were observed and their behavior recorded. The observations were open-ended and activities were recorded, but instructional freedom was encouraged. After each observation, the researcher met with teachers to share feedback and to engage them in reflective conversations.

Data Analysis Technique

As stated, five teachers were observed during classroom instruction, at least once a week. Everything heard and seen for 10-15 minutes was observed. Shortly after each classroom observation session, observation notes were summarized and recorded in writing. In addition, feedback notes after each feedback session with teachers were recorded in writing. Observation data was collected over a period of time relative to use of research based instructional strategies, questioning techniques, students' engagement, and students/teachers' relationships. When scheduling observations and feedback meetings with teachers, the researcher was intentional and systemic.

Five teachers and six instructional leaders completed the survey. Responses were numbered as:

4 Strongly Agree

3 Agree

2 Disagree

1 Strongly Disagree

The teachers' surveys and the instructional leaders' surveys were then summarized and analyzed looking for strong patterns amongst the teachers and the instructional leaders. Teachers' responses to instructional leaders' responses were then compared.

Within 24 hours of each interview, the information was transcribed using Microsoft Office 2013—specifically, its table functions. Data was sorted using a graphic organizer and codes until patterns and similar conclusions were apparent. First, teachers' patterns of similarities and differences were analyzed, then instructional leaders' patterns.

Finally, teachers' responses were compared with the responses of the instructional leaders.

SECTION FOUR: RELEVANT LITERATURE

This study examined the feasibility and effectiveness of frequent, unannounced, and short informal observations at the high school level. It is important to show that instructional leaders who do frequent informal observations can positively support excellent teaching practices and identify areas for needed professional learning supports. Drago-Severson (2009) stated that "professionals in schools and school systems carry out their work and practices on their own, without the benefit of a supportive yet critically thoughtful observer" (p. 15). This research was designed to determine whether frequent, short, and unannounced informal observations can be conducted in a large high school setting to affirm excellent teaching, identify teachers' needs, and build strong rapport between teachers and instructional leaders.

If frequent, unannounced, and short informal classroom observations can be used to effectively support teaching and learning, then this study can add to existing research that demonstrates positive relationships between informal observations and classroom instructions. This chapter begins with the description of the formal and informal observation systems used at AAMHS. Next, state and federal mandates pertaining to classroom observations are reviewed. Following will be studies of different informal and formal classroom observation concepts. Finally, there will be a discussion about the potential benefits for implementing more informal classroom observations.

Marshall (2013) cited that the single most important factor in student achievement is the quality of instruction and that good teaching really matters. He went on to say that "school leaders must have a way of knowing what teachers are doing all the time"—that we need to be able to discuss more than a single lesson plan more than two to three times

a year or one to two lessons every other year (Marshall, 2013, p. 27). Thus, for AAMHS to support teachers at high levels, instructional leaders need to do frequent classroom observations to establish great relationships and to collect information to better support its teachers.

Marshall suggested that leaders should constantly analyze learning through focused and frequent observations. He described a good observation system as one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching is, focuses on students' learning, and has teachers as active participants of the process. In addition, Marshall recommended frequent 10-minute miniobservations as a meaningful way to have purposeful conversations with the teacher. Moreover, he pointed out that after a short period of time, "the number of new insights levels off and then gradually declines for the remainder of the class (Marshall, 2013, p. 62). Marshall also suggested that "safety, objectives, teaching, engagement, and learning" are attributes that most instructional leaders always want to observe (Marshall, 2013, p. 71).

Marshall believed that frequent miniobservations could be used to provide feedback, affirm good teaching, and recommend professional growth opportunities. He stated that teachers needed specific and constructive feedback to improve their expertise and that feedback needed to be given in a nonthreatening way to allow for openness and two-way communication. Furthermore, Marshall felt that the leader should keep track of visits and be systematic and documented. Above Average Means High School could potentially implement a system described by Marshall as early as the next school year. How to accomplish this is discussed in Section Seven's, Strategies and Actions for Change section.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) stated that the most discouraging component of failing schools is that "everyone on the staff is doing his or her own thing"; thus, instructional leaders need to guide teachers to strategies that will significantly improve instruction and students' learning (p. 15). The school leader's main role should be to maximize student learning through observations and meetings with teachers on a regular basis. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser strongly encouraged districts to give district- or school-wide interim assessments four to six times a year, for effective instruction is "based on whether students learned" the information (p. 23).

When it comes to assessments and data sharing at AAMHS, the researcher believes that it is more about appearance then about students' learning, believing that more time is spent highlighting the number of students enrolled in advanced placement courses and less time discussing the poor achievement of underachieving students. For example, ample amounts of time were spent discussing insignificant ACT scale score gains and less time spent discussing systems that could be put in place to maximize learning for all students.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser conveyed that instructional leaders needed to lead data-driven meetings with teachers and its results must transform into significant instructional changes. Like Marshall, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser stated that "observations and feedback are fully effective when leaders systemically track which teachers have been observed, what feedback was given, and whether that feedback has improved practices" (2012, p. 62).

In addition, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser declared that teachers needed to participate in the process of thinking about their teaching. Therefore, great professional

development activities start with knowledge about what teachers' individual needs are. More importantly, "weekly observations, coupled with the interim assessments" can improve individual teachers' needs and specific learning needs of students (Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, 2012, p. 71).

At AAMHS, every department in its district gives at least four common assessments a year relative to the essential learning outcome in the course. Teachers could meet in their established professional learning communities to discuss the results of the assessments; however, they are not obligated to discuss the assessments in their learning communities. Moreover, department chairpersons and other leaders rarely analyze the results of the assessments in great detail. Therefore, holding meetings, described by Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser system, at least twice a year to analyze the kind and level of learning students achieve.

Marzano et al. (2011) wrote that what occurs in the classroom has the most direct causal link to student achievement and that student achievement increases with highly skilled teachers. Instructional leaders need to observe the entire practice of teaching, and "focus on the interaction of the teacher and student related to student learning" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 19). He indicated that feedback should involve only a few elements for teachers to focus on to improve student learning.

Like the authors Marshall and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, Marzano et al. (2011) agrees that focused practices involve a systematic process for developing expertise instructional practices. He documented that instructional leaders needed to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses, monitor teachers' progress relative to the professional growth, and use feedback to make adjustments to growth plans to

enhance students' growth. Marzano et al (2011) suggested that this is more likely accomplished and supported through a positive environment and an exchange of ideas and strategies. Fullan (2008) added that "people do not function well (at least not for very long) when they are scared and angry" (p. 58).

Marzano et al. stipulated that observations are more effective if they are planned by the observer and the teacher. He stressed that instructional leaders and teachers need to be able to ask questions about the prescribed lesson. This notion is different then what others purport in this study.

Wagner (2008) stated that a strong need exists for students to be able to think systemically, adapt to different situations, and make sense of important information. In addition, students need strong communication skills and the ability to apply scientific methods to problem-solving. In my first year as the mathematics department chair, I remembered the superintendent telling me that the curriculum in the department was a mile wide and an inch deep. The curriculum is still too shallow to provide rich experiences for our students in all disciplines. Therefore, we need to reduce the number of concepts students are required to learn per course and ensure that all students learn the concepts prior to exiting any course.

Like Marshall, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, and Marzano et al., Wagner published that teachers and leaders need to identify elements of good teaching practices; and further, observation criterion must be discussed prior to beginning informal observations, which he named learning walks. Moreover, Wagner believed that teachers need to receive feedback to improve instruction and teach beyond the recall and

knowledge of content levels. Much like Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser determined that teachers need to be able to analyze the effectiveness of their lessons.

Wagner added that leaders need to be good coaches for their teachers and conduct learning walks to assess what is taking place in the classroom. He expressed that learning walks should not be evaluative but a sampling of what is taking place in the classroom—learning walks should be an accurate way of assessing students' learning in their classrooms through focused observations. The focused observations should include learning objectives, learning activities, questioning techniques, and students' engagement.

Downey et al. (2004) established that walk-throughs should be "short, focused, and informal observations" (p. 2). The authors also indicate that walk-throughs are not intended to be evaluative; rather, it is about gathering information about instructional practices. More importantly, leaders should look for students' behaviors, skills and concepts to be learned, and the level at which the students are learning. Downey et al. believed that through frequent and short observations, leaders can become familiar with teaching patterns and decisions made by teachers, and leaders would have a more accurate understanding of the teaching practices of their building or district.

Just as Marshall and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, Downey et al. believed that teachers must be mindful of the walk-through process and that follow-up should be a time for active reflection. As stated by Marzano et al. (2011), these authors agree that frequent observations tend to lower teachers' apprehensions and make formal observations more effective. In addition, Downey et al. documented that leaders can better identify common areas of decisions that might prove valuable for group staff development through frequent

classroom observations. Furthermore, in agreement with Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser and Downey et al. contended that growth in the classrooms through teachers' actions will produce improved changes in students' achievement.

More importantly, Downey et al. believe that focus should be primarily on factors that affect higher student achievement and focused on teacher development. As mentioned by Marshall and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, these authors agree that leaders need to "act more like coaches and mentors"; and the definitive goal of walk-throughs is for the teachers to be reflective practitioners (p. 12). Unlike Marshall, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser, Marzano et al., and Downey et al., recommend that follow-up feedback sessions should be on occasion as opposed to after every visit.

Danielson (2007) conveyed that students need skills for evaluating arguments, analyzing information, and drawing conclusions; and that high levels of learning by students require high levels of instruction. She also believed that teachers need to continue finding ways to develop and improve their skills; and that more importantly, teachers need to engage students in developing their own understanding. Danielson added that teachers engage students in learning by teaching students to be more independent of the teacher and by teaching students to use information from a variety of sources to problem solve and think critically. In addition, teachers must be able to determine which concepts and skills are essential for students to learn.

Danielson included four domains in her work: planning and preparation, the classroom environment, instruction, and professional responsibilities. She believed that teachers need to have a strong knowledge of the discipline they teach, and there be a strong focus on the important concepts necessary for student achievement. Furthermore,

to maximize students' success, Danielson strongly believed that teachers need to understand their students' backgrounds, interests, and skills. She indicated that classroom observations need to be performed in person or through video and when observing, leaders need to determine the safety of the classroom environment.

To maximize students' learning, Danielson (2007) declared that students needed to be engaged in meaningful work that has stamina beyond unit work. Further, she documented that instructional leaders should be able to view samples of student work and determine the level rigor expected from students and leaders should observe a culture of hard work and perseverance on the part of the students; high expectations for all students are evidence.

Formal Observations at AAMHS

Above Average Means High School uses the Eleanor and Jerry Bellon classroom observation model for formal classroom observation system (Bellon et al., 1982; see Appendix G). For the novice teacher, instructional leaders tend to use a direct approach to observations where the leader gives feedback to the teacher and holds feedback conversations. For tenured teachers, the leaders use an indirect approach where the leader invites the teacher to reflect on observed instruction and finishes the conversation with a reflective question or two.

The model consists of a 15-30-minute preobservation, followed by a 45-60-minute classroom observation, and concluded with a 45-60-minute postobservation. At the preobservation, the teacher and the observer meet for 15-30 minutes and discuss the lesson to be observed. Learning context, students' characteristics, learning outcomes and

objectives, use of assessments, and instructional strategies are discussed at the preobservation.

The learning context is related to the area of study and program goals. Learning objectives deals more specifically with what the students should learn and be able to do as a result of the lesson. Pre- and postassessments are used to determine students' level of readiness and learning. At the conclusion of the preobservation, experienced teachers are strongly encouraged to suggest the type of data the observer should collect and the best tool(s) to collect said data. More often than not, for novice teachers, the data collected and tool used to collect the data is determined by the observer.

For the observation, the observer meets the teacher at a predesignated location. From there, the observer observes the teacher's lesson for 45 minutes to one hour. Depending on the agreed focus of the observation, the observer may sit and take notes, move about the class, record the lesson (rarely used), or enlist a combination of all three. At the end, the observer gives the teacher a copy of his or her unedited notes for the teacher to review prior to the postobservation.

The observer and the teacher share a tool developed by the Bellons that list best practices in the areas of planning and motivation, behavioral management, and instructional delivery (Bellon et al.). Prior to the postobservation, the observer and the teacher are charged to individually review the observer's notes looking for patterns related to the preobservation and observation. Under the planning and motivation section, the observer and teacher look for patterns related to plans that guide instruction, are based on students' needs, and assist in achieving desired student outcomes, as well as instructional strategies that develop positive attitudes about learning. Patterns for

instructional management entail evidence that the system or systems prevent misbehavior, attend to teacher and students' needs, and promote the academic success. In addition, instructional content and student characteristics guide teacher and students' interactions. The instructional delivery section includes patterns that expand students' knowledge, academic feedback, questioning techniques, and response opportunities. At the postobservation, the observer and teacher share their findings—sharing what they believed the teacher did well and what the teacher needs to improve. At the end of the postobservation, the observer lists recommendations for improvement.

The system represents a good system as it includes a focused observation followed by immediate feedback relative to research-based teaching domains. However, the problem lies with the frequency of formal observations at AAMHS. Nontenured teachers are observed at least three times a year for four consecutive years: by the department chairperson at least twice a year and the administrator at least once a year. Tenured teachers are observed at least three times every other year: at least twice by their department chairperson and once by an administrator. Further, tenured teachers have the option to forego multiple observations and work on a personal professional growth plan. If they opt to do the plan, then they would be observed at least once every other year by their department chairperson. Although the process could have gone perfectly, the opportunities for observations and feedback is too small.

Informal Observations at AAMHS

At AAMHS, the expectation for informal observations is minimum. Instructional leaders are expected to visit a predetermined percentage of teachers at least one extra time per year. Leaders perform announced or unannounced classroom visits for 10-15

minutes per visit. After each visit, the observer provides feedback to the observed teacher either verbally or in writing. The main purpose of the informal observation is to look for good teaching and affirm good teaching practices. This practice is supported by Streich (2009) who stated that successful principals view classroom visits as an opportunity to facilitate excellence in teaching by offering suggestions, encouraging perseverance, and affirming excellent performance rather than engaging in fault-finding missions.

State Mandates—Classroom Observations

According to the State Board of Education Non-Regulatory Guidance on the Performance Evaluation Reform Act and Senate Bill 7, every district in the state must incorporate data and indicators of student growth in teacher evaluations. School districts are required to use an instructional framework that is based on research regarding effective instruction. In addition, school districts must address planning, instructional delivery, classroom management, and align to the state's professional teaching standards. The evaluation plan must also consider teachers' attendance, competency relative to their subject matter, and strengths and weaknesses. Further, school districts implementing the Performance Evaluation Reform Act must have student growth component of at least 30%.

Formal observations must be preceded by a conference between a qualified evaluator and the teacher. The qualified evaluator and teacher must discuss the lesson plan or instructional planning and any areas on which the qualified evaluator should focus during the observation. Following either formal or an informal observation, the qualified evaluator must discuss with the teacher the evidence collected about the teacher's professional practice.

Tenured teachers who received an excellent or proficient performance evaluation rating in their last performance evaluation must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle—with at least one observation being formal. Tenured teachers who received a needs improvement or unsatisfactory performance evaluation rating on their last performance evaluation must be observed at least three times during the school year following such an evaluation rating—with at least two of the observations being formal. Non-teachers must be observed at least three times, with at least two of the observations being formal.

