BUILDING MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT READING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVED STUDENT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

By

Samantha Taylor Sircey

Director: Dr. Jess Weiler
Assistant Professor
Department of Human Services

Committee Members:
Dr. Robert Crow, Human Services
Dr. Michael Boatright, English
Mrs. Susanne Swanger, Buncombe County Schools

March 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

BUILDING MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT READING

COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES FOR IMPOVED STUDENT ACADEMIC

PERFORMANCE

Samantha Taylor Sircey, Ed.D.

Western Carolina University (March 2017)

Director: Dr. Jess Weiler

In the middle school setting, reading is a requirement if students are to access the

curriculum and demonstrate content proficiency. By grade three, students are expected to

read on grade level, but by middle grades (7-8), some students still struggle with reading

for comprehension. In addition, some middle school teachers struggle to implement

effective reading supports. There are several reasons teachers fail to implement reading

during instruction: teachers view reading as the responsibility of the English/language

arts teacher, and not an instructional expectation in other content areas, teachers see

reading supports as content specific and not cross-curricular, or teachers simply do not

have the capacity to implement reading strategies. This instructional deficit leads to lower

student achievement in all content areas due to the students' inability to read for

comprehension, and therefore, access the content.

        To address the problem of a lack of student reading comprehension skills and to

improve student reading performance, this improvement initiative provided on-going,

embedded professional learning supports to teachers so as to build their capacity to implement a reading comprehension program into instructional practice. This disquisition examines one middle school's efforts to improve student reading performance by building the capacity of all teachers to implement reading instruction.

The Hawk 5 program, created by the NBMS leadership/design team, includes the school-wide implementation of the reading strategies toolkit following a prescribed instructional timeline and was modeled after a similar program used in the Anchorage School District (Goodman, A., 2005). Students learn and use the 5 individual reading strategies, with teacher support and instruction, to perform reading comprehension tasks over a 10-week timeline. At the end of 10 weeks of this immersion instruction, the students were able to independently select the strategy that best fits the assigned reading task.

To build the capacity of every teacher, the initiative also provided targeted professional learning supports following the standards introduced by Learning Forward (https://learningforward.org). This improvement initiative provided 10 embedded teacher-learning supports that reflect the standards for professional learning (https://learningforward.org).

Following 7 months of implementation, a mixed-methods evaluation of the improvement initiative was conducted using quantitative and qualitative analysis of teacher perceptions on the impact of the capacity-building program on their own professional growth. Data analysis revealed that the chosen process for embedded capacity development and support increased teacher capacity. Improved student academic

performance as a result of increased capacity cannot be directly correlated amidst the large number of contributing variables.

Summary Description of Disquisition Process and Paper

In a traditional doctoral program, candidates prepare a five-chapter dissertation that provides documented evidence supporting or refuting a given theory or thesis. This paper however, is a disquisition; a body of work that is a formal, in-depth analysis and discourse on an identified problem within an educational context. The disquisition process, outlined below, supports the joint commitment between Western Carolina University and the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) to ensure that Ed. D. programs prepare highly effective leaders, as opposed to researchers. This effort will "prepare educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge and the stewardship of the profession" (Perry, 2012, p. 43).

Doctoral students in WCU's Educational Leadership program are practicing educational leaders across a variety of educational contexts. The disquisition process challenges students to work with others to identify and solve 'problems of practice' facing their educational community. In order to assess improvement initiatives, improvement science methods are applied. The process, as outlined by Bryk, et. al, (2015), requires a measured, purposeful look into the problem, causal analysis of the problem, targeted interventions with measurable outcome goals, and a networked community of professional participants, working toward a common goal of improvement (WCU, 2016). The scholar-practitioner (disquisitioner) references in this paper is also the principal of the school serving as the context for this disquisition.

Building Middle School Teacher Capacity to Implement Reading Comprehension

Strategies for Improved Student Academic Performance

Introduction & Statement of the Problem of Practice

Middle school leaders continue to search for ways to improve student achievement. Many research studies have highlighted the importance of reading and its relationship to learning and student achievement. Sailors and Price (2010) noted that reading comprehension is a foundation to student learning and an area in which teachers must focus. Acknowledging the connection between "literacy learning and achievement" can serve as a basis for school improvement (Fisher & Frey, 2007, p. 210).

A lack of skills in reading can adversely impact student achievement (Nichols, Rickelman, Young & Rupley, 2008). This becomes even more salient as students move up in grade levels and texts become more challenging. Unfortunately, every student is not prepared to read increasingly difficult texts. Middle school teachers themselves acknowledge that proficient reading skills are essential to student learning in every content area. (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Nichols, et al., 2008; Reed, 2009). Conversely, the absence of adequate reading skills may adversely affect student success.   Figure 1, *Impact of Reading Ability on Student Academic Success*, provides a summary illustration of the problem and its impact.

Figure 1

Impact of Poor Reading Comprehension on Student Academic Success

```
┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────┐
│ Some students   │     │ Students struggle│     │ Students may not│
│ begin middle    │     │ with understanding│    │ master course   │
│ school lacking  │─────│ course content in│─────│ content during  │
│ reading         │     │ middle school   │     │ the course      │
│ comprehension   │     │                 │     │                 │
│ skills          │     │                 │     │                 │
└─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘     └─────────────────┘
```

Some students begin middle school lacking reading comprehension skills

Students struggle with understanding course content in middle school

Students may not master course content during the course

Students may not demonstrate proficiency on state exams

Students may leave the course and/or grade level without prerequisite learning for subsequent courses

Students may enter high school courses unprepared

Low achievement in 9th grade increases potential high school drop-out

In middle grades, student learning is shifted from multiple subjects in one classroom to multiple, individual, content specific classrooms. Instruction is segregated

into specific content areas and is delivered by a teacher who has training and expertise in the subject area. In contrast to elementary school programs, students are no longer receiving instruction from the same teacher for all or most of the subject areas (Klapwijk, 2015; Thomas, 2015). Middle school teachers, instead, focus on content standards and mastery of the curriculum of the core subject. When using reading as an instructional tool, teachers in middle grades often rely on strategies that are context specific and not research-based (Adams & Pegg, 2012). This may look like simply having students read the text only to locate answers to content specific questions. More often, middle grades teachers leave explicit reading instruction out of their instructional practices (Reed, 2009).

Without additional instruction, students who enter middle grades without strong reading skills may be unable to access the curriculum (Klapwijk, 2015) which leads to a decline in student mastery of the content and possibly results in a student's lack of demonstrated proficiency on required state exams (Reed, 2009). Although culminating, standardized state exams are used to measure individual achievement and content proficiency in the tested subject area, middle grades promotion standards may not require non-proficient students to relearn the material or repeat the course (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2013). Instead, non-proficient, middle grades students are often promoted and moved on to high school without the background knowledge necessary for the advanced level of comprehension expected in high school course work (Klapwijk, 2015). In a study by Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2009), student success, or failure, in ninth grade is a predictable factor in a student's ability to complete high school. As a result, middle grades success is important to student success

in ninth grade.

Before the problem can be addressed it is important to conduct a causal analysis

beginning with a review of the literature. Causal systems analysis, as defined in *Learning*

to Improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better (Bryk, Gomez,

Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015) adds description, detail and organization to the presented

problem. Causal analysis refers to identifying a problem and possible causes, and then

exploring the root causes. Bryk, et al., (2015), suggests this process is an important step

for design-team collaboration so as to create a "focused improvement community" (p.

66). Once the root causes are listed, areas can be identified where improvement efforts

can have the most impact (Bryk, et al., 2015), and a plan for improvement can be

developed.

To apply a causal analysis to this disquisition, the literature was organized into

perceived root causes of the problem. Each root cause was individually analyzed so as to

answer the question, "what are the causes of this problem?" The educational research

available on each cause was used to support the assertions (Bryk, et al., 2015). A

fishbone, or Ishikawa diagram (Watson, 2004) shown in Figure 2 (*Fishbone Diagram as*

a Causal Analysis), was used to organize the causes most identified in the literature.