Potential Benefits of Informal Observations

Colvin and Johnson (2007) stated that the teachers' actions can no longer be seen as just one among many factors—that teachers are the most important school factor in how much children learn. Marshall (2013) affirmed that the single most important factor in student achievement is the quality of instruction. Therefore, teachers should be constantly supported and provide feedback to encourage good teaching practices and detailed feedback to improve instruction whenever necessary.

Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2013) stated that observations should focus primarily on student learning rather than on teacher's teaching. Kachur et al. (2013) also stated that any conversations should be nonjudgmental and reflective following the informal observations. Jackson (2013) added that although mistakes are inevitable, most teachers hide their mistakes because they do not want to affect the perception of them and their teaching. Thus, it is important to establish a climate in which mistakes are discussed openly and without judgment so that teachers can deal with and learn from their mistakes.

Wagner (2008) stated that teachers who receive weekly observations and feedback develop as much in one year as most teachers do in 20. He also stated that effective feedback is observable and measurable and that feedback needed to be focused and given in small increments to maximize teacher development. Thus, Wagner would agree that giving feedback in small portions over a longer period of time would increase the development of teachers over time. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) agreed with Wagner regarding providing feedback in smaller chunks more often. Wagner further stated that effective supervision is frequent, rigorous, focused on the improvement of instruction, and performed by people who know what good instruction looks like.

Another potential benefit of short and frequent informal observations recognizes that the instructional leader would have a more accurate picture of what is going on in school when he or she is able to visit many classes on a regular basis (Downey et al., 2004). Downey et al. also found that the frequent sampling of a teacher's actions gives greater validity to what is observed, and the advantage of facilitating teacher reflection can significantly impact student achievement. Marshall (2013) added that unannounced visits are not defensible or feasible unless they are frequent.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) stated that teachers who participate in the process of thinking about their teaching are more likely to internalize the feedback and improve their performance. Drago-Severson (2009) found that professionals in school systems practice on their own, without the benefit of a supportive yet critically thoughtful observer. Thus, many times their good work is not replicated, built upon, examined, or celebrated.

Darling-Hammond (2013) stated that the goal of observation involves supporting quality instruction for all students—instruction that is well-informed by an understanding of what students are learning and how teaching can support their progress. Darling-Hammond (2013) affirmed that clear standards of good teaching practice are essential to supporting classroom instruction. Furthermore, she specified that evidence of student learning needs to be used appropriately and strong support for meaningful professional learning needs to be present. Darling-Hammond declared that teachers and instructional leaders need to understand that instructional leaders want to see teachers at their best but they also want to see teachers when they are struggling for then, instructional leaders are able to support teachers as needed.

SECTION FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I frequently observed five teachers' classrooms consisting of two science, one mathematics, one English, and one social science teacher. Four of the teachers were tenured, with the fifth one in his or her tenured year. I administered surveys to participating teachers and six department chairpersons of the district. I also interviewed the five teachers and eight department chairpersons.

Survey Results

This section reports and interprets the data I obtained from those interviewed and surveyed.

Instructional Leaders

Six of the 11 department chairs completed the 20-question survey in this study. They strongly agreed that teachers were provided specific, actionable, and relevant feedback within 24 hours of an observation. They also agreed that observations were objective, developmental, and conducted with professionalism. Furthermore, they maintained that improvement of students' learning was the focus of observations.

Department chairs agreed that the number of observations was adequate for an observer to provide objective and applicable feedback. They believed that teachers' performance expectations were clear and concise, that postobservations emphasized sharing information, and that applicable feedback only focused on one or two aspects of the lesson. In like manner, they agreed that they had a clear understanding of what was going on in their department. In addition, they believed that frequent 10-minute observations could be used to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses and that they

were feasible for teachers. Finally, they agreed that feedback was necessary to improve instruction and it should be shared in nonjudgmental ways.

Department chairpersons strongly disagreed with the notion that unannounced observations were ineffective and poor assessments of overall teachers' performance, and that observations should always be announced. They also disagreed with the notion that teachers received frequent feedback and coaching and that there was a shared expectation between teachers and instructional leaders about what good teaching should be.

Table 1 shows the results of the leaders surveyed using the 20-question survey regarding observation. Responses range from one to four where one represents strongly disagree and four represents strongly agree.

Table 1

Instructional Leaders' Results from 20-Question Survey

Question	**Leader 1**	**Leader 2**	**Leader 3**	**Leader 4**	**Leader 5**	**Leader 6**	**Avg.**
1	4	4	3	3	4	4	3.7
2	4	3	3	4	2	2	3.0
3	4	3	3	2	4	3	3.2
4	4	3	3	3	4	4	3.5
5	4	4	3	2	2	4	3.2
6	4	3	3	3	4	4	3.5
7	4	4	4	3	4	4	3.8
8	4	2	3	2	2	2	2.5
9	4	3	4	4	3	3	3.5
10	4	4	3	3	2	3	3.2
11	4	3	3	2	4	3	3.2
12	2	2	2	1	1	2	1.7
13	2	3	2	3	4	4	3.0
14	3	3	3	4	3	3	3.2
15	4	3	3	2	2	2	2.7
16	1	2	2	1	1	2	1.5
17	4	2	3	2	1	2	2.3
18	3	3	3	3	4	3	3.2
19	3	3	3	2	4	4	3.2
20	4	3	3	4	2	4	3.3

Teachers

Four of the five teachers who participated in this study anonymously completed and returned the survey; as well, six department chairpersons anonymously completed the survey. Overall, the teachers in this study believe that the current observational system at AAMHS provide teachers with specific, actionable, and relevant feedback that is shared in nonjudgmental ways. In addition, they believe that the feedback focused on only one or two aspects of a lesson at a time and that frequent feedback and coaching was necessary for improving instruction.

Teachers responded that their performance expectations were clear and concise, and that there was a shared expectation between teachers and instructional leaders about what is good teaching. They also believed that observations were objective, developmental, supportive, and conducted with professionalism and integrity. Finally, they believed that frequent 10-minute observations could be useful in identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses and feasible for teachers.

Teachers did not believe that the number of observations in their current system was adequate for an observer to provide objective and applicable feedback over time. Thus, in the current system, they did not believe that teachers received frequent feedback and coaching. Furthermore, they did not believe that instructional leaders had a clear understanding of what was going on in their classroom. In addition, they did not believe that classroom observations or visits needed to be announced nor longer than 30 minutes to be effective and informative.

Table 2 shows the results of the teachers surveyed using the 20-question survey regarding observation. Responses range from one to four where one represents strongly disagree and four represents strongly agree.

Table 2

Cooperating Teachers' Results from 20-Question Survey

Question	Cooperating Teacher 1	Cooperating Teacher 2	Cooperating Teacher 3	Cooperating Teacher 4	Response Average
1	1	1	2	2	1.5
2	3	2	3	2	2.5
3	2	2	1	3	2.0
4	2	2	1	2	1.8
5	3	2	2	2	2.3
6	3	2	1	2	2.0
7	3	2	1	3	2.3
8	3	3	2	3	2.8
9	2	1	1	3	1.8
10	2	2	2	1	1.8
11	3	2	2	3	2.5
12	3	3		3	3.0
13	4	3	3	3	3.3
14	1	1	2	2	1.5
15	2	2	1	2	1.8
16	4	4	4	3	3.8
17	4	3	2	3	3.0
18	1	1	1	3	1.5
19	2	1	1	2	1.5
20	1	1	1	2	1.3

Interview Results

This section reports and interprets the data obtained from the participants interviewed. In addition, teachers and instructional leaders from various department were interviewed.

Teachers

One-on-one question and answer interviews were conducted with five teachers. Interviews consisted of six questions relative to the teachers' perceptions about classroom observations and its frequency, relation to professional development, relationship to students' learning, and teachers' support. These interviews were recorded verbally and in writing by the researcher. Interviews were scheduled for 30-minute intervals; however, some interviews took shorter or longer than the allotted 30 minutes.

Frequency of Classroom Observations

One teacher believed that a classroom observation system consisting of frequent, short, and unannounced visits by the same administrator would have to be "implemented carefully," "required teachers' buy-in," and "everyone needed to know the ground rules" prior to implementation. Teachers reported that it would be beneficial to have an extra set of "professional eyes" in the classroom. Most teachers reported that the system would allow teachers to be more open to trying new strategies without the fear of retribution. They felt that trust and rapport would be stronger between the teachers and instructional leaders and that administrators would have a more authentic feel for what was happening in the classroom for the observer would have a more holistic view of classroom functionality. They also believed that teachers would have "more consistent and immediate feedback" over time.

Teachers believe that the informal observation process has "not been fully implemented" and that it is in the "infancy stage." Informal observations should be more frequent with more data points to provide "a clear picture of the type of teaching that is going on" in the classroom and that "appropriate instruction is taking place." One teacher

reported that one pop-in a year is not effective for teachers' growth. This teacher also stated that "administrators should be in the classrooms and the hallways" not in their offices doing paperwork. Another teacher reported that more frequent classroom observations could be a burden on administrators because "administrators are very busy" and that there would be "some apprehension from teachers." A teacher added that the informal observation process expectations should be communicated clearly and there needed to be at least 2-3-minute follow-ups after each informal observation.

Professional Development

When asked about the relationship between classroom observations and professional development opportunities, only one teacher stated that his or her department chair suggested professional development opportunities after classroom observations. However, the majority of the teachers interviewed stated that there is little to no correlation between the two. They believe that administrators could "suggest professional development" opportunities based on their observations and that the professional development activities should be "tailored toward specific teachers' needs."

Recommendations for Change to the Classroom Observations

Teachers responded that the changes they would recommend for the current observation process to improve students' learning would include the "ability for administrators to revisit classes" for routine follow-ups, believing that it was important for administrators to observe using a recommended skill and providing additional feedback. One teacher reported that there needed to be an improved level of clarity of what was to be observed during informal observations. Overwhelmingly, teachers reported that they would recommend more frequent classroom observations—

observations that would not have to always be long. They also reported a need for more accurate and immediate feedback.

Teachers believe that observations are good for the current lesson and that the focus is too narrow. They believe the current observation system looks at what teachers and students do well but the feedback is also "too narrow." One teacher stated that he or she does not believe that informal observations are frequent enough to warrant an impact. Furthermore, teachers believe that instructional leaders need formal training to do observations.

When teachers were asked to share their ideal classroom observation system, one teacher reported that the system needed to "include both formal and informal observations." Another teacher reported that the system required trust and teachers' buy-in. Teachers stated that observations needed to occur more frequently and there needed to be the ability for feedback and discussions. They also would encourage teachers to visit each other's classroom to share ideas relative to instructional practices. In addition, they explained that the frequency of visits was important because administrators need to know what was going on the classrooms to "know what is working well." They also acknowledged that informal observations had to be conducted "by different individuals."

Instructional Leaders

One-on-one question and answer interviews were conducted with seven instructional leaders. Interviews were conducted and recorded verbally and in writing by the researcher and consisted of six questions relative to the instructional leaders' perceptions about classroom observations and its frequency, relation to professional development, relationship to students' learning, and teachers' support. Interviews were

scheduled for 30-minute intervals; however, some interviews took shorter or longer than the allotted 30 minutes.

Frequency of Classroom Observations

Instructional leaders stated that frequent, short, and unannounced informal classroom observations would open the lines of communication and strengthen relationships and rapport. They also believed it would help establish a level of trust and an "honest collection of data" to inform conversations. They stated it would be a "good way for the leader to get to know the instructors and their teaching styles" and get a better "feel for what was going on in the classroom."

The instructional leaders surveyed thought that there would be more opportunities for informative feedback and suggestions for instructors relative to improving teaching. Leaders could observe and share with teachers "the decisions that teacher took to cause things to go well." Further, through repetition, frequent and unannounced informal observations could lead to good insight for teachers and administrators.

To improve students' learning, leaders expressed that there needed to be more frequent observations, since the sample size for the majority of the teachers is one every other year. To increase the number of observations, one leader suggested that "all the components" of the system be shortened, adding that the observation system that they currently have in place does a good job "pointing out what good teaching patterns look like." One leader said that there "should be more of a spectrum" for feedback sessions relative to teaching and that "the number of people who sees the teacher should vary." Further, a leader stated that the system should communicate to the teachers a process to improve instructions thus, increasing students' achievement.

Leaders expressed that they do not know how authentic announced formal observations would be; working with some teachers in a particular area once a year for 45 minutes would be difficult. One leader stated that the current system "reinforced positive behaviors" while another stated that the process provided "feedback of the strength of the teachers." Yet another leader said that, "looking for good behaviors may not be giving good feedback" to improve instruction. Leaders stated that there needed to be more follow-up visits to review deficiencies that were pointed out at prior meetings.

Professional Development

Instructional leaders reported that there was little relationship between professional development and classroom observations and little transfer of professional development. One leader reported that he or she had "recommended professional development opportunities after classroom observations, but there is no formal structure in place." Another leader stated that he or she "recommended that teachers visit each other's classes," while another leader believed that professional development opportunities should be "more discipline specific."

Recommendations for Classroom Observations

Leaders said that they would keep AAMHS's entire classroom observation system. One leader said that he or she "enjoyed the preconference" and that the "three-part system was necessary." However, he or she also stated that "all three parts are not necessary all the time." Another leader commented that "Conversations that occurred" before an observation and the "conversations that happened after" an observation were imperative. Yet other leaders stated that conversations about improving instruction should be the focus of formal observations.

Many of the leaders did not believe that an informal observation system existed. One leader appreciated the fact that he or she could walk into any class unannounced to gather and share information relative to good teaching practices. Another leader stated that the "length of observations" may need adjusting for desirability and practicality. Overall, leaders believed very specific and timely feedback was necessary for improving instructions.

In addition, leaders stated that if they could design their own system that they would like to be viewed as an instructional coach or mentor. One leader said that he or she would like to "model instruction or a lesson with a teacher"; another leader stated that "teachers should visit each other's classes." Yet another leader felt that full formal observations should be at least "three times per semester." Leaders stated that they would keep all three parts of the system but may consider doing one full unannounced observation. Several leaders stated that an informal component should continue to be part of the process and that trust and understanding needed to exist between the teachers and leaders. Finally, one leader stated that teachers needed to be part of the selection of professional development activities and that "professional development opportunities needed to be linked to the improvement of students' learning."

Interpretations and Recommendations of the Process

At the beginning of the informal observation process, I met with each of the five teachers individually and explained that I planned to visit their class at least once every other week and follow each plan with a face-to-face feedback meeting within 24 hours of each observation. I also explained and shared written documents regarding the focus of my visits: students' engagement, teachers' questioning technique, learning objectives,

and/or teachers' feedback to students. I shared the same written documents with instructional leaders regarding my observational purpose.

To conduct the informal observations and feedback sessions, I reviewed the teachers' schedules to determine when they taught, what they taught, and when they were available for feedback meetings. At the beginning of this process, my assistant continued scheduling my obligated appointments and meetings as usual. However, I found it difficult to observe each teacher's classroom with the intention of following-up with feedback within 24 hours. I learned that I needed to be intentional about scheduling the observations and feedback times. Eventually, I experienced greater success with keeping up with my daily obligations and keeping the observation schedule. In fact, after scheduling the observations, I found that I was able to visit with teachers at least once every other week and provide consistent feedback.

At the feedback sessions, I was always able to speak to all five teachers about the students' engagement, teachers' feedback, and learning objectives. At times, I was able to speak to their questioning techniques but found myself more in-tuned to students' responses. When I spoke with teachers about their learning objectives, I shared that the objectives were strong and really described what students should be able to do with the new information and the level they were to perform. My only recommendation regarding the learning objectives, beyond being written on the board and referred to one or twice throughout the lesson, was that it should be referred to multiple times throughout the lesson to be a better gauge of students' learning.

By frequently visiting classes, I established improved rapport with teachers and a greater appreciation for their efforts in the classroom setting. From the beginning, the

teachers were comfortable with my visits but it took three to four visits before students were less curious about me. Eventually, I became just another person in the class. I believe that I achieved a better understanding for the teachers' instructional styles and management systems.

If I had to begin this process again, I would focus my attention on the same concepts: questioning technique, student engagement, and learning objectives. However, for students' engagement, I would concentrate more heavily on students' responses—length, depth, and quality. I would also set the observational schedule to see teachers in a variety of courses at different times the courses were scheduled. (I found that I often scheduled the same teacher's class because that was the class that fit into my schedule.) I would also request and review written curriculum documents to have a better idea of the concepts and skills students were to learn and have learned prior to my visit.

Interpretations

Teachers and instructional leaders agreed that more frequent classroom observations are necessary to increase the rapport between teachers and leaders, to provide teachers with feedback and sound recommendations for improving students' learning, and to give leaders a better understanding of what actually goes on in the classroom and at the school. They also agree that there could be an improved correlation between classroom observations and suggestions for professional development opportunities. In addition, teachers and instructional leaders agreed that all three parts of the current system are necessary but all three parts do not have to be used all the time nor be as long each time. However, all three parts need to be used more frequently.

Teachers and leaders agreed that a need exists for more follow-up visits to observe whether recommendations were successfully implemented, and that teachers should visit each other's classes. Teachers believe that an extra set of eyes in the classroom is important because teachers do not see everything going on all the time. Teachers also agreed that in the current system, the logistics of implementing more observations may be difficult what with leaders' current workloads. In addition, changes in responsibilities and obligations need to be reassigned, modified, or eliminated. Teachers also agreed that unannounced observations could be highly effective and good assessments of teachers' performances.

SECTION SIX: A VISION OF SUCCESS (TO BE)

As described in the As Is and To Be charts (see Appendix C), AAMHS should incorporate a classroom observation system that includes frequent, short, and unannounced classroom observations. More specifically, leaders should be assigned to visit the same small group of teachers at least every other week to ensure practicality. Every educator should know the ground rules prior to engaging in the process.

Context

As previously mentioned, the state currently requires that administrators and instructional leaders formally observe nontenured teachers at least three times a year and nontenured teachers one to three times every other year. Above Average Means High School's formal observation is a lengthy process—we meet with each teacher at least 15 minutes for a preobservation, then observe instruction for at least 45 minutes, and finally meet for at least 30 minutes for postobservation.

During the preobservation, the teacher and the observer discuss what the teacher plans to teach and the tools and strategies the teacher plans to use to achieve his or her learning objectives. The observer and the teacher then discuss how the observer plans to collect data and discusses other logistical factors such as where the observer will sit and the date and time of the observation.

The observer and the teacher shared a tool that lists best practices in the areas of planning, behavioral management, and instructional delivery. Prior to the postobservation, the observer and the teacher were to individually review the observer's notes to look for patterns related to planning and motivation, instructional management, and instructional delivery. At the postobservation, the observer and teacher share their

findings. At the end of the postobservation, the observer lists recommendations for improvement.

I believe the problem with AAMHS's formal observation process, beyond the time it takes to implement per each teacher and per each observation, involves the fact that it occurs too infrequently to support and improve good teaching.

Currently, AAMHS is in the process of implementing a new evaluative process. I am not privy to what the new process entails for the teachers union; the administration is developing it in closed sessions with representatives from both sides. I am hopeful that more frequent informal observations would be encouraged by the teachers union and the administration.

Culture

The organizational culture just described shows that instructional leaders routinely meet multiple times a week and often the same personnel sit at the same meetings. The department chair meetings consist of the principal, the two assistant principals, the director of special education, the director of technology, the director of curriculum and instruction, and department chairpersons. Agenda items at these meetings include upcoming events, feedback relative to events, book reads, creation of policies; and discussions about all-school initiatives.

The building team meetings consist of the director of operation and maintenance, the director of technology, the principal, two assistant principals, the chair of assessment, the chair of guidance, and the director of athletics. Upcoming events, review of events, grounds, and athletics and activities are discussed during these meetings.

The administrative team meetings consist of the superintendent, the principal, two assistant principals, one director of maintenance, one director of technology, one director of special education, one director of curriculum and instruction, the director of human resources, and the business manager. These meetings review the highlights of the department chair and building team meetings. It also reviews athletic events, upcoming events, and observations of past events. We meet routinely with often the same personnel sitting at multiple meetings.

Beyond meetings, department chairs are obligated to oversee assessments and instruction, teach, do classroom observations, and articulate with feeder programs. Assistant principals are obligated to engage in disciplinary procedures, residency inquiries, Section 504 meetings, supervisions, and formal observations. (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a national law that protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability.) The principal, superintendent, and directors fill more traditional roles beyond meetings and formal observations.

Conditions

At AAMHS, stronger trust needs to be established and maintained between staff and administration, in conjunction with implementing more frequent informal observations or classroom visits. Further, there exists infrequent and untimely use of summative data and a perception of initiative overload from teachers. Professional development tends to be more global (a one size fits all), although AAMHS is moving closer to more specific ongoing and job-embedded professional developments.

Fiscally, AAMHS is strong—our programs continue to thrive and we continue to offer considerable resources to our students and parents. Above Average Means High

School has a spacious and beautiful facility that allows for a manageable student-to-teacher ratio in most cases. It also offers space for private conversations and opportunities for reflecting about practices.

Competencies

Section Two of this study stated that all teachers are certified to teach in their discipline. Further, many educators in our districts have advanced degrees in curriculum and instruction, educational leadership, and subject-related areas. Every instructional leader has an advanced degree in educational leadership and/or curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, all instructional leaders have been certified to do full observations (preobservation, observation, and postobservation).

SECTION SEVEN: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

Authors in this study stated that good instructional practices are the most important attributes to excellent student achievement. This study showed that classroom observations need to be frequent and focused, and that teachers need to be active participants in the process—the goal of the process is to support quality instructions for all students. It also indicated that the classroom observational process needed to be systemic and focused on maximizing students' learning. Further, feedback meetings need to be nonthreatening, and specific strengths and recommendations need to be given to teachers. In addition, this study stressed that feedback should be given more often and in smaller parts because frequent sampling of teachers' efforts gives greater validity to what is observed.

Above Average Means High School is nearly in compliance with the new state law regarding classroom observations and so will need to change very little. The following represents the number of observations required by state law:

- Tenured teachers in good standing must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle and one of the observations needs to be formal,
- Tenured teachers in poor standing must be observed at least three times during the year of the rating and at least two of the observations need to be formal, and
- Nontenured teachers must be observed at least three times a year with at least two of the observations being formal.

At AAMHS, the number of observations are currently:

- Tenured teachers must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle and one of the observations needs to be formal, and
- Nontenured teachers must be observed at least three times a year with at least two of the observations being formal.

The state law requires that classroom observations consist of a preobservation, observation, and postobservation, which AAMHS currently does. The state also specifies that informal observations could be used for evaluative purposes—provided that it is conducted with the understanding that only written documentations can be used for the end-of-the-year evaluations.

This research study proposes that more frequent and unannounced informal classroom observations are needed to support and maximize instruction, build rapport amongst all educators, and increase students' learning. I recently learned at a leadership team meeting that AAMHS plans to incorporate more informal observations; however, the frequency of informal observations will be only two to three more times a year. The superintendent communicated to the team that he believes that due to the responsibilities and obligations of the instructional leaders, it would be nearly impossible to do more than what is required by the state with the expectation of a few additional informal observations. However, teacher representatives that sit on the evaluation committee expressed the need for more observations so that instructional leaders get a more authentic view of their teaching practices.

Ultimately, I believe that we need a classroom observation system described by Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser (2012). His system consists of data-driven instruction that includes common interim assessments at least four times a year. The assessments would

be aligned to what students need to learn by the end of the day, week, unit, and year. There needs to be time for postinterim assessment meetings where teachers and assigned instructional leaders meet to discuss the analysis of the assessment. The focus of the meetings is on students' learning. Following data analysis, there should be a plan to address concerns derived from the data and discussion. The instructional leader is highly encouraged to lead face-to-face meetings by asking carefully prepared questions to support instruction.

To ensure that recommendations are being implemented, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser strongly encourage instructional leaders to frequently visit the classrooms and comment on recommendations. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser also stated that every teacher must be observed and provided face-to-face feedback every week and observations need to be systemically tracked to include when a teacher was observed and the kind of feedback that was given. Furthermore, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser indicated that the primary reason for the observations should be to coach teachers to improve students' learning and focused on one or two areas at a time to maximize implementation and improvement.

However, I strongly believe the change we could implement more readily is described by a combination of Marshall (2013) and Downey et al. (2004). Marshall stated that teachers and instructional leaders needed to have a shared understanding of what good instruction looks like and that teachers need to be active participants in the observation process. Further, the five most important aspects of teaching should be safety, objectives, teaching, engagement, and learning. Marshall also said that students' learning outcomes should be the main focus. In addition, he advocates for frequent, brief,

and unannounced classroom observations where instructional leaders have the opportunity to deepen and enrich relationships.

Marshall stated that frequent and unannounced classroom observations occur when they are short and when administrative are redistributed or delegated to others. Moreover, he stated that 10-minute observations are more than enough to gather great data because after 10 minutes into an observation, new insights level off and gradually decline for the remainder of the classroom observation. Marshall agreed with Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser when he indicated that the observational process needed to be systematic and documented.

Downey et al. (2004) added that every informal observation does not need to be followed up with feedback, and that the informal observations should not be intended to evaluate teachers' work. Instead, informal observations should be used to gain a more accurate picture of what is going on in the school and classrooms. Moreover, Downey et al. believe that informal observations should focus on factors that impact increased student achievement, and that feedback sessions should be collaborative and reflective with the focus on teachers' development. Downey et al. agrees with Marshall (2013)—that everyone needs to know the purpose of informal visits. She also believes that instructional leaders could identify common areas of concerns for staff development.

Thus, I strongly believe that AAMHS should develop a system described by Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser; however, it could start with a system described by Marshall and Downey et al. Heifetz et al. (2009) stated that "significant change is the product of incremental experiments that build up over time" (p. 17). I believe that the ideas described by Marshall and Downey et al. are the incremental changes needed to

happen over time to get to the great change of Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser's ideas. Along with the incremental changes, Heifetz et al. (2009) would also state that AAMHS needs to begin shaping changes in its staff priorities and habits.

Above Average Means High School could begin the incremental and experimental process of change by using the systemic change process described by Wagner et al. (2006); these authors stressed that change needs to be systemic. Moreover, leaders need to review the competencies of the organization—specifically, the actual skills and knowledge required to carry out specific tasks. To improve the learning for all classrooms, competencies need professional developments that are focused, job embedded, continuous, and collaborative. Data needs to be constantly collected and a sense of shared accountability will be essential for the continuous improvement of learning.

Context that deeply impacts AAMHS's work and sometimes is beyond its control are test scores—more specifically, ACT scores. For the past eight plus years, it has been the state examination and gauge for students' achievement. Something within the district's control is the number of leadership team meetings held on a weekly basis. Often, these meetings are in groups but at times, these meetings are individual. Some individuals on AAMHS's leadership teams believe that students are achieving at or above the levels that they achieved in the past. They also believe that work is needed to improve students' achievement. Improvement efforts consist of free tutoring seven days a week, a reading program, test preparation courses throughout the year, an additional 10 to 15-minute visit to teachers' classroom, an all-school book read, and time for professional

learning communities to meet. The school and school district are financially stable and departments are compartmentalized with an instructional leader in each department.

Wagner et al. (2006) also stated that supervision needs to be frequent and entirely focused on the improvement of instruction—all educators need to learn how to significantly improve their skills. The document that list the patterns of good teaching habits needs to be discussed at length to increase the notion of what good teaching looks like. All collected data needs to be disaggregated and transparent to everyone.

Actions for Change

It is really important that instructional leaders have time to frequently observe teachers, as well as time to provide actionable and measurable feedback in face-to-face meetings. I propose that leadership teams meet less often to garner more time to support a classroom observation system that includes more focused and short classroom observations. As stated earlier, a leadership team meets every Monday and is scheduled for an hour. On average, the meeting lasts for about thirty minutes. Above Average Means High School tends to discuss management issues such as activity coverage, school updates, and compliance issues. Another leadership team meets every Tuesday and is scheduled for an hour; however, on average, AAMHS tends to meet for about twenty minutes. We discuss mostly management issues such as activity or athletic event coverage, upcoming events, discussions about past events, and other nonacademic events not directly tied to improving student achievement. Still another leadership team meets every Wednesday and consists of mostly the department chairpersons. It should focus more on academic issues that directly impact students' achievement. However, it too tends to focus more on upcoming events or recap past events.

Currently, AAMHS has 20 leaders assigned to observe classroom instruction—one superintendent, one principal, two assistant principals, one director of curriculum and instruction, one director of human resource, one director of finance, 11 department chairpersons, one director of special education, and one director of athletics. In addition, AAMHS has about one hundred and sixty teachers. Thus, I propose, in lieu of leadership meetings, that we assign eight teachers to each instructional leader to do short, frequent, and unannounced classroom observations at least every other week.

If AAMHS accomplishes at least three classroom observations per teacher per course (15 observations per teacher), the process could be completed, on average, within four days a month for the observations and four days a month for the face-to-face feedback sessions. Specifically, each teacher could be observed twice in the months of September, October, November, February, March, April, and May and once in the months of December and January. I strongly believe that this is feasible for all instructional leaders and, as highlighted in this study, pertinent to excellent student achievement.

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Appendix A: Letter to the Superintendent

April 20, 2014

Superintendent
Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School District 233
999 Kedzie Avenue
Flossmoor, IL 60422

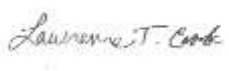
Dear Superintendent,

In reference to our recent conversation regarding informal classroom observations and data collection for my dissertation, I am asking your permission to initiate the process this fall.

I plan to investigate the use and feasibility of informal observations for teachers and instructional leaders. Specifically, I plan to do unannounced and short classroom visits, at least once every other week, of seven teachers in various departments. I also plan to do short feedback meetings with each teacher within 24 hours of each informal observations. I will also conduct a survey and two written inquiries with the teachers, and a survey and an inquiry with instructional leaders.

I look forward to your response, and thank you for your continual support of my professional endeavors.