Figure 2

Fishbone Diagram as a Causal Analysis
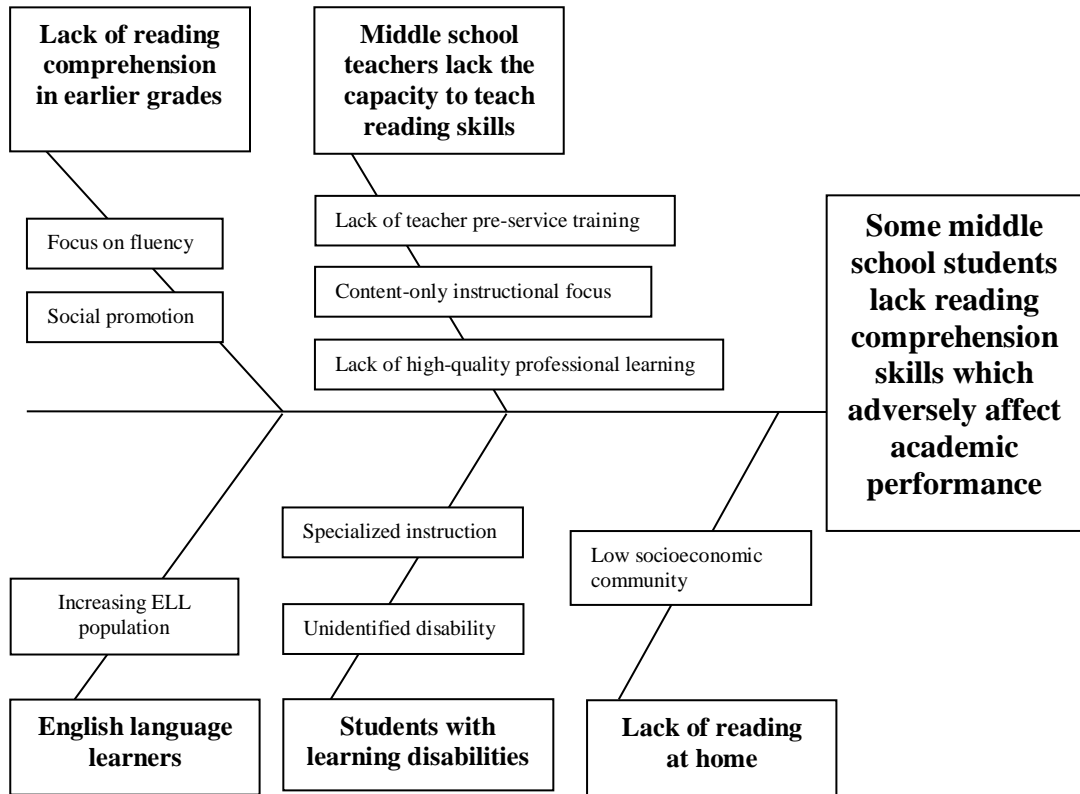
In reviewing the literature, five areas emerged as possible causes for the problem of reduced reading skills for middle grade students. Possible root causes included: (1) a lack of reading instruction in earlier grade levels (Bowen & Bowen, 1998; Klapwijk, 2015; Nichols, et al., 2008), (2) an increase in English language learners in US schools (Reed, 2009; Ringler, O'Neal, Rawls, & Cumiskey, 2013), (3) limited student access to reading materials at home (Reed, 2009; Ringler, et al., 2013; Thomas, 2015), (4) student learning disabilities (Imants, 2002), and (5) reduced capacity of middle school teachers to teach reading (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Imants, 2002; Klapwijk, 2015; Phillips, Bardsley, Bach, & Gibb-Brown, 2009; Sailors, 2008; Sailors & Price, 2010; Thomas, 2015).

The first identified root cause is a lack of instruction focused on reading comprehension skills in earlier grade levels. (Klapwijk, 2015). This could be due to the focus in earlier grades that focus reading instruction on foundations and fluency, leaving comprehension skills for later grade levels. Unfortunately, most educators expect students to have mastered reading comprehension before reaching middle school (Klapwijk, 2015; Nichols, et al., 2008) and do not include reading instruction into their curriculum. They expect and want students to arrive ready for their course. In their minds, middle school students should be reading to learn, *not* learning to read.

A second root cause, as noted in the literature, examines the increase of non-native English speaking students in some United States schools (Reed, 2009; Ringler, et al., 2013). This societal change may impact classroom teachers that do not have instructional skills to support the needs of dual-language learners. Further, a lack of exposure, at home or in settings other than school, will decrease the chances of English language learners to read at an expected level (Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014). Limited

language and correct vocabulary use at home, may lead to   students' inability to connect

to required reading at school (Ringler, et al., 2013). This gap in an English language

learner's reading foundations, may lead teachers to feel of a lack of confidence in their

ability to impact reading for comprehension of their non-native English speaking students

(Ringler, et al., 2013).

A third root cause is low expectations for reading in some students' homes,

possibly due to limited access to reading materials (Bowen & Bowen, 1998; Reed, 2009;

Ringler, et al., 2013; Thomas, 2015). Students from low socio-economic homes may not

have available reading materials outside of the school building. Home academic culture

can be a strong factor in student learning at school. Bowen and Bowen (1998) found that

any school improvement intervention needs to also allow for ways to enhance the

academic conversations students have with parents. An ongoing parent-student

conversation about academic goals and learning, may help increase time reading at home

(Bowen & Bowen, 1998). Thomas (2015) encourages teacher training that supports

reading during instruction as another way to support this academic home culture. If

reading is not required during instructional time at school, the student may not see a

benefit to reading at home (Thomas, 2015).

Classroom instruction is also affected by modifications required for students with

disabilities. When using the inclusion model, middle school classrooms 'include' students

with disabilities in classrooms with non-disabled students, for content instruction. Many

of the students with disabilities in these classrooms are identified as having a specific

learning disability in reading (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005). Teachers already

unsure of how to implement reading, may find more difficulty in addressing reading

needs for learning disabled students (Cheney & Barringer, 1995; Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005). In addition, teachers are often able to easily identify those students with behavioral disabilities more often than identifying those with reading disabilities (Cheney & Barringer, 1995). Middle school teachers often connect poor academic performance and poor social and behavioral skills as parallel (Cheney & Barringer, 1995). In this belief, many middle school teachers feel they are unqualified (Cheney & Barringer, 1995; Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005) to provide reading instruction (Ness, 2009) to students with learning disabilities.

A fifth area in the literature identified the missing capacity of middle school educators to teach reading for comprehension as critically important to student achievement. Unfortunately, most middle schools and middle school teachers do not directly address reading skills primarily due to a reduced capacity to implement curriculum and instructional practices related to reading in the middle school classroom (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Imants, 2002; Klapwijk, 2015; Sailors & Price, 2010; Thomas, 2015). The literature outlining some of the reasons for this phenomenon include (1) un-prepared classroom teachers (Sailors, 2008; Sailors & Price, 2010) due to inadequate teacher training in reading instruction (Adams & Pegg, 2012), (2) the teacher's need for more evidence of connection between reading and content achievement (Klapwijk, 2015), (3) no prior or pre-service knowledge or experience on how to teach reading at the middle school level (Klapwijk, 2015; Phillips, et al., 2009), and (4) a mind-set that believes teaching reading is not the responsibility of the middle school, content area teacher, rather, it should fall to the elementary or 'reading teachers' (Phillips, et al., 2009; Thomas, 2015). These statements can be noted throughout the literature on middle school

reading interventions. These barriers: teacher expectations and reduced capacity across

middle school teachers to address reading, have contributed to and/or compound the

limited access to reading comprehension instruction for middle school students.

Traditionally, only the English Language Arts (ELA) teacher addresses reading

comprehension in middle school classrooms (Klapwijk, 2015). However, research

suggests that the responsibility of teaching reading should extend far beyond the ELA

teacher to include every teacher, in every classroom and content area (Klapwijk, 2015;

Paige & Magpuri-Lavell, 2014; Phillips, et al., 2009; Thomas, 2015). Limited, or even a

complete lack of student access to research-informed reading instruction presents a

problem for students and for middle school communities if they hope to improve

academic performance.

The Problem of Practice within the Local Context

In this section, readers will find a description of the place and context in which

this disquisition was situated. The description takes the reader back to October, 2015, the

time prior to the onset of a reading improvement initiative (detailed later). This baseline

analysis includes six components: (1) regional demographics, (2) school and student

demographics, (3) teacher demographics, (4) daily, school schedule, (5) student reading

data, and (6) reading instructional practices.

Regional Demographics

North Buncombe Middle School is located in western North Carolina and is

included in the Buncombe County Schools district, the largest school district in this

region (NCDPI, 2016). Western NC is defined by 23 counties, in a mostly rural,

mountainous part of the state (http://www.wncvitalityindex.org/overview/about-wnc-vitality-index).

NBMS, however, is located in the most populated county in the region, and is in close proximity of western NC's largest city. Buncombe County, according to 2010 Census data, is home to 238,318 residents who identify as white (87.4%), black (6.4%), and Latino/Hispanic (6%) ethnicity. The region also reports an estimated 16.6 % of the population live in poverty, a rate slightly higher than the state average of 15.7%, and has seen an increase in poverty levels over the last 10 years (http://www.wncvitalityindex.org/overview/about-wnc-vitality-index).

Buncombe County Schools, the governing school district for NBMS, is a public-school district and is the 13th largest district in North Carolina (https://buncombeschools.org/). The district contains 44 schools; NBMS is one of the seven middle schools in the district (https://buncombeschools.org/). The school's curriculum and polices are aligned with state and district board policies.

School and Students

The school building, built and opened in 1954, is an aging physical structure, but is well supported by a dedicated community. Located in northern Buncombe County, the community is situated in a rural setting, but is considered a suburban school due to a growing local economy and proximity to the largest city in the county and region. Industry in the school district includes family-owned farms, commercial farms, and several manufacturing facilities (http://www.weavervillenc.org/). The area is home to several small businesses and local artisans.

The North Buncombe public school district, one of six districts of Buncombe County Schools, includes one primary school (grades K-1), three elementary schools (grades K-4), one intermediate school (grades 5-6), one middle school (NBMS, grades 7-8), and one high school (grades 9-12). The community is located within a 30- minute drive to three universities and colleges, and several community colleges (http://www.weavervillenc.org/).

Community support for the school is strong, but poverty is an issue for many of the school families. As reported by Buncombe County Schools in accordance with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (2016), which implements the school's "free or reduced lunch program," approximately 49% of the NBMS's students are from households designated as low socio-economic (NBMS, principal's monthly report, 2015). This designation is provided to those who qualify for free or reduced cost lunch by federal guidelines (https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines).

According to 2015-2016 school demographic data, the school served approximately 590 students in grades seven and eight. The student body was 54% male and 46% female at the time of this improvement initiative. School ethnicity data reported 82% of the 2015-2016 student population identified as white, 13% reported Hispanic heritage, 4% identified as multi-racial, and less than 1% identified as black, Asian, or American Indian. The student population included the following identifiers as designated by state and federal guidelines: 27% of the students were identified with Academically and Intellectually gifted (AIG) designations; 23% were identified as students with disabilities; 3% qualified for services for English language learners (NBMS, Principal's Monthly Report, December 2015). To meet the needs of special populations, the school

met the required local, state and federal guidelines such as having "highly-qualified"

teachers (those with a specific state licensure in a core academic area), student access to

placement specialist (such as AIG or Exceptional Child teachers), and/or specific class-

size parameters.

Teachers

Staffing at NBMS during the 2015-2016 school year included one principal, one

full-time and one half-time assistant principal, and forty-two state certified teachers,

serving approximately 590 students. The teaching staff at the time was 100% "highly

qualified" with more than 60% of the teachers meeting this requirement in more than one

subject area (NCDPI, School Report Card, 2015). The 'highly qualified" state and federal

designation is awarded to teachers who have completed undergraduate courses in a

content specific area, and teach in that same content area. As reported by the state

licensure requirements data from the NC Department of Public Instruction (2016), more

than 33% of NBMS teachers held an advanced degree and 7 teachers had attained

National Board Certification, as awarded by the National Board for Professional

Teaching Standards. The teaching experience of the staff, as reported by NC Department

of Public Instruction (2016), showed that 50% of the teachers at NBMS at the time of this

intervention, had more than eleven years of teaching experience, while 23.8% had four to

ten years of teaching experience and 26.2% had three years or less. The teacher turnover

rate at NBMS was 12.2% for the 2015-2016 school year, and was a comparable rate at

that time to the teacher turnover rate for the district (NCDPI School Report Card, 2015).

It is important to note that the principal, also the disquisitioner, began as a new principal

in the summer of 2015.

Daily School Schedule

During the time of this improvement initiative, the school was following a traditional middle school model which includes teaming as an instructional practice (http://edglossary.org/teaming/). The middle school teaming model places students in grades seven and eight into grade level 'teams' of four teachers. The students then transition through the school day as a peer-group to the four academic core classes. In this model, a team of four core academic area teachers 'teamed' and collaborated on student behavioral, emotional and instructional needs. In addition to academic courses (math, ELA, science, social studies), students at NBMS also had physical education/health and one exploratory elective course each day, which could include Chorus, Band, Art, Spanish, Agriculture, Family and Consumer Science, Project Lead the Way/Robotics, or Business/Marketing.

The school's 42 highly qualified, state licensed teachers had been trained to work in content specific, collaborative learning teams, called "PLC's," following the standards for professional learning communities as outlined by DuFour and Eaker (1998). Using this model, teachers worked to set common goals to improving student learning through collaboration on content focused, instructional practices with their PLC teacher groups. In these weekly PLC sessions, teacher content groups focused on instructional learning targets for each lesson and assessed student learning using common assessment data in order to make adjustments to instructional practices that meet the needs of all learners. At the time of this disquisition, the PLC process was in place, but teachers struggled to implement the program with success. To better support the teacher's understanding of PLC's, the teachers and administration utilized district level training and support sessions

by implementing a school-based leadership team. This PLC leadership team, at the time

of the disquisition, was working to ensure every teacher understood the process of the

PLC program, but no school-wide expectations had been set for the professional growth

of the teachers in their use of the PLC tenants.

Reading Data and School Accountability

Students at NBMS, like all students in NC public schools, complete a required

state end of grade assessment in 7th and 8th grade mathematics and reading. Students in

middle school are also given a science assessment and a Math I assessment (if enrolled)

in 8th grade ([https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/)](https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/). At the time of this disquisition,

NC educational expectations required students to show proficiency on state reading

exams by third grade. "Third grade students who do not pass the end-of-grade

assessment for reading are subject to additional requirements under the state's Read to

Achieve law" (NCDPI, School Board Policy, 2013), and were usually subject to a reading

remediation during the summer non-school months. To this date, this is the only state law

in effect that addresses individual student reading proficiency as a requirement for

promotion to the next grade level (NCDPI, School Board Policy, 2013).

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) implemented an

updated state-wide school assessment model starting in the 2012-2013 school year.

During the 2012-2013 school year, student achievement data was used as for statistical

norming, so not all results were reported for accountability that school year. The new

assessment program uses student performance scores (proficiency) and student growth

scores, as reported by an accountability statistical program called EVAAS

([https://ncdpi.sas.com/)](https://ncdpi.sas.com/), to assess the school's academic progress (NCDPI, School

Accountability, 2016).

EVAAS is used by the state to measure the school's ability to ensure that every child shows academic growth (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/effectiveness-model/evaas/). The expectation is that every child will reach his or her own learning potential for the current school year. The data are shared with schools and stakeholders for use in decision making affecting school improvement efforts (https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/). The NC School Report Card is one of the data sharing tools. This publicized document reports average student achievement scores and assigns a School Performance Grade (SPG) to each school in the state (https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/). Along with the achievement data, EVAAS accountability data on student growth is calculated to create the NC School Report Card and is used to give public notification of the school's overall performance.

Below in Table 1, *NBMS School Performance Grades*, for the school years previous to this disquisition and under the new school accountability model, are outlined. For each school year listed in the first column, subsequent columns note the school rating as it was reported the stakeholders. A description of each column and its connection to the School Report Card are:

1. School Performance Grade (SPG) Grade: the overall letter grade earned

2. School Performance Grade (SPG) Score: the overall number grade earned

3. Reading SPG Score/Grade: results from the reading assessment only

4. Reading Growth Score: EVAAS calculation on student growth

5. EVAAS Growth Index: EVAAS calculation on the school's ability to provide student growth

6. EVAAS Growth Status: Exceeded, Met, Not Met designation based on the

EVAAS Growth Index.

Table 1

NBMS School Performance Grades

NBMS	SPG Grade	SPG Score	Reading SPG Score/Grade	Reading Growth Score	EVAAS Growth Index	EVAAS Growth Status
2012-2013	NA	NA	NA	NA	-.79	Met
2013-2014	C	61	63/C	59.5	-2.4	Not Met
2014-2015	C	66	61/C	59.3	-2.5	Not Met

Reading assessment data, as reflected by NC, End of Grade (EOG) exams, give a

summative measure of the impact of instruction on student learning at NBMS and is one

aspect of the state accountability model (NCDPI, School Accountability, 2016). As

outlined in Table 1 (*NBMS School Performance Grades)*, at the time of the improvement

initiative, NBMS had seen a steady decline in reading measures over the three school

years previous to this improvement initiative (https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/).

NBMS reported reading growth score for 2014-2015 measured at 59.3%

(http://www.ncpublicschools.org/effectiveness-model/evaas/). This was the least amount

of growth of the seven middle schools in the school district

(https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/) for the school year, and showed a decline in

reading growth over three consecutive school years (2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15). The

overall school Report Card grade for NBMS, which includes math, science and reading,

identified NBMS as a 'C' school and reported a School Performance Score (SPG) in

reading to be 'C' 61% (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/effectiveness-model/evaas/) for

the 2014-2015 school year. This School Report Card, SPG grade, only three points away

from a grade of "D", was a concern for the teachers and stakeholders of NBMS.

Instructional Practices

Prior to this improvement initiative, NBMS did not have a school-wide

improvement goal to address student reading needs. Teacher leaders, however, were

exploring ways to implement a remediation plan for those students working below grade

level. The remediation plan, put in place to address the needs of students not meeting

proficiency based on teacher assessment of student grades and student progress on

content specific learning targets. If the student was showing little or no progress toward

proficiency, the student would be assigned to a content specific teacher (math, ELA,

science, social studies) during a designated remediation time in the school day.