Sincerely yours,



Lawrence Cook

Appendix B: Informal Observations Research Study Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study of how short, frequent, and announced informal observations could be used to identify, support, encourage, and affirm highly-effective teaching practices, and to offer support for professional learning whenever necessary. I am asking you to participate in this study because I believe that you are an effective educator who would offer honest insights for the study. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

The purpose of my study is to determine whether frequent, unannounced, and short classroom observations would be useful and feasible for teachers and instructional leaders to implement. Short classroom observations shall be described as 10-15-minute classroom observations with feedback sessions within 24 hours of each observation, and will be referred to as informal observations. Full observations are described as a 15-30-minute preobservation, followed by a 45-60-minute classroom observation, followed by a 30-45-minute postobservation. The full observations will be called clinical observations.

The participants in this study will consist of teachers, department chairpersons, an assistant principal, a principal, and the superintendent. I do not anticipate any emotional, physical, social, or political ramifications to staff participants. Names, research information, and school information will be held to strict confidentially through the use of pseudonyms and generalities. Research records will be kept in a locked file, which only I will have access.

I will do informal classroom observations at least once every other week with follow-up face-to-face meetings within 24 hours of each visit with cooperating teachers. My expectation is that frequent informal classroom observations would give me, an instructional leader, the opportunity to build and maintain trustworthy and cooperative relationships with teachers, support great teaching traits, and provide information relative to professional learning and growth.

I asked five teachers from various departments to allow me to observe their class, collect data, and share collected information. I will meet with each teacher at the beginning of the study to explain his or her expectation of the study. I plan to administer a survey that will consist of statements that are brief, clear, and stated in simple language. I will also give open-ended inquiries to teachers and instructional leaders to gage their perception about clinical observations and informal observations. The survey and inquiries are included at the end of this packet.

Appendix B: Informal Observations Research Study Consent Form (continued)

If the informal observations prove to be as effective as clinical observations, then I will present this information to the superintendent and principal with hope to incorporate more informal observations into our observational system. I have observed teachers' teaching for more than 11 years using the clinical observation system. I always believed that the observations were too infrequent to build strong and trustworthy relationships with every teacher. In addition, I did not believe that I consistently gave accurate and formative feedback based on one or two clinical observations a year per teacher.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. Please note that if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequence(s).

The researcher conducting this study is Lawrence Cook. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 708-335-5604 or at lcook@hf233.org. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact my Institutional Research and Review Board (IRRB) Chair, Dr. Judah Viola at 312-261-3527 or Judah.Viola@nl.edu; or my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Tina Nolan at 847-275-6077 or at tina@tinanolan.com.

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

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

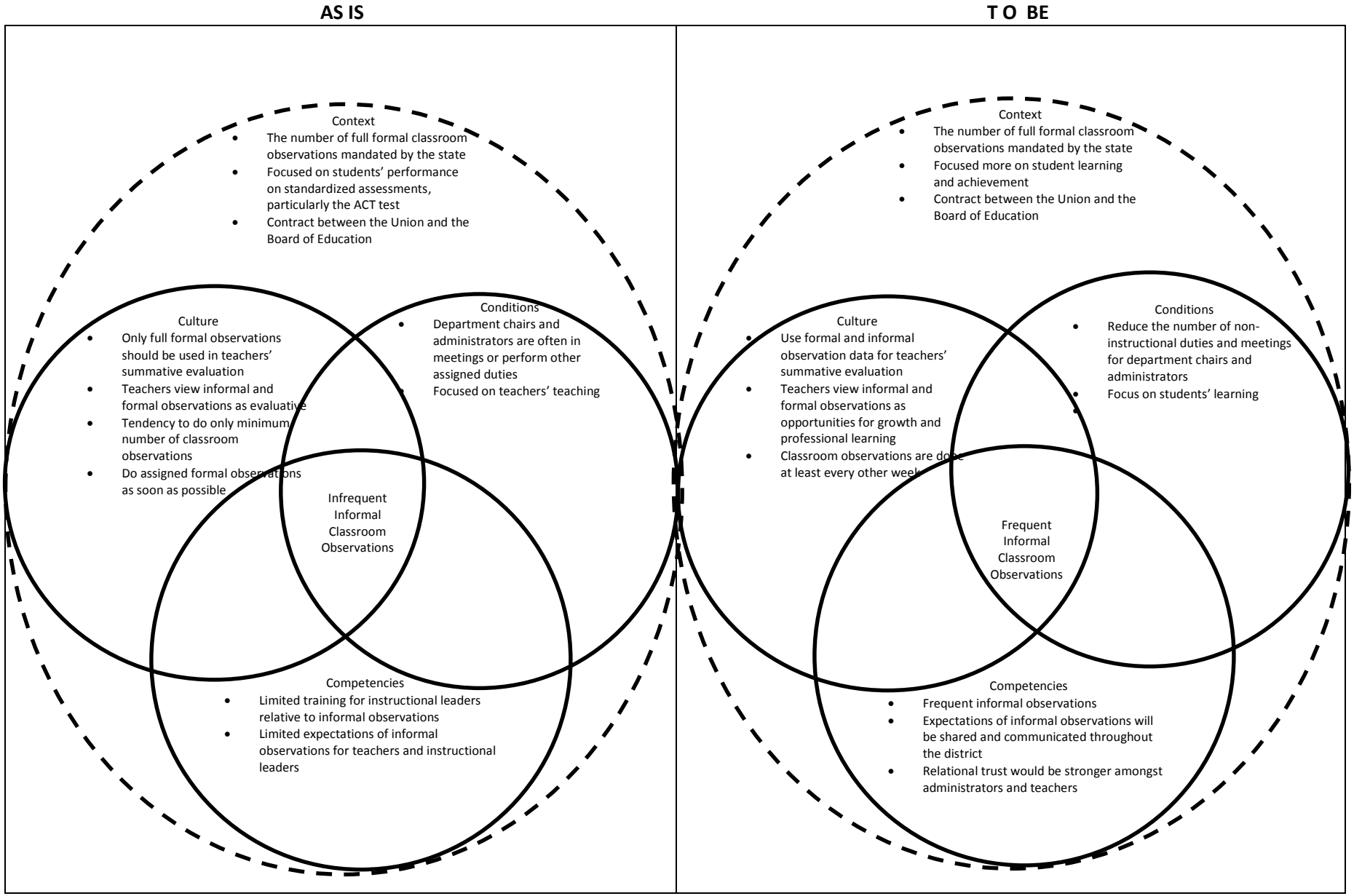
Participant Name (printed) _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Name (printed) _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

Appendix C: As Is/To Be



Appendix D: Teacher Participation

I understand that this research study is strictly voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without negative consequences. I also understand that my confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and generalities.

I understand that the purpose of this study involves determining whether frequent, unannounced, and short informal observations would be beneficial and feasible for teachers and instructional leaders. Specifically, whether the informal observations help build trustworthy and collaborative relationships between instructional leaders and teachers, identify and support good teaching and learning attributes, and whenever necessary, help provide recommendations and other resources for professional learning and growth to improve students' learning.

I understand that the informal observations will focus on learning objectives, teachers' questioning techniques, student engagement, and teachers' feedback. The researcher will visit my classroom at least once every other week for 10-15 minutes. The observations will be open-ended where the researcher will observe and collect written information relative to the aforementioned areas of focus. The researcher will then schedule a feedback meeting to discuss information collected.

Finally, I understand that I will complete a multiple-choice survey, an inquiry relative to the current observational system, and a reflective inquiry at the end of the study. The overall finding of the study will be shared with me at the end of the program via a written hardcopy of the findings and an electronic copy via the internet.

Participant Name
(Please Print):_____

Participant Signature:
_____

Today's Date:_____

Appendix E: First Interview for Cooperating Teachers

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this inquiry will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

1. List the advantages of the current observation system.

2. List the disadvantages of the current observation system.

3. If you could change anything about the current observation system, what would you change? How would you change it?

4. Is the current observation system used to support the professional growth of teachers, used mostly to evaluate teachers' performance, or is it both supportive and evaluative? Please explain.

Appendix F: First Interview for Instructional Leaders Regarding the Current Observation System

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this inquiry will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

1. List the advantages of the current observation system.

2. List the disadvantages of the current observation system.

3. If you could change anything about the current observation system, what would you change? How would you change it?

4. Is the current observation system used to support the professional growth of teachers, used mostly to evaluate teachers' performance, or is it both supportive and evaluative? Please explain.

Appendix G: Instructional Leader Survey

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this survey will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.
Please check the box that best describe your belief about each statement.

1. Within 24 hours after an observation, the teacher is provided with specific and actionable feedback.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

2. The number of observations is adequate for an observer(s) to provide objective and applicable feedback.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

3. Teacher's performance expectations are clear and concise.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

4. Observational feedback is supportive and relevant.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

5. Postobservations emphasize sharing information, rather than giving advice.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

6. Observations are objective, developmental and supportive, and conducted with professionalism, integrity, and courtesy.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

7. The focus of an observation is to improve students' learning/achievement.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

8. Teachers receive frequent feedback and coaching.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

9. Through open and honest communication, the observer and teacher clarify what was actually observed.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

10. For applicable feedback, observations focus on only one or two aspects of the lesson at a time.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

Appendix G: Instructional Leader Survey (continued)

11. Instructional leaders have a clear understanding of what is going on in their departments/school and within each individual classroom.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

12. Observations and/or classroom visits should be announced.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

13. To be effective and informative, observations must be 30 minutes or longer.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

14. Frequent 10-minute observations can be useful in identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

15. There is a shared expectation between teachers and instructional leaders about what is good teaching.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

16. Unannounced observations or classroom visits are ineffective and poor assessments of overall teachers' performance.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

17. The frequency of classroom observations is sufficient to support teachers' efforts.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

18. Frequent feedback and coaching are necessary to improve instruction.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

19. Feedback is often shared in nonevaluative and objective ways.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

20. Frequent 10-15-minute classroom observations with face-to-face feedback is feasible within my schedule.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

Appendix H: Cooperating Teacher Survey

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this survey will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.
Please check the box that best describe your belief about each statement.

1. Within 24 hours after an observation, the teacher is provided with specific and actionable feedback.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

2. The number of observations is adequate for an observer(s) to provide objective and applicable feedback.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

3. Teacher's performance expectations are clear and concise.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

4. Observational feedback is supportive and relevant.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

5. Postobservations emphasize sharing information, rather than giving advice.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

6. Observations are objective, developmental and supportive, and conducted with professionalism, integrity and courtesy.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

7. The focus of an observation is to improve students' learning/achievement.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

8. Teachers receive frequent feedback and coaching.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

9. Through open and honest communication, the observer and teacher clarify what was actually observed.
   □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

10. For applicable feedback, observations focus on only one or two aspects of the lesson at a time.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

Appendix H: Cooperating Teacher Survey (continued)

11. Instructional leaders have a clear understanding of what is going on in their departments/school and within each individual classroom.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

12. Observations and/or classroom visits should be announced.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

13. To be effective and informative, observations must be 30 minutes or longer.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

14. Frequent 10-minute observations can be useful in identifying teachers' strengths and weaknesses.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

15. There is a shared expectation between teachers and instructional leaders about what is good teaching.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

16. Unannounced observations or classroom visits are ineffective and poor assessments of overall teachers' performance.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

17. The frequency of classroom observations is sufficient to support teachers' efforts.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

18. Frequent feedback and coaching are necessary to improve instruction.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

19. Feedback is often shared in nonevaluative and objective ways.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

20. Frequent 10-15-minute classroom observations with face-to-face feedback is feasible within my schedule.
    □ Strongly Agree □ Agree □ Disagree □ Strongly Disagree

Appendix I: Second Interview for Cooperating Teachers

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this inquiry will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

1. List the advantages of the classroom visits.

2. List the disadvantages of the classroom visits.

3. List recommendations for improving the informal observation process.

Appendix J: Second Interview for Instructional Leaders Regarding the Current Observation System

Thank you for participating in my research study. Data collected from this inquiry will remain anonymous and used solely for the purpose of dissertation research.

1. List the advantages of the current observation system.

2. List the disadvantages of the current observation system.

3. If you could change anything about the current observation system, what would you change? How would you change it?

4. Is the current observation system used to support the professional growth of teachers, used mostly to evaluate teachers' performance, or is it both supportive and evaluative? Please explain.

Appendix K: Focus of Informal Observations

Observation and Feedback

- **Learning Objectives (Outcomes)**
  - Statements of what students will know and be able to do at the end of the lesson or unit of instruction.
  - Verbs used when writing good instructional objectives are list, identify, rephrase, tell, define, explain, draw, solve, describe, compare, contrast, create, summarize, design, and evaluate.
  - Verbs or phrases to avoid when writing good instructional objectives are understand, appreciate, know, be exposed to, be familiar with, explore, get a sense of, think about, learn, see, and realize.
  - Examples of objectives that do not address learning objectives (outcomes) are:
    - Students will take notes from a PowerPoint lecture about the stock market crash of 1929
    - Students will practice drawing squares, triangles, and circles
    - Students will complete a vocabulary worksheet
    - Students will write a two-page research report on a farm animal of their choice
  - Examples of good learning objectives are:
    - Students will explain causes and effects of the stock market crash of 1929
    - Students will name and create squares, triangles, and circles
    - Students will match German words to their English translations
    - Students will collaborate in groups of three to solve geometry problems
    - In a two-page research report, students will describe a farm animal, tell how it lives on the farm, and explain what it is used for

- **Teacher Questioning Technique**
  Research shows questions that focus student attention on important elements of a lesson result in better comprehension than those that focus on unusual elements. *Lower cognitive questions* (fact, closed, direct, recall, and knowledge questions) involve the recall of information. *Higher cognitive questions* (open-ended, interpretive, evaluative, inquiry, inferential, and synthesis questions) involve the mental manipulation of information to produce or support an answer.

  Lower cognitive questions are more effective when the goal is to impart factual knowledge and commit it to memory. Studies show that a combination of lower and higher questions are more effective than the exclusive use of one or the other. Increasing the use of higher cognitive questions can produce superior learning gains for older students, particularly those in secondary school, and does not reduce student performance on lower cognitive questions. The use of a high frequency (50% or more) of higher cognitive questions with older students

Appendix K: Focus of Informal Observations (continued)

- **Teacher Questioning Technique (Continued)**
  is positively related to increases in on-task behavior, length of student responses, the number of relevant contributions, the number of student-to-student interactions, student use of complete sentences, speculative thinking, and relevant questions posed by students.

  - ***Level 1 (Lowest Level)—Remembering/Knowledge***
    The teacher then provides verbal or written texts about the subject that can be answered by recalling the information the student learned.
    - ***Question Prompts***
      - What do you remember about …?
      - Where is …?
      - Who was …?
      - What is …?

  - ***Level 2—Understanding/Comprehension***
    The student understands the main idea of material heard, viewed, or read. He/she can interpret or summarize the ideas in his/her own words.
    - ***Question prompts***
      - How would you compare/contrast…?
      - How would you generalize…?
      - What can you infer from …?
      - How can you describe …?
      - What is the main idea of …?

  - ***Level 3—Applying***
    The student can apply an abstract idea in a concrete situation to solve a problem or relate it to prior experiences. The teacher should give students opportunities to apply knowledge to new situations, and provide questions that require the student to define and solve problems.
    - ***Questions Prompts***
      - What actions would you take to perform …?
      - What other way would you choose to …?
      - How would you change …?

Appendix K: Focus of Informal Observations (continued)

- ***Level 4—Analyzing/Analysis***
  The student is able to break down a concept/ideas into parts and show relationships among the parts. The teacher allows time for the students to examine concepts to break down into basic parts, and requires students to explain why they chose a certain method to solve the problem.
    - ***Questions Prompts***
      - What explanation do you have for …?
      - How is … connected to …?
      - Discuss the pros and cons of …?
      - What ideas validate …?
- ***Level 5—Evaluating/Evaluation***
  The student makes informed judgments about the value of ideas or materials, and uses standards to support opinions and views. The teacher provides opportunities for students to make judgments based on appropriate criteria.
    - ***Level 5 Questions Prompts***
      - What criteria would you use to assess…?
      - What is the most important…?
      - What would you suggest…?
      - How could you verify …?

- ***Level 6 (Highest Level)—Creating***
  The student brings together parts of knowledge to form a whole and build relationships for new situations. The teacher requires the students to demonstrate that they can combine concepts to build new ideas for new situations.
    - ***Questions Prompts***
      - What alternative would you suggest for …?
      - Predict the outcome if …
      - What would happen if …?
      - How would you improve…?

- **Feedback**
  Feedback is not praise, not advice, not judgment, nor inference; instead, it describes what the student has done and helps the student decide what to do next. Research reports that less teaching and more feedback equals better learning. It further shows that effective feedback is concrete, specific, useful, and provides actionable information. In addition, too much feedback is counterproductive; teachers should concentrate on only one or two key elements of performance. Thus, effective feedback limits corrective information to an amount the student can act on. Feedback should be timely and teachers should follow this feedback with immediate opportunities for students to use it.

Appendix K: Focus of Informal Observations (continued)

- **Student Engagement**
  Ask students to do something with the knowledge and skills they have learned. The following list showcases some activities a teacher can ask a student to engage in:
    - ***Passive Activities***
        - Paying attention
        - Taking notes
        - Listening
    - ***Active Activities***
        - Asking content related questions
        - Responding to questions
        - Reading critically with pen in hand
        - Writing to learn
        - Presenting
        - Inquiring
        - Explaining
        - Experimenting

UTILIZING CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS TO INFORM TEACHING AND LEARNING: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Lawrence T. Cook

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

National Louis University

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Abstract

The purpose of this policy advocacy document was to show the need for more frequent, unannounced, short, and focused classroom observations to support classroom instruction. This document includes studies related to the effectiveness of shorter classroom observations and provides an analysis of the educational, economic, social, political, moral, and ethical needs for the change in policy. In addition, a summary of current practices, along with the implementation and assessment of the policy, are examined.

Preface

Lessons learned in year three were cultural awareness, inclusiveness, and policy advocacy. The culturally proficient teacher has the desire to help disadvantaged students overcome circumstance and the ability to engage students in the learning process. Deficit-minded thinking results in the creation of curriculum and instruction that falls short of effective teaching and related educational opportunities. Equity teaching means that educational experiences are designed to meet the specific needs of students. Growth-minded teachers are respectful, courteous, complimentary, active listeners, approachable, positive in attitude, and knowledgeable; they see their students as being learners, accountable, honorable, successful, college-bound, communicators, and leaders.

Auerbach (2012) stated that educational leaders need to seek conversations where people show up by invitation rather than being mandated to attend. In addition, Auerbach said that people who are not used to being together need to engage in conversations that they have never had. Block (2008) added that for communities to grow and thrive, the focus should be on the communities' gifts, not their deficits or shortcomings, so that communities can be restored through possibility thinking and generosity.

Furthermore, Auerbach (2012) said that parents needed training about examining school data and asking difficult questions about achievement and resources. Parents learned how to problem-solve, collect data, and work together as a team. Therefore, school officials should provide everyone with the information and skills needed to be inclusive and forward thinking

A policy advocacy document represents a thoughtful approach to educational policy. It desires that educational leadership be expressed through reflective and moral

practices. The document should consist of a vision statement, a needs analysis, a policy statement, an argument, an implementation plan, an assessment plan, and a summary statement.

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SECTION ONE: VISION STATEMENT

My educational career began in the fall of 1993. I have been a high school mathematics teacher; a football, wrestling, track, and basketball coach; an assistant to the athletic director; a mathematics department chair; a dean of students; and an assessment department chair. Currently, I am assistant principal at Above Average Means High School (AAMHS, pseudonym)—a one-school, high school district located about thirty minutes outside of a major metropolitan area.

Reflecting over the years regarding the support I received or gave relative to classroom observations, I realized it was minimal compared to the number of opportunities that could have been available over the years. For the first 2 years of my teaching career at a high school, I was observed and evaluated by the building principal. He would stop by my classroom unannounced and sit for about fifteen minutes. Later, in passing, he would give me generic but positive feedback about what he observed. Through my first 2 years, he would perform the same observational and evaluative process about three more times for a total of four observational experiences in 2 years.

For the next 2 years, at a different high school located about thirty minutes south of a major metropolitan area, I was observed twice by my department chair and once by a designated administrator. The observation process consisted of a preobservation, an observation, and a postobservation. During the preobservation, the observer and I would spend about fifteen minutes discussing my lesson plan, the materials needed, and instructional strategies. The classroom observation followed; it was aligned with the preobservation. The observer would observer classroom activities for about forty minutes and within 24 hours, the observer and I would meet for a postobservation. At the

postobservation meeting, the observer would share his or her findings and make recommendations for improved instruction.

For the next 5 years at the same high school, I was observed twice by my department chair and once by a designated administrator every other year. This system was an improvement to my previous workplace. Classroom management improved and lessons and units were better paced. Notwithstanding, it was mostly shared that I was doing an excellent job and told to continue as usual. There were very few discussions and recommendations about how to improve my instruction, instructional strategies, student engagement, and questioning techniques.

I have been an observer of classroom instruction for the past twelve years at AAMHS. Our observation system consists of a preobservation, an observation, and a postobservation. AAMHS's preobservations and observations are similar to those just described; however, AAMHS's postobservation was intended to be more reflective in hopes that the teacher would take more ownership of the objective data collected and shared, as well as of the joint recommendations for instructional improvements.

Although this observational system was designed to be more reflective, my research has shown that classroom observations in AAMHS's system occur too infrequently to fully support classroom instruction and help teachers grow to their fullest potential to maximize learning for all students. At the beginning of my second year, I read, *Rethinking Teacher Supervision and Evaluation* (Marshall, 2013) and, *Leverage Leadership* (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser (2012)). Based on those readings, I have realized that observers see only a fraction of a percentage of the times when teachers are engaged in instructional activities; especially, when teachers are observed only one to

three times a year and sometimes, only every other year. Marshall and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser suggested that observations should occur more frequently, be shorter and focused, and be unannounced (Marshall; Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser).

If teachers are considered one of the most influential contributors to students' academic successes and achievements, then it is imperative that teachers' professional learning be supported. Thus, my policy advocacy proposal would require instructional leaders to perform more frequent, shorter, focused, and unannounced classroom observations. From this point forward, frequent, shorter, focused, and unannounced classroom observations will be referred to as informal observations.

The primary focus of informal observations involves supporting classroom instruction by building trust and rapport between teachers and instructional leaders. In addition, classroom instruction would be supported through more frequent and reflective discussions about classroom instruction and other behaviors.

Reflective practice is a tool that supports teacher professional learning by helping teachers examine and modify their behaviors (Drago-Severson, 2009). When instructional leaders engage in reflective practices, they listen more and allow teachers to think about their actions and reflect deeply. Effective reflective practices accentuate acknowledging, paraphrasing, and clarifying response behaviors (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Acknowledging means recognizing what was said without judgment. Paraphrasing creates a safe environment for thinking. Clarifying helps the instructional leader better understand the speaker. It is extremely important for instructional leaders to develop trusting relationships with teachers by keeping commitments and acting nonjudgmentally.

Introduction to the Problem

Currently, I am an assistant principal at AAMHS, which is deemed a teaching and learning institution by its stakeholders and committed to the professional growth of all staff. More importantly, it is believed that providing teachers with the opportunity to examine objective data and to engage in two-way feedback with instructional leaders will result in improved instructional performances and increased student learning. This approach is performed during a teacher's observational cycle.

At AAMHS, nontenured and tenured teachers rated as unsatisfactory are observed annually. Tenured teachers in good standing are observed every other year. During an observation year, teachers are observed two to three times. The department chairperson conducts one or two observations and a designated administrator completes at least one observation. Each observation is preceded by a preobservation and followed by a postobservation.

The preobservation includes a review of the expectations and an agreement on the date and specific time for the observation. In addition, the observer discusses with the teacher the lesson plan and completes a preobservation conference report. The observation period is at least 30 minutes. During the observation period, the department chairperson or designated administrator collects data concerning the teaching patterns discussed during the preobservation. Copies of the data collected during the observation are given to the teacher. After the observation, the observer completes a postobservation conference form that consists of lesson summary, pattern identification, reflection and analysis, pattern assessment, and recommendations. During the process, patterns are

compared to desired instructional outcomes and discussed openly with the teacher. In addition, recommendations are made to improve instruction and student learning.

The number of observations does not differ much from what is done at AAMHS and at the state level. As part of the mandated observation system, the state of Illinois requires that nontenured teachers be observed at least three times a year and tenured teachers be formally observed from one to three times every other year (Performance Evaluation Reform Act, 2010). By the fall of 2016, the number of observations required by state law for tenured teachers in good standings is at least twice during the two-year evaluation cycle. One of the observations must be formal. The number of observations required for tenured teachers in poor standings and nontenured teachers must be observed at least three times during the year of the rating; at least two of the observations need to be formal.

Due to the changes proposed by the state, AAMHS will implement a revised observational system similar to the three-step system currently used: preobservation, observation, and postobservation; however, the revised system will include one or two walk-throughs for tenured teachers and a minimum of two, walk-through observations for nontenured teachers. Walk-throughs, which will be unannounced, will be at least 15 minutes in duration. During this time, the observer will record objective data. After each walk-through, the observer will complete the walk-through form and give a copy to the teacher. After which, the teacher or the observer may also choose to schedule a follow-up meeting to review the observational data collected.

Walk-throughs are designed to be short and unannounced. Feedback will be collected and shared with the teachers. Observations are designed to be announced and

include a preobservation, an observation, and a face-to-face postobservation. The observation process could take anywhere from 1 hour and 15 minutes to 2 hours and 30 minutes. Walk-throughs and full observations should be based on objective and non-bias feedback.

The focus of my doctoral work over the past year and a half has been informal observations and how it could be used to support classroom instruction. My observational ideology was motivated by the works of Marshall (2013), Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser (2012), and Danielson (2007). I have learned through my study that observers can obtain good data from short observations—especially when the observations are focused and systematic. Marshall's rationale for shorter classroom observations is that after 5-10 minutes of an observation, the number of new observational insights level off and decline for the remainder of the class. He added that one way to support teachers' professional growth is to engage teachers in examining their own practices through informal classroom observations and forming partnerships between teachers and instructional leaders.

Marshall described a good classroom observation system as one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching is, a focus on students' learning, and teachers as active participants of the process. He believes that frequent miniobservations should be used to provide feedback to affirm good teaching and be used to recommend professional growth opportunities. Wagner et al. (2006) expressed that teachers and instructional leaders need to identify and discuss elements of good teaching practices and classroom observation criterion prior to beginning short and informal observations that he termed walk-throughs. Wagner (2008) stated that teachers needed to receive feedback to improve

instruction and leaders should document visits and be systematic. Concurring with Marshall and Wagner et al. (2006), Paul Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) specified that, "observations and feedback are fully effective when leaders systemically track which teachers have been observed, what feedback was given, and whether that feedback has improved practices" (p. 62).

During my study, I worked with five teachers and observed their classroom instruction at least once every other week. Four of the five teachers were tenured—two science, one English, one social science, and one mathematics. At the beginning of the study, I met with each teacher individually to discuss the expectations and structure of the informal observations: unannounced, short, and frequent; focused on questioning, students' engagement, and formative assessments; and face-to-face feedback sessions. I observed, collected, and shared data with each teacher at least once every other week.

I surveyed participating teachers and instructional leaders regarding AAMHS's current observational process. A four-point Likert scale system (using a predetermined range of questions) was used on the 20-question survey given to the teachers and instructional leaders. I tabulated and summarized the results in frequencies. The questions were mainly based on and built for measurement uses. The four-point scale was used to eliminate or avoid the neutral position and required respondents to take a positive or negative view. As Appendices A and B show in the Program Evaluation document, there were eight questions relative to feedback, three questions regarding frequency, and nine questions concerning the functionality of the classroom observations.

Five teachers and six instructional leaders were interviewed for 20-30 minutes at the middle and end of the process to gain their input about the overall process, obstacles,

and recommendations for improvements. The interviews were structured where I asked a series of questions of individuals to establish an understanding of their ideas relative to the topic of informal observations. The interviews were recorded and administered in an environment that was quiet. I also took notes during the interviews; full transcriptions of the interview recordings were transcribed at the end of the interviews.

Coding of interview transcripts and data analysis revealed that teachers and instructional leaders at AAMHS agreed that more frequent classroom observations were necessary to increase the rapport between teachers and leaders, provide teachers with feedback and sound recommendations for improving students' learning, and to give leaders a better understanding of what actually goes on in the classroom and the school. These individuals also agreed that there could be an improved correlation between classroom observations and suggestions for professional development opportunities. In addition, teachers and instructional leaders agreed that all three parts of the current system are necessary but all three parts do not have to be used all the time nor do they need to be as long each time.

Teachers and leaders agreed that there existed a need for more follow-up visits to observe whether recommendations were successfully implemented, and that teachers should visit each other's classes. Teachers believed it was important to have an extra set of eyes in the classroom because they cannot see everything going on all the time. They also agreed that in the current system, the logistics of implementing more observations may be difficult with leaders; for example, current workloads and addressing changes in responsibilities and obligations that would need to be reassigned, modified, or eliminated. Further, they agreed that unannounced observations could be highly effective and good

assessments of teachers' performances. For additional information, please reference my change plan titled, *Using Frequent, Unannounced, Focused, and Short Classroom Observations to Support Classroom Instruction.*

Thus, the problem is that teachers are being observed too infrequently to be given timely and helpful feedback to support their classroom instruction and consequently improve student learning. The authors above stressed an observation system should consist of shorter, focused, more frequent, and unannounced classroom observations. In the study conducted at AAMHS, participating teachers and leaders supported the need for more frequent observations and feedback sessions.

Critical Issues

Performances of students who are Black, White, and Hispanic; have special needs; are students from families with low income, regular education students, and students who are not from families with low income on the state of Illinois achievement exams are discussed in this section. Further, the achievement gap amongst different subgroups will be shown to be alarming. In addition, the ACT scores amongst aforementioned subgroups and the trending demographic outlook will be discussed. Overall, due to the increase in the members of subgroups who are poorly achieving, the need for teacher and instructional support will be necessary.