Students who were not showing acceptable proficiency in the ELA class, and

possibly with reading comprehension deficits, were included in this general, remediation

time. This time focused on individual student content proficiency and not skills mastery.

Teachers were using remediation for students to make up missing assignments, complete

test corrections, or by adding content to current assignments. Reading comprehension

was not specifically addressed during this remediation time.

According to current teacher leaders, former school administrators and archived

school improvement plans and documents, NBMS has no recent history of implementing

a school-wide reading skills support program. At the start of the 2015-2016 school year,

NBMS did not have a common literacy instructional approach for below grade level

readers or struggling learners. As such, teachers used literacy strategies they are familiar

with; those that worked specifically within their content area. For example, principal

observations indicate the use of note taking strategies resembling Cornell notes in one classroom, and a teacher-generated outline in another, both as during reading activities. Although both may be useful, their true effectiveness was unknown and it was unclear whether students applied these strategies in other content area classrooms.

Upon arrival, the principal collected data by completing formal classroom observations in every classroom, conducting administrative learning walks (informal classroom observations), and administering teacher surveys using internal school email accounts, google docs and SPSS survey software. Cumulative results from all of these data sources collected by the new principal showed less than half of the teachers in the school reporting or demonstrating the use of a literacy strategy regularly during classroom instruction.

As the new instructional leader of NBMS in the fall of 2015, the principal surveyed 36 NBMS teachers to determine the current use of reading as an instructional tool at the school. In this survey, which was conducted prior to this improvement initiative's creation, teachers reported the number of times a week reading was used as a homework activity was nearly three nights per week; $M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.16$ (NBMS principal's survey, 2015). In the same principal's survey, teachers reported the number of times a week reading was used as a during classroom instructional tool was only 1.5 days per week; $M = 1.5$, $SD = .65$ (NBMS principal's survey, 2015). This data show that teachers at NBMS reported using reading most often as an independent student activity, outside of classroom instruction. This preliminary, pre-initiative baseline data helped the new principal to note the current instructional practices at NBMS, in which, teachers were not using reading as an instructional tool on a daily basis at NBMS.

When implementing classroom reading support, many middle school teachers create their own strategies that are specific to their content needs (Nichols, et al., 2008). Although possibly effective, students may view the connection between the strategy and the content as course specific and non-applicable in other classrooms (Nichols, et al., 2008). In a study by Nichols, et al., (2008), middle school teachers reported using sixty strategies over a four-month period. This variety may limit student use of the strategy in other instructional settings by overwhelming students and prohibiting focus on reading for content comprehension (Nichols, et al., 2008). Also, some strategies are 'teacher-centered,' meaning the teacher has personalized the reading strategy to fit their own, individual classroom practices. In teacher–centered instruction, the student is guided through the strategy by the teacher and not given time or skills needed to apply the reading strategy independently. If the strategy applied is overly teacher-centered and the teacher doesn't allow for students to individually process or practice the application of the strategy, the teacher may be limiting student engagement with the strategies, and therefore comprehension, of the text (Fletcher, Greenwood, Grimely, Parkhill, & Davis, 2012; Nichols, Young, & Rickelman, 2007).

When the new principal arrived, NBMS implemented "flipped" faculty meetings. In contrast to a traditional faculty meeting where information is disseminated to teachers by the principal in a "sit-and-get" presentation format, a flipped faculty meeting allows teachers to participate in learning opportunities that build their capacity to better meet student needs. During an October, 2015 flipped faculty meeting, the faculty worked in teacher teams, made up of content area teachers from both grade levels, to discuss and report the reading strategies used within their classrooms. The reading strategy lists were

shared within the school community in a public document format, using google docs. The lists, reviewed by the new principal and the teachers of NBMS, established that most reading strategies being used at the school did not have research support. For example, 'worksheets' was listed as a reading strategy, as well as a note taking strategy (NBMS Faculty Meeting Notes, 2015). The list did not appear to include reading strategies supported by research.

To confirm her findings, the principal assembled leaders from the district level for the purpose of assessing all relevant school data. This data meeting took place in November 2, 2015, and included all district level instructional support personnel.

Improvement Methodology

This section includes a detailed outline of the improvement process including (1) the selection of a leadership/improvement initiative design team to design and organize a school-wide reading improvement initiative, (2) a description of the design team's reading strategies improvement program, called the "Hawk 5", (3) desired outcomes for the improvement process, teacher performance, and student performance, (4) a description of the teacher capacity building activities used to facilitate the program's success, and (5) a step-by-step timeline of the improvement process.

The Leadership Team

Teacher learning is most likely to occur when teachers have influence over the substance and process of professional development. If teachers have some control over the course of professional development, this increases their opportunity to connect it to specific conditions of their schools and it provides opportunities for them to exercise professional discretion. Empowerment facilitates a sense of

personal ownership or 'buy-in', which promotes internalization of learning (King

& Newmann, 2001, p.2).

In assessing the school's ability to impact student learning, the principal, prior to

the disquisition process, reflected on her own observational data and the declining school

reading accountability data. The result was that students, nor teachers, used common

practices to help students feel competent in the way "they demonstrate their

understanding and knowledge" (*Fisher & Frey, 2007, p. 210*). The principal, and

disquisitioner, then worked to create and implement an improvement initiative to effect

change at NBMS.

On November 2, 2015, the principal presented school data, including concerns

about student reading achievement, to a district level leadership team comprised of the

district's associate superintendent, the secondary curriculum directors and content

specialists, the district data specialist, and the NBMS literacy and math coaches. During

this meeting, the group discussed the state and school data, agreed that the data suggest a

problem, and discussed the implementation of a reading strategies program. The district

team was supportive and encouraged the principal to move forward by including teacher

leaders from NBMS in the planning and implementation of the school-wide reading

strategy program.

In moving forward, the principal initially met with the district English Language

Arts/Social Studies curriculum specialist and the school's literacy coach to explore the

proposed need for school-wide professional development that would support all teachers

in using research-informed reading strategies within their instructional practices.

"Undoubtedly, the skills required of a proficient reader are those that most middle school

teachers acknowledge as essential to success in the content areas" (Reed, 2009, p.2). The

discussion resulted in the following steps used in the design and implementation of the

improvement effort to improve reading ability at NBMS.

During the initial planning phase, the principal (also the disquisitioner) assembled

a team of five content teachers, the school's literacy coach, and the district English

Language Arts/Social Studies (ELA/SS) curriculum specialist. The disquisitioner

participated as a member, and as a co-leader, with the literacy coach, of the leadership

team. Each member of the leadership team was selected for their leadership potential,

their commitment to improving our school and their dedication to the teaching

profession. The evaluation of their individual leadership abilities was considered by the

principal and the literacy coach as criteria for participation. Once school teacher-leaders

were identified, the leadership/design team included two 8th grade ELA teachers, one 7th

grade science teacher, one 7th grade math teacher and one Career and Technical

Education (CTE) teacher. The professional background of the teachers ranged from 12

years to 3 years of classroom experience. Only one of the leadership team members had

been teaching at NBMS for more than four school years.

Each teacher selected also presented individual characteristics and professional

traits that made them important to the design of this initiative. Both 8th grade ELA

teachers were knowledgeable of the need for reading, but each had different views on the

use of reading as an instructional tool; one used it as a whole class, read aloud activity,

while the other focused on writing to support reading comprehension. Both of the ELA

teachers selected also hold dual teaching certification and have taught other content areas

and grade levels in the past, suggesting they may add a unique perspective of reading use in other core subjects.

The 7th grade science and math teachers selected also added layers of experience to the leadership/design team. Each teacher has worked in their current content area only, but has served in other capacities. The 7th grade math teacher, in her fourth year of teaching, has presented at state conventions, served on national committees for mathematics educators, and has recently created a multi-district support program for new math teachers. NBMS is the second school where she has been employed to teach 7th grade math.

The 7th grade science teacher has been teaching for more than 5 years and has taught various grade levels, including high school science. She works well within the middle school teaming model to ensure that student needs are addressed within every content classroom, serving as a PLC content team leader.

In addition to the four core content area teachers, the CTE teacher was included in the leadership/design team for many reasons. Her current class is called 'Project Lead the Way' and is follows a state curriculum geared toward robotics and problem solving skills. She has been teaching in the middle school CTE classrooms for 12 years. At the time of the improvement initiative, she was also the NBMS Teacher of the Year, reflecting the professional respect of her peers.