Tables 1 and 2 show that from 2010 to 2014, the percentage of students who met or exceeded the state achievement exam standards in reading at AAMHS had fallen from 64% to 51%. Over that 5-year span, the average achievement gap between Black and White students had been 28% in reading and 34% in mathematics.

Table 1

State Reading Achievement Exam by Race

% = Percentage of Students Who Met or Exceeded State Standard N = Number of Students Tested					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N
All Students	65.5% 536	57.6% 686	52.7% 786	53.6% 676	57.7% 669
White	78.7% 198	77.0% 200	77.6% 212	73.4% 165	79.5% 166
Black	55.3% 291	47.3% 416	40.4% 482	45.5% 450	48.7% 421
Hispanic	53.0% 17	57.1% 35	50.0% 40	46.7% 30	62.0% 50

Table 2

State Mathematics Achievement Exam by Race

% = Percentage of Students Who Met or Exceeded State Standard N = Number of Students Tested					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N
All Students	61.8% 536	53.6% 685	51.9% 786	48.2% 676	48.8% 670
White	82.9% 198	71.0% 200	78.5% 212	74.5% 165	72.6% 166
Black	46.8% 291	43.8% 416	39.1% 482	37.5% 450	40.1% 422
Hispanic	47.1% 17	62.8% 35	50.0% 40	50.0% 30	48.0% 50

Tables 3 and 4 show the average achievement gaps in reading and mathematics for students with and without disabilities: 40% and 43% points respectively. In addition,

a 23% percent gap existed between students from families with low-income and students who were not from families with low-income in reading and a 25% gap in mathematics.

Table 3

State Reading Achievement Exam Results by Learning Attributes and Social Economic Status

% = Percentage of Students Who Met or Exceeded State Standard N = Number of Students Tested					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N
Non-IEP	69.2% 493	61.7% 611	56.6% 709	57.2% 610	61.6% 594
IEP	23.3% 43	24.0% 75	18.5% 77	19.7% 66	26.7% 75
Non-Low Income	70.6% 449	62.9% 555	57.6% 624	57.4% 519	63.3% 498
Low Income	39.1% 87	35.2% 131	33.8% 162	40.7% 157	41.6% 171

Table 4

State Mathematics Achievement Exam Results by Learning Attributes and Social Economic Status

% = Percentage of Students Who Met or Exceeded State Standard N = Number of Students Tested					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N
Non-IEP	65.7% 493	59.2% 610	56.2% 709	51.6% 610	53.2% 594
IEP	16.3% 43	8.0% 75	13.8% 77	16.7% 66	14.4% 75
Non-Low Income	66.5% 449	58.6% 555	57.2% 627	53.7% 519	54.0% 498
Low Income	36.8% 87	32.3% 130	31.2% 162	29.9% 157	33.7% 498

Table 5 shows that AAMHS's 5-year ACT average for all students was a 21.2. In that time frame, Black students scored an average of 19.6, Hispanic students an average of 20.7, and White students scored an average of 24.5 scale points. Thus, White students outscored Black students by almost five scale score points and outscored Hispanic students by almost four scale score points. The tables show that AAMHS's Black students, students who are disabled, and students from families with low income perform well-below White students.

Table 5

Five-Year ACT Trend

N = Number of Students Tested					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	Mean Score N	Mean Score N	Mean Score N	Mean Score N	Mean Score N
All Students	20.7 658	21.5 618	21.3 656	21.1 740	20.7 709
White	23.9 195	24.9 178	24.9 143	24.8 188	23.8 148
Black	19.2 327	19.7 297	20.1 344	19.6 371	19.6 410
Hispanic	21.3 31	19.3 32	21.7 43	20.9 54	20.5 46

Table 6 shows an increase in the percentage of Black students, students from families with low income, and students with special needs over the past 5 years. The achievement gap amongst the subgroups and the underachievement of Black students, students who are disabled, and students from families with low income is too high. If teachers are considered to be one of the most influential contributors to students'

academic success, then it is imperative that teachers are supported and assisted with their professional growth. At AAMHS, the current classroom observation system includes observing individual teacher's teaching at a fraction of a percentage of the time teachers are instructing over the period of an academic year. Although the proposed system includes at least two walk-throughs per teacher, observers are still minimally observing classroom instruction.

Table 6

Student Demographics

% = Percentage of each Subgroup N = Number of Students in the Subgroup					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
	% N	% N	% N	% N	% N
White	30.6% 871	28.0% 805	27.3% 776	25.2% 704	22.6% 635
Black	58.7% 1670	60.2% 1730	61.6% 1751	63.4% 1772	66.5% 1869
Hispanic	4.7% 134	5.5% 158	5.3% 151	5.8% 162	5.9% 166
Low Income	19.1% 543	20.5% 589	21.5% 611	23.6% 660	24.9% 700
IEP	11.2% 319	13.0% 374	12.8% 364	13.3% 372	13.8% 388

If the classroom teacher is highly influential in students' academic achievement, then instructional leaders need to make an effort to observe their instruction on a more frequent basis. There needs to be ongoing objective and helpful feedback to support teachers' instructional efforts and to improve students' learning. Over time, teachers and instructional leaders learn to trust one another by developing great rapport through more frequent observations. Downey et al. (2004) reasoned that teachers must be mindful of

the observational process and that follow-up should be a time for active reflection. They add that leaders can identify common areas of decisions that might prove valuable for group staff development; and growth in the classrooms through teachers' actions will produce improved changes in students' achievement.

Recommended Policy

I propose that AAMHS create a policy that incorporates an observation of classroom instruction system that includes more frequent and unannounced classroom observations. Marshall (2013) and Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) showed that with more frequent observations, rapport between participants improve and student achievement increases. The policy calls for instructional leaders to be assigned a group of 12 to 15 teachers to support throughout the year. Leaders' main charge would be to observe classroom instruction for no more than 15 minutes and at least every other week, followed by collaborative and reflective feedback sessions.

Currently, AAMHS has 20 leaders responsible for classroom observations and an annual average of about 180 teachers; thus, the teacher-to-observer ratio at AAMHS would be about 9:1. Each instructional leader would be assigned nine teachers to observe and support—a ratio better than described as ideal by Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser and Marshall.

The expected positive effects of informal observations (frequent, short, and unannounced) would include improved and supportive relationships between instructional leaders and teachers. This relationship would be enhanced through feedback sessions that are reflective, nonevaluative, focused, and an authentic account of students' learning in classrooms. In addition, instructional leaders can identify common areas of

decisions that could be valuable for staff development and focus on factors that impact higher student achievement.

An unintended consequence of this new policy may include instructional leaders and teachers noncommitment to the system. They may find the process too time consuming and invasive due to the frequency of meetings for feedback sessions for reflections. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser concurred with Marshall and Wagner (2008) when they stated that "observations and feedback are fully effective when leaders systemically track which teachers have been observed, what feedback was given, and whether that feedback has improved practices" (p. 62). Therefore, at the beginning of each school year, I will communicate my informal observations plans with selected teachers—those who I have established trusting relationships. I will share my plan to observe their class at least once a week with a follow-up reflective discussions regarding what I observed. To be more systematic and intentional, I plan to review teachers' schedules and build a spreadsheet listing teachers I plan to observe, when I observed them, what I observed, and what reflective conversations took place.

Encouraging teachers with whom I developed strong relationships and with who find the frequent and informal observations beneficial represents a way of addressing the concerns of skeptic teachers. Also, like Marshall, I eventually plan to visit skeptic teachers' classrooms so that they may see the benefits of reflection and growth through the frequent and informal observation system. Above Average Means High School needs to create systems that focus on the continuous improvement of teaching, learning, and instructional leadership (Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, Lemons, Garnier, Helsing, Howell &

Rasmussen, 2006), and frequent, focused, and unannounced informal observations can be the catalyst to continuous improvement.

Another unintentional consequence may be teachers believing the frequent observations to be evaluative. My goal involves encouraging teachers to be reflective thinkers. Costa and Garmston (2002) pointed out that nonevaluative behaviors are associated with coaching and collaborating and compared behaviors against standards and results against goals. Costa and Garmston added that it is not about judging the worth or motivation of the individual. Thus, when supporting classroom instruction, only nonevaluative behaviors—giving data and asking questions—will be used.

Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston Jr. (2004) described reflective thinkers as people who personally take responsibility for their own growth through continuous analysis of their practice. These authors stressed that it is important not to make judgments about teacher practices, but to engage teachers in why they chose to select one instructional practice over another. It is really important that observers remain professional and neutral. Further, teachers need to reflect on the choices they are making, and for them to become self-affirmed. Moreover, reflective questions include choice, criteria for decisions, and impact on students learning. Thus, the goal of the reflective feedback session should be to establish a growth-oriented environment where a community of learners are in collegial dialogue (Downey et al., 2004).

In compliance with state law, nontenured and below average teachers should be formally observed two to three times a year until they meet proficient and tenured status. Tenured teachers in good standings should be formally observed two to three times every other year. However, all teachers, whether on or off cycle, should be assigned to an

instructional leader and be frequently and informally observed at least every other week of every year of their career.

SECTION TWO: NEEDS ANALYSIS

The purpose of this section is to bring a comprehensive understanding to the proposed policy by examining five key areas for analysis: educational, economic, social, political, and moral and ethical analysis. To infuse more frequent, unannounced, short, and focused observations during the school year to support teachers and to grow student achievement is the policy I am proposing at the district and school building levels.

Educational Analysis

Currently at the state level, the number of required classroom observations for nontenured teachers is three times a year. For tenured teachers, it is one to three times every other year. At AAMHS, the number of required classroom observations is consistent with the state requirement. Officials added one to two required classroom walk-throughs throughout the year. However, Downey et al. (2004) reported that frequent and short classroom observations should be implemented so instructional leaders can become familiar with teaching patterns and decisions made by teachers and can have a more accurate understanding of the teaching practices of their building or district.

The nature of the frequency of classroom observations at AAMHS is due to the minimal number of observations required to fulfill instructional leaders' assigned duty by an annual deadline. For the past 2 years, the principal encouraged all instructional leaders to informally visit a significant number of teachers to affirm good teaching practices. However, due to time constraints or poor time management, many instructional leaders performed the minimal number of classroom observations. Therefore, focused and frequent classroom observations involve a systematic process for developing instructional practices (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser 2012; Marshall, 2013; Marzano et al., 2011).

Instructional leaders needed to constantly monitor teachers' progresses relative to their professional growth and use feedback to make adjustments to growth plans.

In addition, classroom observations at AAMHS tended to be evaluative in nature. Wagner (2006) declared that informal observations should not be evaluative, but a sampling of what takes place in the classroom. He stated that the data collected should be an accurate way of assessing student learning through focused classroom observations. Marzano et al. (2011) indicated that good classroom observational practices and outcomes are more likely to occur when it is supported in a positive environment. Subsequently, teachers need specific and constructive feedback to improve their expertise, and the feedback needs to be given in a nonthreatening way to allow for openness and two-way communication (Marshall, 2013; Marzano et al., 2011).

Moreover, it appears that trust is a concern between teachers and instructional leaders. For example, 2 years ago, at least seven teachers filed grievances with the superintendent regarding their summative rating—an action that had never taken place during my tenure at AAMHS. However, frequent and focused informal observations may be used to improve relationships between teachers and instructional leaders; in addition, instructional leaders may develop greater rapport with the student body (Marshall, 2013).

To further enhance relationships between the teachers and leaders, Downey et al. (2004) reasoned that teachers must be mindful of the observational process and that follow-up should be a time for active reflection. They added that instructional leaders can identify common areas of instructional behaviors that could be valuable for group staff development. More importantly, Downey et al. stated that the observational focus should

be primarily on factors affecting higher student achievement and focused on teacher development.

I personally found, through engaging in frequent, unannounced, and focused observations, that the relationship that I had with teachers went from good to great. Teachers were more comfortable with observations of their classes and they wanted more information to go grow professionally. I noticed that I could recognize more students by name or face from completing frequent informal observations. Also, more students address me by name. I believe both these incidents stem from frequent observations.

Authors of, *Everyone at the Table,* strongly encourage the consideration of the input of those most deeply affected by teacher evaluation (Behrstock-Sherratt, Rizzolo, Laine, & Frideman, 2013). Thus, teachers and leaders need to discuss good teaching practices and settle on classroom observational foci. Hence, there needs to be time set aside to meet. More importantly, teachers and instructional leaders need to be trained regarding focused observations. Teachers need training relative to expectations of the observations, the observations, the feedback sessions, and time commitment. Likewise, instructional leaders need training to be systematic and intentional relative to classroom observations, the expectations of the observations, and feedback sessions.

Economic Analysis

At AAMHS, it was reported in 2014 that the average teacher salary was $82,000. The average number of years of teacher experience was 13, and the average percentage of teachers with master degrees was 78%. In addition, it was reported that in 2014, the number of FTE staff was 182. Thus, teacher salary and benefits will be costly for at least the next 15 years. The state is providing AAMHS less state aide each year and local tax

revenue is low due to a low tax rate and foreclosed homes with little to no tax revenue. I do not believe that teacher positions will be lost due to attrition, but support staff positions have and will continue to be lost to attrition. Due to possible future financial short falls and very little money to create new positions, AAMHS officials need to restructure instructional leaders' responsibilities to ensure that frequent and focused observations are occurring.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) recommend a 15:1 teacher-to-observer ratio for effective and frequent informal observations. He added that when the ratio is 30:1, teacher-to-observer, then the informal observations could occur every other week. Marshall (2013) wrote that an observer should try to observe four to five teachers a day, record who and what was observed, and attempt to do 10 informal observations in a year per teacher. In addition, Marshall stated the frequent observational system should provide the observer with a sampling that accurately represents teachers' performances.

At AAMHS, there are 20 leaders responsible for classroom observations: 11 department chairs, two assistant principals, one principal, one superintendent, one director of curriculum and instruction, one director of athletics, one human resource director, one director of finance, and one director of special education. For the past 2 years, FTEs have been around 180; thus, the teacher-to-observer ratio at AAMHS would be about 9:1.

According to Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012), the teacher-to-observer ratio described for AAMHS would be more than ideal to conduct focused and systemic informal observations on a weekly basis. However, instructional leaders would need to evaluate and reallocate their time to do more informal observations with reflective

follow-up sessions. Currently, instructional leaders attend scheduled meetings multiple times a week and most meetings consist of managerial items. Therefore, one way to make time to systemically do frequent informal observations involves reducing the number of weekly meetings and allocating the time for more classroom observations. At least two of the meetings that I attend (many of the instructional leaders attend the same meetings) span 10-30 minutes although scheduled for 60-90 minutes. Oftentimes, the reason for the shorter meetings can be attributed to discussions surrounding daily routine information and practices. Hence, at least two meetings could occur once a month as opposed to weekly.

Time management would be an area of training for instructional leaders and teachers to ensure informal observations are performed with fidelity. Instructional leaders need to be intentional about scheduling informal observations to see teachers many times a year at different times throughout the school day. Instructional leaders would be encouraged to complete office paperwork before or after school, delegate others to handle nonemergent situations, and schedule a time in the day to meet with parents and other community members. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser stated that instructional leaders need to solidify their weekly schedule and manage their monthly and weekly tasks. Teachers need to be trained relative to what the instructional leader would be looking for and how the instructional leader would collect and share data. In addition, teachers need to commit to being available for observational feedback sessions.