The inclusion of the NBMS literacy coach on the leadership team was an important connection to literacy supports already in place at the school. A part-time school-based position, the literacy coach offers individual content support to English/Language Arts and Social Studies teachers. In this capacity, the literacy coach

co-teaches lessons, helps prepare instructional lessons with classroom teachers, and supports all school literacy initiatives. The literacy coach offers school-wide support for literacy and works with the entire faculty to implement professional learning opportunities for literacy instruction. Unfortunately, this support is limited to those teachers who ask for services or attend help sessions; the literacy coach is assigned to the school only one day per week.

The Hawk 5 Reading Program

"Despite the existence of research that shows the benefits of reading instruction, it seems that teachers seldom teach reading strategies explicitly, thereby depriving learners of the strategies they need to think about the process of meaning making when they encounter texts" (Klapwijk & van der Walt, 2011, p.27).

The leadership/design team felt the school would benefit from a literacy initiative aimed at improving student reading comprehension. The team also recognized the need for the program to be easily implemented into instructional practice.

The Hawk 5 program, created by the NBMS leadership/design team, includes the school-wide implementation of the reading strategies toolkit following a prescribed instructional timeline and was modeled after a similar program used in the Anchorage School District (Goodman, A., 2005). Students learn and use the individual strategies, with teacher support and instruction, to perform reading comprehension tasks. The toolkit includes five reading strategies, and students are immersed for two-week sessions in one strategy at a time, in every classroom. At the end of 10 weeks of this immersion instruction, the students will be able to independently select the strategy that best fits the

assigned reading task. The leadership/design team predicted this process would engage

students in reading for comprehension and ultimately, improve their academic

performance.

The Hawk 5 program toolkit included five reading strategies for student use when

reading for understanding and comprehension. The five strategies, as listed in Table 2

(*Hawk 5 Toolkit*) include pre-reading strategies ('Read-Around-the-Text' and 'Read-

Around-the-Word'), during reading strategies ('What? So, what?' and 'Say Something'),

and a post-reading strategy ('Get the Gist'). The five strategies selected included

research-informed strategies (Fishman, et al., 2003; Klapwijk, 2015; Klapwijk & van der

Walt, 2011; Thomas, 2015) that could be used for the purpose of improving student

reading comprehension.

Table 2

The Hawk 5 Toolkit

Reading Strategy	Description	Use	Research-based best practices
Reading Around the Text (Weeks 1-2)	Students scan and read all tables, graphs, photos, etc. and ask a question prior to reading the text.	Pre- reading strategy	Fishman, et al., (2003); Klapwijk (2015); Klapwijk & van der Walt (2011); Thomas (2015).
Reading Around the Word (Weeks 3-4)	Students look for signals in the text to decode unfamiliar words.	Pre-reading strategy During reading strategy	
What? So, What? (Weeks 5-6)	Students use these headings for two-column notes.	During reading strategy	
Say Something (Weeks 7-8)	Students work in pairs or small groups to 'say	During reading strategy	

	something' about the text.		
Get the Gist (Weeks 9-10)	Students use summarizing strategies.	Post-reading strategy	

The literacy coach, also a member of the leadership team, selected the five research-informed reading strategies (Klapwijk, 2015; Thomas, 2015). The selected reading strategies were all commonly known by teachers in the school throughout various content areas, but, prior to the improvement initiative, were not being used as strategies to specifically improve overall reading comprehension.

To create a common language for the Hawk 5 initiative, the leadership team, including the literacy coach, renamed each strategy. Creating the toolkit with commonly named reading strategies for use in every classroom, was a component of professional learning that supports the likely increase in student comprehension, student confidence, and teacher instructional confidence (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Fisher, Frey & Williams, 2002; Nichols, et al., 2008).

To create a school learning culture around reading instruction, the Hawk 5 program was implemented in a 10-week process, allowing for a single-strategy focus for each 2-week period. Stated another way, each teacher would teach only a single strategy for a two-week time period. It was predicted that a student immersion in the strategy (Fisher & Frey, 2007) would occur as the result of every teacher, in every content area used the same strategy during instruction. Teachers would implement the strategies, in an integrative fashion, during regular instruction, according to the scheduled timeline (Learning Froward, 2015).

District curriculum leaders and coaches, the NBMS School Improvement team, and the NBMS faculty approved implementation of the program selected by the leadership/design team. The Hawk 5 improvement initiative started in December, 2015.

Desired Outcomes

"To create excellent programs of professional development, it is necessary to build an empirical knowledge base that links different forms of professional development to both teacher and student outcomes" (Fishman, et al., 2003, p. 643).

The improvement initiative involved two primary components: (1) the Hawk 5 reading program itself, and (2) a professional learning plan to build teacher capacity to implement the Hawk 5 with fidelity. This disquisition focuses on the second component.

The improvement initiative at the center of this disquisition is *not* a reading strategies program, rather—it is the provision of research-supported, on-going capacity building (professional learning) to ensure successful implementation and sustainability of the reading strategies program. Supporting the teacher as a learner is as important to the success of the improvement initiative as is the selection of the instructional strategies (Erickson, et al., 2005; Fishman, et al., 2003; Guskey, 2002; Imants, 2002; King & Newmann, 2001; Reed, 2009). Therefore, this improvement initiative included elements to address the needs of the teacher as a professional learner, engaged in activities that promoted their instructional ability.

Specifically, this plan for improvement (1) created a school literacy initiative, (2) trained all NBMS teachers, (3) charged them with the tasks of learning and implementing five specific strategies to support and improve student reading comprehension, and (4)

designed a professional learning model of support and collaboration. These efforts,

implemented by the Hawk 5 leadership/design team, targeted the school's problem: a

decline in student reading achievement.

Although the ultimate desired outcome of the improvement initiative was

improved student reading comprehension (as a result of a reading strategies toolkit

implemented during instruction), and therefore improved student achievement, this

disquisitioner focused on the intermediate outcome of increased teacher capacity,

recognizing that it is a prerequisite to the improvement of student reading

comprehension. Figure 3 (*Desired Outcomes of the Improvement Initiative)* illustrates the

relationship among the predicted outcomes.

Figure 3

Desired Outcomes of the Improvement Initiative

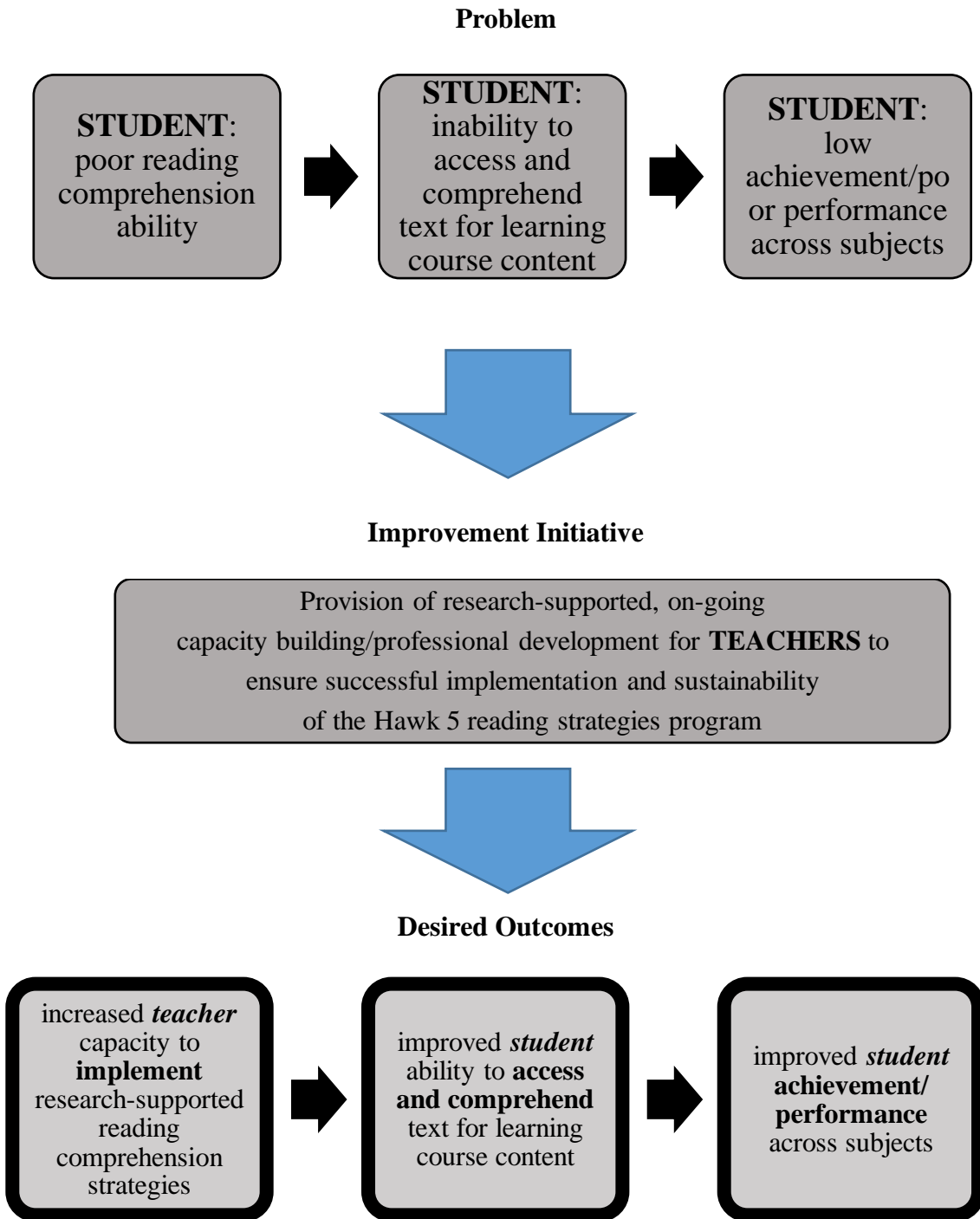| Increased **teacher** capacity to *implement* research-supported reading comprehension strategies	→	Improved **student** ability to *access and comprehend* text for learning course content	→	Improved **student** *achievement/ performance* across subjects