Social Analysis

High-stakes testing leads to sorting and ranking high schools across the country, within states and areas of states. Ranking is often based on one test that is given once a

year—in the state of Illinois, it is the Prairie State Achievement Exam and it included the ACT. The main focus of the test was reading and mathematics, and we pooled a lot of resources over the year to prep students for reading, mathematics, and the ACT.

Wagner (2008) conveyed a strong need for students to be able to think systemically, adapt to different situations, and make sense of important information. He added that for students to be successful adults, they must develop strong communication skills and possess the ability to apply scientific methods to problem-solving. Similarly, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 was created to ensure the all children had a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and to reach proficiency on challenging academic standards through quality of instruction (United States Department of Education, 2004). Danielson (2007) purported that students need skills for evaluating arguments, analyzing information, and drawing conclusions. More importantly, she explained that high levels of learning by students require high levels instruction Danielson (2007).

Currently, AAMHS is at the beginning stage of focusing on student needs through common assessments, standard-based grading, and higher concentration on student growth and deficiencies. Teachers are strongly encouraged to engage every student in class, ask a variety of questions, be more mobile during lessons, provide rubrics, and set high and achievable expectations. Teachers are asked to look at students' work on a consistent basis for evidence of student achievement. Linda Darling-Hammond (2013) said the goal of observations is to support quality instruction for all students—instruction that is well informed by what students are learning, and how teaching can support their progress. In addition, Marshall (2013) discussed that leaders should look for students'

behaviors, skills, and concepts to be learned and the level at which the students are learning. Equally, he expressed the importance of obtaining an accurate understanding of the value of instruction in all classrooms and supporting the development of teachers through frequent observations.

Appropriately, classroom instruction needs to be observed on a continuous basis to constantly grow students academically. Identified areas for professional growth must be communicated in a nonevaluative and professional manner to ensure that teachers are operating at optimum levels. As teachers are functioning at high levels with ongoing and outstanding supports, students academically achieve at high levels. Thus, students are more apt to be prepared to think critically, make sense of important information, and communicate effectively; resultantly, creating a more productive and literate citizen.

Currently, teachers at AAMHS are voluntarily trained during the summer in the areas of common assessments, appropriate use of technology to support learning, and effective classroom management. Instructional leaders are trained in the area of formal observations and observational tools. Teachers and instructional leaders need to be trained in the area of relevant growth regarding student achievement and shift from the mindset of I taught it to students learned it. These trainings could be added to the list that occurs over the summer, as well as offered during professional development days, which occur four times a year.

Political Analysis

Currently at AAMHS, nontenured teachers are expected to be observed five times over the course of the year: three observations that include a preobservation, observation, and postobservation, and two walk-throughs. Tenured teachers are expected to be

observed from one to three times a year. The number of expected classroom observations for AAMHS teachers is consistent with the number of classroom observations required for state compliance. Due to other obligations, instructional leaders tend to conduct the minimal number of classroom observations required. I proposed that instructional leaders conduct frequent, focused, and unannounced classroom observations to support learning, support professional growth, identify and provide professional development opportunities, and develop relational trust.

The current observational process consists of a preobservation, observation, and postobservations. At the preobservation, the teacher and the instructional leader meet to discuss the logistics of the observation, such as date and time, learning objectives, assessment tools, and duration of the observation. Next is the classroom observation, which should be at least 30 minutes. The observer collects data relative to the parameters discussed and set during the preobservation. Following the classroom observation, the teacher and the observer meet for a postobservation to share and discuss teaching practices and recommendations.

Due to the changes proposed by the state, AAMHS will implement a revised observational system similar to the one currently in place, but will include one to two walk-throughs for tenured teachers and two minimum walk-through observations for nontenured teachers. Walk-throughs, which will be unannounced, will be at least 15 minutes in duration. During this time, the observer will record objective data. After each walk-through, the observer will complete the walk-through form and provide a copy to the teacher. After, the teacher or the observer may choose to schedule a follow-up meeting to review the observational data collected. However, even with the addition of

walk-throughs, the number of times a teacher will be observed will be less than a fraction of a percentage of the number of opportunities classroom instruction occurs for each teacher.

Thus, the focus of my doctoral work over the past year and a half has been informal observations and how they could be used to support classroom instruction. My observational design was motivated by the work of Marshall (2013), Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012), and Danielson (1996, 2007). Through my study, I have learned that observers can obtain good data from short observations—especially when the observations are focused and systemic. Marshall's (2013) defense for shorter classroom observations is that after 5-10 minutes of an observation, the number of new observational insights level off and decline for the remainder of the class.

Marshall (2013) described a good classroom observation system as one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching is, focuses on students' learning, and has a process in which teachers actively participant. He believes that frequent, miniobservations should be used to provide feedback to affirm good teaching and/or to recommend professional growth opportunities. Wagner (2008) also expressed that teachers and instructional leaders need to identify and discuss elements of good teaching practices and classroom observation criterion prior to beginning short and informal observations (or learning walks). Both Marshall and Wagner (2008) declared that teachers need specific and constructive feedback to improve their expertise and that the feedback needs to be given in a nonthreatening way to allow for open and honest communication.

If this new policy comes to fruition, there will be many expected changes, such as the following:

- Instructional leaders will be assigned a manageable group of teachers to support throughout the school year.
- Instructional leaders will be in more classrooms several times throughout the school year.
- Teacher to teacher, teacher to instructional leader, and instructional leader to instructional leader will engage in ongoing conversations about good teaching practices.
- Teachers' willingness and trust in the system to share their professional learning needs with instructional leaders.
- Teachers and instructional leaders will have an understanding that better instructional practices will be observed along with some bad classroom observation moments.

More importantly, all observation endeavors would be a time for reflection and growth.

Moral and Ethical Analysis

All students at AAMHS are not achieving academic success to ensure college or career readiness prior to graduating. More and more students are entering school unprepared for high school studies and/or with social emotional needs that interfere with learning. Since 2010, the percentage of students at AAMHS who meet or exceeded the state achievement standards via the state exam has fallen from 64% to 51%. Over the past 5 years, the average achievement gap between Black and White students has been 21% in reading and 34% percent in mathematics. Over the same span of time, the average

achievement gaps in reading and mathematics for students with disabilities and nondisabled students have been 4% and 43% respectively. A 23% gap existed between students from families with low income and students who were not from families with low income in reading, and a 25% gap in mathematics.

Average Above Means High School's 5-year (2010–2014) ACT average for all students was a 21.2. In that time frame, Black students scored an average of 19.6 scale points and White students scored 24.5 scale points. Thus, White students outscored Black students by almost five scale score points. Overall, students who are Black, have a disability, and are from a family with low-income perform well-below White students in our district (see Tables 1–6, which were presented in Section One: Vision Statement).

Through my study, I have learned and come to believe that there is a need for a classroom observation system as described by Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) and Marshall to support classroom instruction. Each encourages instructional leaders to observe classroom instruction and provided face-to-face feedback on a regular basis. Furthermore, these authors stressed that observations needed to be systemically tracked to include when a teacher was observed and the kind of feedback given. Furthermore, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser indicated that the primary reason for the observations should be to coach teachers to improve students' learning—and focused on one or two areas at a time to maximize implementation and improvement.

It is really important that instructional leaders have time to frequently observe teachers and to provide actionable and measurable feedback in face-to-face meetings. I propose to meet less often as leadership teams to gain more time to run a system that consists of more classroom observations and feedback meetings. Teachers and

instructional leaders agreed that more frequent classroom observations were necessary to increase rapport between teachers and leaders, to provide teachers with feedback and sound recommendations for improving student learning, and to give leaders a better understanding of what is actually going on in the classroom and the school. Furthermore, teachers and instructional leaders agreed that there could be an improved correlation between classroom observations and professional development opportunities. Moreover, they agreed that all three parts of the current system are necessary, but all three parts did not have to be used all of the time nor did all three parts need to be as long each time. However, all three parts need to be used more frequently.

Above Average Means High School needs to conduct more frequent, short, unannounced, and focused classroom observations to support teachers' teaching and students' learning. When teachers are supported and given prescriptive support, then teaching and learning improves. All students at AAMHS need teachers who are equipped to teach them to their fullest potential, which may be accomplished through regular feedback and support. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser's study showed that when a systematic and frequent classroom observation system is implemented, then all students achieve at high levels and the achievement gap narrows between various subgroups.

This policy puts instructional leaders into classrooms more often to collect objective data and provide ongoing feedback in reflective and nonjudgmental ways. Through this process, good teaching will be affirmed and/or teachers will develop alternatives to grow professionally. Frequent and focused observations will provide leaders with insights relative to students' needs—academically, emotionally, and

behaviorally. In addition, it would increase the number of opportunities for leaders and teachers to engage in frequent dialogue about teaching and learning.

SECTION THREE: ADVOCATED POLICY STATEMENT

My policy advocacy is designed for instructional leaders to do more informal observations: frequent, unannounced, short, and focused observations to support classroom instruction and student achievement. One goal achieved by increasing the number of informal observations involves supporting teachers' professional growth through teachers' own reflections regarding their classroom instruction. Effective teachers will receive authentic praise and affirmation while ineffective teachers will receive the assistance needed to improve. A second goal achieved by increasing the number of informal observations involves establishing and maintaining excellent rapport and trust between instructional leaders and teachers.

Ongoing professional development to meet the needs of AAMHS's diverse staff would be evidence that the proposed policy is implemented with fidelity. Also, the trust, support, and rapport between the teachers and instructional leaders would be apparent. In addition, any instructional leader would be able to speak to what is going on in their building regarding classroom instruction and student learning.

Instructional leaders who are nonchalant about implementing the policy with fidelity are a potential challenge. They may feel the need to put out fires or to spend their time doing other duties they perceive as more important than committing to supporting classroom instruction on a consistent basis. Teachers may remain apprehensive to someone visiting their class on a frequent basis and therefore may not buy-in to the system or they may believe that they are doing an excellent job with little need for improvement. In addition, teachers and instructional leaders may view the system as evaluative rather than supportive.

However, if the policy is implemented with fidelity, then instructional leaders and teachers would know that they are working together to support teaching. Teachers and instructional leaders would have frequent dialogue relative to classroom observations, teaching practices, and professional growth. Conversations would be supportive and nonjudgmental in nature; reflective information would be based on shared and effective teaching practices, not on teachers' worth or merit.

Downey et al. (2004) has shown that teachers who become more reflective through the implementation of this policy will be more determined to incorporate more effective classroom instructional strategies into the classroom. In addition, when observations are more about coaching through reflective dialogue, people are much more likely to embrace the conclusions they have reached on their own (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012). Judgment is associated with coaching and collaborating through comparing behaviors against standards and results against goals; it is not about judging the worth of the individual (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Moreover, the coach's role should only use coaching behaviors consisting of gathering data, asking questions, and encouraging self-assessments. Ultimately, the goal will be for the teacher to develop a collegial relationship with the instructional leader.

Stakeholders Related to the Policy

The stakeholders who would benefit from the implementation of this policy would be instructional leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community members at large. Instructional leaders would benefit from this policy through the authentic knowledge they gain relative to classroom instruction and behavior. Also, instructional leaders would be on the same page with teachers through shared knowledge of what good

teaching looks like. Teachers would benefit from this policy through frequent reflection and feedback regarding classroom instructions. In addition, teachers who need added support may receive more support designed to develop their individual skill sets. Parents and students will benefit from the policy through effective instruction and cohesive and coherent curriculum. Students who learn to think critically, solve problems, write and speak effectively, and use available information appropriately will be better prepared for postsecondary opportunities and better equipped to support their communities.

This policy is necessary to support classroom instruction, identify instructional needs, and support student academic achievement. The overarching benefits are increased rapport between teachers and instructional leaders, a focus on student learning, more focused and beneficial professional learning opportunities for teachers and instructional leaders, and attention to instructional needs by the instructional leaders. Drago-Severson (2009) conveyed that trusting relationships lead to learning for all. Auerbach (2012) added that when teachers are supported and continue growing professionally, then teachers are better able to serve all students equitably. She added that school systems need to ensure that students have access to high-quality and ambitious curriculum and all teachers must maintain high expectations for all students to prepare students to perform well.

Rationale for the Validity of the Policy

Teacher-thinking influences how a teacher develops curriculum, formulates questions to expand the curriculum, selects students to participate in activities, and identifies which strategies to employ (Landsman & Lewis, 2010). Moreover, Landsman and Lewis add that equity means teachers prepare a set of educational experiences

tailored to meet the particular needs of their students. Thus, school systems need to assist teachers in thinking about teaching and help them develop the necessary skills to support all students.

Wagner (2006) stated that business leaders want potential workers to be able to reason, analyze, hypothesize, assess, and apply relevant information to new problems, as well as write and speak clearly. In addition, Childress, Doyle, and Thomas (2009) communicated that investments in teacher knowledge and skill are imperative to the success for all students. Hence, the study I conducted during my change plan was about supporting teachers through more informal classroom observations and reflective feedback sessions. Therefore, through the many observational opportunities, teachers can continuously receive the support needed to provide the tools needed for students' success.

SECTION FOUR: POLICY ARGUMENT

Wagner (2006) stated that there needs to be a focus on how to support the teaching skills required to help all students meet more rigorous standards and thereby increase student achievement for all students. Additionally, Glickman (2002) purported that in academically successful schools, staff work together to improve instruction for all. Further, Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) added that the most discouraging component of failing schools is that "everyone on the staff is doing his or her own thing"; thus, instructional leaders need to guide teachers to strategies that will significantly improve instruction and students' learning (p. 15).

This policy advocacy promotes support for classroom instruction, prescribed professional development opportunities, collegial relationships between teachers and instructional leaders, as well as support for student achievement. To further support the proposed policy, Danielson (2007) said that teachers need to continue finding ways to develop and improve their skills; more importantly, teachers need to be able to determine which concepts and skills are essential for students to learn. In like manner, Downey et al. (2004) believed that through frequent and short observations, leaders can become familiar with teaching patterns and decisions made by teachers and have a more accurate understanding of the teaching practices of their building or district.

Supportive Arguments

A supportive argument for local support regarding frequent and unannounced classroom observations was evident in the interview results reported in this research's change leadership plan. The change leadership plan had six, open-ended questions that were given to instructional leaders and teachers regarding classroom observations.

Overall, the teachers and instructional leaders in the change leadership study agreed that more frequent classroom observations were necessary to increase the rapport between teachers and leaders, provide teachers with feedback and sound recommendations for improving students' learning, and give leaders a better understanding of what actually goes on in the classroom and school. The teachers and leaders also agreed that there could be an improved correlation between classroom observations and suggestions for professional development opportunities.

Teachers and instructional leaders agreed that there exists a need for more follow-up visits to observe whether recommendations were successfully implemented, and that teachers should visit one another's classrooms. Teachers and instructional leaders also thought that unannounced observations could be highly effective and good assessments of teachers' performances.