Implementing an improvement initiative successfully, according to Guskey

(2002), will change the teacher's attitude and beliefs about instructional practices. Once

teachers have the capacity to implement the initiative (Erikson, et al., 2005; Reed, 2009),

they can connect the results of their own professional learning to student achievement

(Nichols, et al., 2008), as evidenced in their own classrooms (Guskey, 2002; Imants, 2002; King & Newmann, 2001). Therefore, the initiative will be able support sustainable change (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009) and continued improvement in student achievement.

This desired outcome of this improvement initiative was to build the capacity of teachers at NBMS to implement reading strategies within their respective courses and as part of their instructional practice. Stated another way, could NBMS create a school-wide initiative to improve student performance? What embedded supports would teachers need to build their capacity to implement the components of the initiative? Illustrated in Figure 4 below (*Improvement Initiative Theoretical Framework*), a framework of the improvement initiative's desired outcomes for teacher and student learning has been provided.

Figure 4

Improvement Initiative Theoretical Framework

Problem

| **STUDENT**: poor reading comprehension ability | **STUDENT**: inability to access and comprehend text for learning course content | **STUDENT**: low achievement/poor performance across subjects |

Improvement Initiative

Provision of research-supported, on-going
capacity building/professional development for **TEACHERS** to
ensure successful implementation and sustainability
of the Hawk 5 reading strategies program

Desired Outcomes

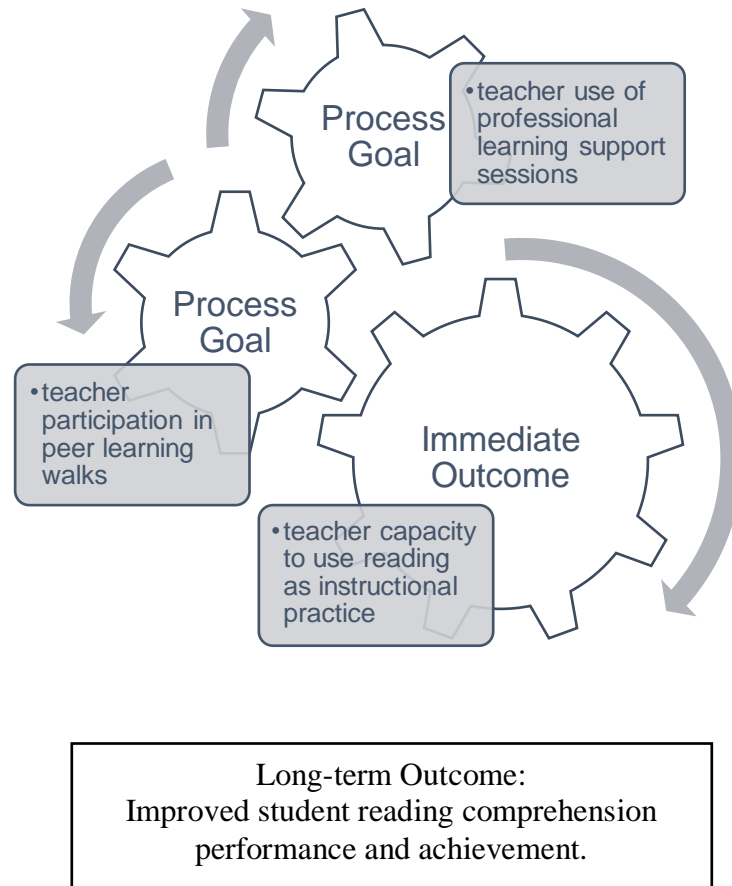| increased *teacher* capacity to **implement** research-supported reading comprehension strategies | improved *student* ability to **access and comprehend** text for learning course content | improved *student* **achievement/ performance** across subjects |

In addition to the desired outcomes for teachers and students outlined in Figure 4 (*Improvement Initiative Theoretical Framework*) process goals for the leadership/design team were also defined to guide the implementation of research-informed professional learning experiences (Bryk, et al., 2015) for NBMS teachers. The process goals ensure the improvement initiative remains focused on desired outcomes and program goals of improved instructional practice for all teachers. It is important to mention, the process goals are not considered in the data collection and analysis of this improvement initiative due their implementation prior to the approved data collection period for this disquisition. However, the disquisitioner feels it is necessary to the overall methodology to highlight the existence of these process goals and to acknowledge the efforts of the leadership/design team to measure the progress of the initiative.

The leadership/design team's process goals for this improvement initiative included: (1) 60% teacher participation in the Hawk 5 professional learning refresher sessions and (2) implementation and teacher participation in a school-wide learning walk for peer observation. The process goals support the improvement initiative's outcome goals of (1) building capacity in teachers to implement research-informed reading strategies (Hawk 5) in accordance with expectations set by the leadership team, therefore (2) increasing student reading comprehension and, ultimately, learning. This relationship between the initiative's process goals and outcome goals is outlined in Figure 5 (*Relationship of Process and Outcomes for Hawk 5),* below.

Figure 5

Relationship of Process and Outcomes for Hawk 5

Process Goal
- teacher use of professional learning support sessions

Process Goal
- teacher participation in peer learning walks

Immediate Outcome
- teacher capacity to use reading as instructional practice

Long-term Outcome:
Improved student reading comprehension performance and achievement.

Improvement Initiative: Teacher Capacity Building

(S)ignificant change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs occurs primarily after they gain evidence of improvements in student learning. These improvements typically result from changes teachers have made in their classroom practices—a new instructional approach, the use of new materials or curricula, or simply a modification in teaching procedures or classroom format (Guskey, 2002, p. 383).

Many school leaders fail to recognize that a new initiative's success is predicated, at least in part, on effective professional development (Guskey, 2002; Nichols, et al., 2008; Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006; Yager, et al., 2011-2012). If we do not sufficiently build the capacity of teachers to implement an initiative with fidelity, we cannot expect to achieve the desired outcomes. To ensure that the professional learning experiences ultimately improved reading comprehension for increased course performance, this disquisitioner considered and employed the professional development standards set by Learning Forward (https://learningforward.org), a professional organization for educators and others interested in the indicators of effective professional learning. The Learning Forward website (https://learningforward.org) explains the standards are the result of collaborative work of forty professional organizations and educational agencies to create "standards outlining the characteristics of professional learning that lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results." All standards are supported with research-informed practices that reflect these outcomes.

The leadership/design team and the disquisitioner included supports for teacher's professional learning, necessary to building teacher capacity to integrate reading into instruction. In the planning of this improvement effort, the Learning Forward standards were aligned with the leadership/design team's outcome goals. This effort to maintain consistency in implementation for all teachers, was paired with the team's desire to support the teacher as learner. Having knowledge of the teacher's at NBMS, including their experiences with past improvement efforts, led the team to embed teacher learning supports for the purpose of building the teacher's capacity to implement the reading strategies into instruction.

An illustration of this effort to support teachers as learners is shown in Table 3, *Professional Learning Plan*. The professional learning standard, as outlined by Learning Forward (https://learningforward.org), is listed in column one. In the second column, a component of the improvement initiative's professional learning plan is presented corresponding with the standard. In the third column, research support for the professional learning standard is cited. Following Table 3 is a discussion and examination of the literature supporting each standard, including a narrative description of the ways in which the standard was upheld within the improvement initiative.

Table 3

Professional Learning Plan

Learning Forward Standards for Professional Learning	Improvement Initiative Components	Research Support
Standard One: "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment."	1. Teacher-teams developed 2. Team-based training 3. Team data-analysis 4. Teacher-team work focused on collaborative learning and implementation of reading strategies 5. Peer to peer support 6. Shared goals	Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., & Wallace, M. (with Greenwood, A., et al.). (2005, May). *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities* (Research Brief RB637). Nottingham, United Kingdom: Department for Education and Skills. Hord, S.M. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning together, leading together: Changing schools through professional learning communities.* New York: Teachers College Press & NSDC. Lieberman, A. & Miller, L. (Eds.) (2008). *Teachers in professional communities: Improving teaching and*

		learning. New York: Teachers College Press. McLaughlin, M.W. & Talbert, J.E. (2001). *Professional communities and the work of high school teaching.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Saunders, W.M., Goldenberg, C.N., & Gallimore, R. (2009, December). Increasing achievement by focusing grade-level teams on improving classroom learning: A prospective, quasi-experimental study of Title I schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 46*(4), 1006-1033.
Standard Two: "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning."	1. Leadership Team 2. Time for teams to collaborate 3. Time for Capacity Building 4. Capacity-building/professional learning opportunities 5. Funds for substitute teachers during learning opportunities	Abdal-Haqq, I. (1996). *Making time for teacher professional development.* Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 400259) Chambers, J.G., Lam, I., & Mahitivanichcha, K. (2008, September). *Examining context and challenges in measuring investment in professional development: A case study of six school districts in the Southwest region* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2008-No. 037). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest. Haslam, M.B. (1997, Fall). How to rebuild a local professional development infrastructure. *NAS Getting Better by Design.*

		Arlington, VA: New American Schools.

Odden, A., Archibald, S., Fermanich, M., & Gallagher, H.A. (2002). A cost framework for professional development. *Journal of Education Finance, 28*(1), 51-74.

OECD. (2011). *Strong performers and successful reformers in education: Lessons from PISA for the United States.* Paris: OECD Publishing. |
| Standard Three:

"Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes." | 1. Common framework
2. Common language
3. Collective visioning
4. Adult learning theories | Croft, A., Coggshall, J.G., Dolan, M., & Powers, E. (with Killion, J.). (2010, April). *Job-embedded professional development: What it is, who's responsible, and how to get it done well* (Issue Brief). Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.

Dede, C. (Ed.) (2006). *Online professional development for teachers: Emerging models and methods.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Garet, M.S., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K.S. (2001, Winter). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 915-945.

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Penuel, W.R., Fishman, B.J., Yamaguchi, R., & Gallagher, L.P. (2007, December). What makes professional development effective? Strategies that foster |

		curriculum implementation. *American Educational Research Journal, 44*(4), 921-958.
Standard Four: "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards."	The professional learning activities were designed to increase teacher capacity to implement a reading program with fidelity. Successful implementation will improve student performance in reading and other academic areas. These outcomes are aligned with both educator performance and curricular expectations.	Blank, R.K., de las Alas, N., & Smith, C. (2007, February). *Analysis of the quality of professional development programs for mathematics and science teachers: Findings from a cross-state study.* Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Borko, H. (2004, November). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher, 33*(8), 3-15. Cohen, D. & Hill, H. (2000). Instructional policy and classroom performance: The mathematics reform in California. *Teachers College Record, 102*(2), 294-343. Kennedy, M. (1998, March). Education reform and subject matter knowledge. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 35*(3), 249-263. Shulman, L.S. (2000, January-February). Teacher development: Roles of domain expertise andpedagogical knowledge. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 21*(1), 129-135.
Standard Five: "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning."	1. District and school administrative support for initiative 2. School-based design team 3. Principal as facilitator 4. Teachers and other educators as input providers and co-leaders	Knapp, M.S., Copland, M.A., & Talbert, J.E. (2003, February). *Leading for learning: Reflective tools for school and district leaders.* Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning: A review of research for the Learning from Leadership*

		Project. New York: Wallace Foundation. Spillane, J.P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J.B. (2001, April). Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher, 30*(3), 23-27. Waters, J.T., Marzano, R.J., & McNulty, B.A. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement.* Aurora, CO: McREL. York-Barr, J. & Duke, K. (2004, Fall). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(3), 255-316.
Standard Six: "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning."	1. PLC data on student learning 2. PLC notes on teacher instructional practice 3. Teacher participation data 4. Field notes 5. Surveys	Datnow, A. (1999, April). *How schools choose externally developed reform designs* (Report No. 35). Baltimore: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk. Desimone, L., Porter, A., Garet, M., Yoon, K.S., & Birman, B. (2002, Summer). Effects of professional development on teachers' instruction: Results from a three-year longitudinal study. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(2), 81-112. Griffith, P.L., Kimmel, S.J., & Biscoe, B. (2010, Winter). Teacher professional development for at-risk preschoolers: Closing the achievement gap by closing the instruction gap. *Action in Teacher Education, 31*(4), 41-53. Reeves, D.B. (2010). *Transforming professional*

		development into student results. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Torgesen, J., Meadows, J.G., & Howard, P. (n.d.). *Using student outcome data to help guide professional development and teacher support: Issues for Reading First and K-12 reading plans.* Tallahassee, FL: Florida Center for Reading Research.
Standard Seven: "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long term change."	1. Hawk 5 supported by research 2. Professional learning opportunities supported by research 3. Improvement Science principals considered 4. On-going support sessions 5. Digital resources available to support learning over time 6. Feedback welcome and response to feedback provided	Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press. Hall, G. & Hord, S. (2011). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon. Huberman, M. & Miles, M.B. (1984). *Innovation up close: How school improvement works.* New York: Plenum. Supovitz, J.A. & Turner, H.M. (2000, November). The effects of professional development on science teaching practices and classroom culture. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 37*(9), 963-980.

Standard one. "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment" (https://learningforward.org).

In recent years, teacher teams, commonly called "professional learning communities", have been formed to review and update their own instructional practices

for the purpose of improving student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). In some

schools, teachers are given time to work within their content area and grade level teams

to support student needs through this professional collaboration for continuous

improvement. In creating common goals for student learning, teachers must first assess

current instructional practices and student outcomes. Once a collective goal is in place,

these teacher communities can put into practice professional learning that supports their

group goals and improves student learning (Vescio, et al., 2008).

Imants (2002) notes "feedback and collaboration for learning" (p.722) as the most

important components of effective professional learning. Teacher collaboration occurs

within the learning communities where a common goal of improvement is used as the

focus for instructional practices (Nichols, et al., 2008). A collective decision by teachers

to internalize and embrace the goals of improvement (Imants, 2002) is required if change

is to occur.

Once goals are aligned and made the focus of continuous, instructional

improvement, teacher learning communities can benefit from professional learning that

helps them focus on analyzing what they do and how they can best use research informed

instructional strategies to improve student learning (Nichols, et al., 2008).

Alignment of teacher capacity-building plan with Learning Forward, standard

one. In addressing the needs of teachers as outlined in standard one, the leadership/design

team's plan for professional learning included the use professional learning communities.

As a way to assess the impact of instructional practices on student learning (Vescio et al.,

2008), professional learning community, or PLC, paradigms were used.

The PLC process used at NBMS was still evolving at the time of this

improvement initiative. Therefore, the leadership/design team and the disquisitioner added supports to create a collaborative professional learning environment. At the time, the school's grade level teams had a common planning time during the school day. Teacher grade level teams were therefore trained on the improvement initiative, given opportunities to collaborate in these smaller training sessions, and encouraged to analyze their own use of the reading strategies within these groups. By offering this common training time, the leadership/design team embedded collaborative learning, peer to peer support and shared goals of improvement across grade level and content area teachers.

Standard two. "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning" (https://learningforward.org).

To support teacher learning for improved student achievement, schools must use resources to maximize professional learning. To name a few, resources can include the provision of time, financial support, including materials necessary for the professional learning activity, and the use of curriculum coaches and support staff.

Time. Acknowledging that time is a valuable resource in a teacher's school day is critical. It is well known that there is no "free" time in a teacher's day. Adding collaborative teaming to a teacher's schedule without subtracting another responsibility makes little sense. Leaders who value collaboration, find ways to change schedules to accommodate this effective practice. School administrators can support teachers as learners with flexible and supportive scheduling. (Yager, S., Pederson, Yager, R., & Noppe, 2011-2012) Teachers will value the professional learning activity if their schedules are considered in the process (King & Newmann, 2001).

Financial support. Often times, financial resources can become a barrier to professional learning activities (Yager, et al., 2011-2012). In an effort to fund professional learning events, school administrators often work to allocate available resources. However, without first aligning the professional learning activity with research-based practices, they may undermine the goals of the initiative, rather than support change (Sanholtz & Scribner, 2006).

Coaches and support staff. A 2009 study by Tschannen-Moran and McMaster, found the most effective professional development initiatives, incorporating teacher use of reading strategies, included on-going support by a literacy coach. The use of a literacy coach is essential to a successful reading professional development (Thomas, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Providing access to a literacy coach, as well as other expert support staff, facilitates teacher learning (Thomas, 2015).

In addition to the curriculum coach, support staff, including teacher leaders, are an important factor of quality professional learning. Often times, professional learning is associated with an outside trainer who is hired to share knowledge on teaching and learning (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006). This deficit-thinking takes away the use of strong teacher leaders as supports in professional learning, and according to Sandholtz and Scribner (2006), may be one factor in failed improvement efforts.