Other supportive arguments for this policy advocacy were supported through research. Marshall stated that school leaders must know what is going on in the classroom at all times; and that leaders need to be able to discuss more than a single lesson plan more than two to three times a year or one to two lessons every other year. Marshall also believed that frequent observations could be used to provide feedback, affirm good teaching, and recommend professional growth opportunities. He stated that teachers needed specific and constructive feedback to improve their expertise and that this feedback needed to be given in a nonthreatening way that allowed for openness and two-way communication.

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) stated that the school leader's main role should be to maximize student learning through observations and meetings with teachers

on a regular basis. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser added that teachers who participate in the process of thinking about their teaching are more likely to internalize the feedback and improve their performance.

Marzano (2011) wrote that what occurs in the classroom has the most direct causal link to student achievement and that student achievement increases with highly-skilled teachers. In addition, Marzano stated that instructional leaders need to focus on the interactions of the teacher and student related to student learning. Moreover, Marzano documented that instructional leaders needed to identify specific areas of strengths and weaknesses, monitor teachers' progresses relative to the professional growth, and use feedback to make adjustments to growth plans to enhance students' growth.

Downey et al. (2004) believed that through frequent and short observations, leaders can become familiar with teaching patterns and decisions made by teachers, and leaders would have a more accurate understanding of the teaching practices of their building or district. Further, Downey et al. believed that frequent observations tend to lower teacher apprehension and make formal observations more effective, and leaders can better identify common areas of decisions that might prove valuable for group staff development through frequent classroom observations. Downey et al. also found that the frequent sampling of a teacher's actions gives greater validity to what is observed, and the advantage of facilitating teacher reflection can significantly impact student achievement.

Counterargument

Marzano **(**2011**)** stipulated that classroom observations are more effective if they are planned by the observer and the teacher. He stressed that instructional leaders and

teachers need the ability to ask questions about the prescribed lesson. According to the State Board of Education Non-Regulatory Guidance on the Performance Evaluation Reform Act and Senate Bill 7, formal observations must be preceded by a conference between a qualified evaluator and the teacher. The qualified evaluator and teacher must discuss the lesson plan or instructional planning and any areas on which the qualified evaluator should focus during the observation. Following either formal or an informal observation, the qualified evaluator must discuss with the teacher the evidence collected about the teacher's professional practice.

More importantly, tenured teachers who received an excellent or proficient performance evaluation rating in their last performance evaluation must be observed at least twice during the 2-year evaluation cycle, with at least one observation being formal. Tenured teachers who received a needs improvement or unsatisfactory performance evaluation rating on their last performance evaluation must be observed at least three times during the school year following such evaluation rating, with at least two of the observations being formal. Non-teachers must be observed at least three times, with at least two of the observations being formal.

Above Average Means High School's school leaders will incorporate at least the required number of classroom observations. Unless there are changes in leaders' responsibilities and obligations, the time to perform more classroom observations would be limited. Information extracted from the interviews conducted in this researches' change plan showed that teachers and leaders believed that the logistics of implementing more observations may be too difficult to implement with leaders' current workloads.

SECTION FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

My policy advocacy is for instructional leaders to do more informal observations—frequent, unannounced, short, and focused observations to support classroom instruction and student achievement. Increasing the number of informal observations supports teachers' professional growth through teachers' own reflection on their classroom instruction. Thus, effective teachers receive authentic praise and affirmation and ineffective teachers get the help they need to improve. It is also an excellent way for instructional leaders and teachers to build rapport and trust.

Above Average Means High School can implement an informal classroom observation system described by Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) and Marshall (2013). Instructional leaders will frequently visit classrooms and help teachers reflect on what was observed. The primary reason for the observations would be to support teachers to improve students' learning. At the beginning of the informal observation process, teachers and instructors discuss criterion for good classroom instruction. Marshall (2013) suggested that the five most important aspect of teaching should be observed; they are safety, objectives, teaching, engagement, and learning. Thus, everyone involved needs to know the purpose of the informal observations. Instructional leaders will be highly encouraged to lead face-to-face meetings by asking carefully prepared questions to support instruction.

It is truly important that instructional leaders have time to frequently observe teachers and provide actionable and measurable feedback in face-to-face meetings. I propose to garner more time to run a system of more classroom observations. Feedback meetings would meet less often as leadership teams. At AAMHS, a leadership team

meets every Monday. Although scheduled for an hour, on average, the meeting lasts for about thirty minutes. Topics discussed tend to be management issues, such as activity coverage, other school updates, and compliance issues. Another leadership team meets every Tuesday. As well, it is scheduled for an hour; however, on average, the meeting lasts for about twenty minutes. Mostly discussed are management issues, activity/athletic event coverage, upcoming and past events, and other nonacademic events not directly tied to improving student achievement. Still another leadership team meets every Wednesday. This meeting consists of mostly the department chairpersons and was intended to focus more on academic issues that directly impact students' achievement. However, it too tends to focus more on upcoming events or to recap past events.

Due to the issues discussed at leadership team meetings, they can easily be reduced to once a month. By doing so, more time could be used to observe classroom instruction and hold face-to-face feedback meetings with teachers. As stated in this study, quality instruction is the number one aspect of students' academic success. So leadership teams need to be available to support instructional endeavors. Currently, AAMHS has 20 leaders assigned to observe classroom instruction—one superintendent, one principal, two assistant principals, one director of curriculum and instruction, one director of human resources, one director of finance, 11 department chairpersons, one director of special education, and one director of athletics. In addition, AAMHS has about one hundred and forty teachers.

Thus, I propose, in lieu of leadership meetings, that we be assigned eight teachers to do short, frequent, and unannounced classroom observations at least every other week. If we do at least three classroom observations per teacher per course (15 observations per

teacher), then the process could be completed, on average, within four days a month for the observations and four days a month for the face-to-face feedback sessions. Specifically, each teacher could be observed twice in the months of September, October, November, February, March, April, and May and once in the months of December and January. I strongly believe that this is feasible for all instructional leaders and as highlighted in this study, pertinent to excellent student achievement.

This policy would be communicated to teachers and instructional leaders at the first meeting of the new school year. Currently, teachers and instructional leaders are being trained relative to the new evaluation process that includes explanations of walk-throughs and classroom observations using parts of Danielson (2007) model. Thus, good classroom instructional strategies could be elaborated on and discussed amongst teachers and leaders at the beginning of the year.

At the beginning of this semester, I plan to visit a different set of teachers from various departments. Henceforth, at the beginning of the second semester of this school year, I will solicit the support teachers from various departments to discuss the impact of the frequent observations and classroom instructions. Through these conversations, I am hopeful that trust, rapport, support, collegial relationship, self-affirmation, and professional growth highlight these discussions.

Parents and community members could be informed about the new policy at the back-to-school night conference and at the first parent meeting of the year. The back-to-school night conference is an open house event where parents and community members meet in the gymnasium and then move about their student's schedule. Parent meetings include families and community members, held to share with parents any upcoming and

past events. The leaders of the parent association also send email blasts to members of the association. Board members could be informed of the policy at the first-of-the-year board retreat, as well as the first board meeting of the year.

The main obstacle for this policy is that time be used strategically and systemically to support instruction and maximize student achievement. Instructional leaders need to reallocate time reserved for other duties throughout the school day and teachers need to be willing to give up a small portion of their school week to reflect on their teaching as well as students' learning. A potential obstacle may be the use of the system as an intimidating and evaluative tool. The main purpose of this policy entails supporting instruction. Therefore, instruction leaders need to learn that these are supportive and relationship building classroom observations.

Frequent, short, focused, and unannounced observations are about supporting instruction through reflective dialogue (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser). The goal of this policy is to support classroom instruction through more frequent and short informal observations and for teachers to develop a collegial relationship with instructional leaders. Costa and Garmston (2002) pointed out that judgment is associated with coaching and collaborating, but through comparing behaviors against standards and results against goals. They added that it is not about judging the worth or motivation of the individual. Thus, when supporting classroom instruction, only use nonjudgmental and nonevaluative behaviors encompassing giving data and asking questions.

SECTION SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT PLAN

Surveys and planning period meetings will be used to collect data relative to informal classroom observations. An all-staff email will be sent to all teachers and instructional leaders asking for their participation in interviews and surveys. After, a list of volunteers will be generated and a sample of teachers and instructional leaders will be selected to participate in interviews and surveys. Also, EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT (EPAS) data will be collected and analyzed to determine whether students are significantly achieving for all subgroups and to determine whether the achievement gap is narrowing.

For the survey, I will use a four-point Likert scale system (using a predetermined range of questions). I will tabulate and summarize the results in frequencies. Questions will be based on and built for measurement uses. I will use the four-point scale to eliminate or avoid the neutral position and force the respondent to take a positive or negative view. The survey will be short in length and solicit information relative to the implementation of the informal observation policy. More importantly, survey prompts will be designed to obtain information relative to feedback sessions, frequency of classroom observations, and professional development outcomes.

Plan period meetings will be conducted at the middle and end of the year where I invite teachers and instructional leaders to use their plan period to share any information about the informal observation system. My interest lies in the pros and the cons of the system as I look for strong patterns amongst the teachers and the instructional leaders. Next, I will compare teachers' responses to instructional leaders' responses. I plan to

share pertinent information with administration at leadership meetings and plan to share the results with all staff via email correspondence.

The assessment office can provide aggregate data relative to the EPAS system for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. Results could be broken into gender, race/ethnicity, social economic status, and students with special needs. Each test provides information regarding English, mathematics, science, and reading achievement. Mean scores and standard deviations will be generated and t-tests run to determine whether gains are significant.

If conducted carefully and professionally, a systemic classroom observations system could help identify teachers' needs, support good teachers' habits, give actionable and measurable feedback, and maintain rapport and trust amongst instructional leaders and teachers. More emphasis would be placed on good instructional practices and instructional growth. As well, teachers will receive the support they need so that they can support their students and students will receive the necessary tools they need in a good learning environment to grow to their maximum potential. The transition to students learned it mentality would be evidenced through the following observations:

- Students will accept teacher's insistence on high quality work.
- Teachers' purpose for the lesson is clear.
- Teachers' explanation of content connects with students' knowledge and experiences.
- Teachers' questions are of high quality and response time is appropriate for students' learning outcomes.
- Teachers successfully engage all students in the discussion.

- Students are fully aware of criteria and performance standards by which their work will be evaluated.
- Teachers' feedback is timely and actionable. (Danielson, 2007)

Instructional leaders would conduct many more informal observations from the start to the end of the school year. The informal observations will be focused and short and followed-up with face-to-face feedback sessions. Teachers and instructional leaders would be in agreement, relative to good teaching instructions and strategies. More classroom observational data would be collected to assist instructional leaders and teachers with creating prescriptive professional development.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

If teachers are considered to be one of the most influential contributors to students' academic success, then it is imperative that teachers are supported and assisted with their professional growth. Thus, my policy advocacy proposal calls for instructional leaders to do more frequent, short, and unannounced classroom observations. The primary focus of informal observations involves supporting classroom instruction through building greater rapport between teachers and administrators and more frequent and reflective discussions regarding classroom instruction and other behaviors.

The focus of my doctoral work over the past year and a half has been informal observations and how they could be used to support classroom instruction. My observational design was motivated by the work of Marshall (2013), Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012), and Danielson (2007). I have learned through my study that observers can obtain good data from short observations—especially when the observations are focused and systematic. Marshall (2013) stated that one way to support teachers' professional growth entails engaging teachers in examining their own practices through informal classroom observations and forming partnerships between teachers and instructional leaders. Furthermore, Marshall's defense for shorter classroom observations is that after 5-10 minutes of an observation, the number of new observational insights level off and decline for the remainder of the class.

Marshall described a good classroom observation system as one that includes a shared definition of what good teaching is, a focus on students' learning, and teachers as active participants of the process. He believes that frequent miniobservations should be used to provide feedback to affirm good teaching and be used to recommend professional

growth opportunities. In the same way, Wagner (2008) expressed that teachers and instructional leaders need to identify and discuss elements of good teaching practices and classroom observation criterion prior to beginning short and informal observations (or learning walks). Marshall and Wagner stated that teachers need specific and constructive feedback to improve their expertise and that the feedback needs to be given in a nonthreatening way that allows for open and honest communications.

If the classroom teacher is highly influential in students' academic achievement, then instructional leaders need to make an effort to observe their instruction on a more frequent basis. Therefore, their needs to be ongoing objectivity and helpful feedback to support teachers' instructional efforts and students' learning. Over time teachers and instructional leaders learn to trust one another through developing great rapport through more frequent observations.

During any given year at AAMHS, there are about one hundred and sixty teachers: 25 mathematics, 20 physical education, 5 reading, 20 special education, 20 science, 18 social science, 12 world language, 8 applied academic, 25 English, and 10 fine arts teachers. In addition, 20 school personnel would execute classroom observations throughout the year: one superintendent, one principal, two assistant principals, one director of human resource, one director of curriculum and instruction, one director of special education, one director of athletics, one director of school finance, and 11 department chairpersons. Thus, each person could be responsible for supporting eight teachers and assigned to do at least 10 frequent and short observations followed with feedback. Furthermore, if a 15:1 teacher-to-observer ratio is recommended, then an 8:1 teacher-to-observer ratio should be doable and more than ideal.

If the informal observation system entailed a ratio of 8:1 (teachers to observers), then there would be no additional cost to the district. Instructional leaders would need to evaluate and reallocate their time to complete informal observations with follow-up reflective sessions. Currently, every listed observer meets from one to three times a week. Since most of the meetings consist of managerial items, the meetings could be reduced to once or twice a month. If meeting schedules are reduced, then observers could systemically plan for frequent, unannounced, and short informal observations.

Linda Darling-Hammond (2013) said the goal of observations is to support quality instruction for all students—instruction that is well informed by an understanding of what students are learning and how teaching can support the student's progress. More importantly, Marshall discussed that leaders should look for students' behaviors, skills, and concepts to be learned and the level at which the students are learning. Equally, he expressed the importance of obtaining an accurate understanding of the value of instruction in all classrooms and supporting the development of teachers through frequent observations.

Thus, I propose, in lieu of some leadership meetings, that AAMHS's instructional leaders be assigned eight teachers to engage in short, frequent, and unannounced classroom observations at least every other week. By engaging in at least three classroom observations per teacher per course (15 observations per teacher), then the process could be completed, on average, within four days a month for the observations and four days a month for the face-to-face feedback sessions. Specifically, each teacher could be observed twice in the months of September, October, November, February, March, April, and May; and once in the months of December and January. I strongly believe that this is

feasible for all instructional leaders and as highlighted in this study, pertinent to excellent student achievement.

This policy is necessary to support classroom instruction, identify instructional needs, and support student academic achievement. The overarching benefits include increased rapport between teachers and instructional leaders, a focus on student learning, more focused and beneficial professional learning opportunities for teachers and instructional leaders, and attention to instructional needs by the instructional leaders. Thus, effective teachers will receive authentic praise and affirmation and ineffective teachers will get the help they need to improve. It is really important that we as instructional leaders have time to frequently observed teachers and provide actionable and measurable feedback in face-to-face meetings. I propose to meet less often as leadership teams to gain more time to do more classroom observations and conduct more feedback meetings.

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