Alignment of teacher capacity-building plan with Learning Forward, standard two. To address the needs of the teacher as a learner, this improvement initiative ensured resources were appropriately allocated for the maximum benefit. The leadership/design team, that included the disquisitioner, was a first step toward this measure. In the creation of the leadership/design team, every effort was taken to use the expertise of the teachers

to identify the research-informed practices that would best meet the needs of teachers at NBMS.

The leadership/design team also ensured teacher needs were considered a priority in the planning of the improvement initiative. This consideration included the timing of the initial small group training session, the use of teacher-leaders as facilitators in the sessions, and the allowance of collaboration time in every face to face professional learning activity offered. This provided a school-wide support network that offered every teacher time for feedback as well as questions as the program was implemented.

The principal, also the disquisitioner, worked with the leadership/design team to allocate funds when the team felt necessary. Funding was provided for substitutes for the team so they could facilitate training sessions and assist teachers during classroom instruction. Funds were also allocated to create paper copies of the Hawk 5 toolkit documents. By providing the student copies, teachers were not asked to use their time or resources creating the student Hawk 5 toolkit.

Standard three. "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes" (https://learningforward.org).

It is important for any professional learning initiative's success that the needs of the learner, in this case the teacher, also be considered. Professional learning is most effective if research-informed practices that support adult learning theories are embedded. For example, job-embedded learning should focus on student achievement, but allow for teachers to gain on-going feedback using both formative and summative analysis of the program's impact while encouraging and creating opportunities for peer

observation and collaboration.

In many schools, a common framework assists teachers as they plan classroom instruction. This common framework reflects the research-informed, best instructional practices that are important aspects of engaging lesson delivery. For example, reading and writing are probable essentials in a school's common instructional framework, meaning that both should be included in every lesson, in every class, every day. This job-embedded, common instructional expectation is also beneficial to the design of professional learning. Professional learning works best with researched strategies and an instructional framework (Klapwijk, 2015; Nichols, et al., 2008), as well as a school-wide common language (Klapwijk, 2015; Thomas, 2015) in an effort to support teacher learning.

Successful professional learning activities are "designed to meet the needs of teachers to increase their confidence" (Reed, p.8) in instructional practice. However, simply giving the teacher a set of guidelines to learn or a script for classroom instruction is not enough (Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003). Teachers, as adult learners, require collaboration, feedback and assessment of their own learning as essential components of the learning process. (King & Newmann, 2001; Fishman, et al., 2003; Kitchenham, 2008). This collaborative analysis may not happen organically; schools looking for transformative change include this in the professional learning program's design.

According to Guskey (2002), professional learning seeks to "change the classroom practices of teachers, change their attitudes and beliefs, and change the learning outcomes of students" (p. 383). To ensure this change occurs, support for teachers during the implementation of professional learning opportunities should target

teachers' understanding of the rationale for the improvement initiative (Fishman, et al., 2003; Imants, 2002).

Alignment of teacher capacity-building plan with Learning Forward, standard three. In creating the Hawk 5 improvement initiative, the leadership/design team set out to create a common language around reading instruction that would build teacher capacity to increase the amount of reading used during class time. In addition to the researched professional learning standards of Learning Forward (2015), other research provided support for the leadership/design team's use of a school-wide common framework (Fisher & Frey, 2007), a common language around the strategies to be implemented (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Klapwijk, 2015) and shared vision for student improvement (Guskey, 2012; King & Newmann, 2001), noting these practices have been proven to build teacher capacity to implement a reading initiative.

Standard four. "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards" (https://learningforward.org).

Professional learning opportunities should result in student and teacher outcomes that mirror the standards for teacher and student performance. The professional learning activities provided during the improvement initiative were designed to increase teacher capacity to implement a reading program with fidelity, while supporting the student and teacher standards already in place. Therefore, outcome expectations were aligned with both educator performance and curricular expectations.

The quality of an educational community is often measured by student achievement on state and local exams. This high-stakes testing model is foremost in

many teachers' perception of their instructional impact on student learning, but this should not be the only reason for implementing professional development (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006). According to the North Carolina English/Language Arts Curriculum Guide, students who are college and career ready in reading,

> demonstrate independence. Students can, without significant scaffolding, comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines, and they can construct effective arguments and convey intricate or multifaceted information. Likewise, students are able independently to discern a speaker's key points, request clarification, and ask relevant questions. They build on others' ideas, articulate their own ideas, and confirm they have been understood. Without prompting, they demonstrate command of standard English and acquire and use a wide-ranging vocabulary. More broadly, they become self-directed learners, effectively seeking out and using resources to assist them, including teachers, peers, and print and digital reference materials
>
> (http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/languagearts/scos/) .

Teachers are committed to meeting this goal for student success, but may lack the capacity to insert reading into instructional practice without some professional learning (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Klapwijk, 2015; Klapwijk & van der Walt, 2011; Nichols, et al., 2008). However, teachers will respond to improvement initiatives when the predicted outcomes reflect teacher views on instructional needs and not simply student achievement scores (Klapwijk, 2015).

To impact professional learning, King and Newmann (2001) contend that school capacity must be considered. In 2001, they define school capacity as a three-part concept

that explains how the organization of the school itself impacts student achievement: "the knowledge, skills and dispositions of individual teachers; professional community among the staff as a whole; and program coherence within schools" (King & Newmann). The school's capacity to create change is therefore impacted by the teacher's need to feel their input is valued (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006; Fisher and Frey, 2007). Teacher motivation is an important factor in professional development for improvement. There can be no impact on student learning if the teachers are unwilling to implement the change (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009).

Alignment of teacher capacity-building plan with Learning Forward, standard four. The professional learning activities were designed to increase teacher capacity to implement a reading program with fidelity. By including a school-wide initiative that is aligned with student learning standards, teachers were able see collective buy-in across all content areas. Therefore, the leadership/design team expected successful implementation would improve student performance in reading in all academic areas.

In addition to curricular expectations, the desired outcomes of the improvement initiative were aligned with educator performance expectations. According to the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards (www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/effectiveness-model/ncees/.../prof-teach-standards.pdf):

Standard I d: Teachers advocate for schools and students.

- Teachers advocate for positive change in policies and practices affecting student learning.

- They participate in the implementation of initiatives to improve the education of students.

Standard III a: Teachers align their instruction with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.

- In order to enhance the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, teachers investigate the content standards developed by professional organizations in their specialty area.

- They develop and apply strategies to make the curriculum rigorous and relevant for all students and provide a balanced curriculum that enhances literacy skills.

- Elementary teachers have explicit and thorough preparation in literacy instruction.

- Middle and high school teachers incorporate literacy instruction within the content area or discipline.

Alignment of the plan for the improvement initiative with professional teaching standards, provided another embedded support to ensure teacher buy-in and implementation of the Hawk 5 reading strategies.

Standard five. "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning" (https://learningforward.org).

School leaders including professional learning as a driver of successful initiative implementation, should recognize the connection between professional learning and leadership. The encouragement of teacher-leadership, distributed leadership and collaborative decision-making are key for building capacity.

The use of a leadership/design team that includes teachers increases the likelihood that an initiative will be implemented with fidelity. "Teachers should be fostered in becoming thoughtful decision makers who use their knowledge of learning goals and

state curriculum guidelines to design instruction and select strategies that best enable

students to reach proficiency across all subject areas" (Nichols, et al., 2008, p. 231).

Acknowledging the teacher as a decision maker in professional learning activities, also

supports research on the need for shared leadership during improvement initiatives

(Matsumura, Granier, Junker, & Bickel, 2010).

The principal can foster this distributed leadership by allowing teacher-leaders to

help make decisions about the improvement initiative. Support must also be paired with

expectations for implementation, even pressure (Guskey, 2002), if the professional

learning is to lead to educational improvements. The role of the principal is important to

the success of the initiative. As found in a study by Matsumura, Garnier, Junker, Resnick

and Bickel (2010), the "principal's willingness to share leadership positively predicted

the frequency of teachers' participation" and was reflected in the teachers' "lesson

enactment" (p. 21).

Modeling expectations and implementing a school vision that supports improved

instructional practices requires professional development that addresses and supports

teacher needs while offering the chance to improve student outcomes (Fishman, et al.,

2003; Sanholtz & Scribner, 2006). On-going supports put in place during the

improvement initiative and available following the implementation are essential to the

success of professional learning (Guskey, 2002). This collaborative decision-making

process allows teachers to be a part of the problem-solving when addressing professional

learning needs. Simply having teachers meet in groups is not enough, they must be able

to discuss issues and solutions to address both student learning needs and teacher learning

needs (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006).

***Alignment of teacher capacity-building plan with Learning Forward, standard
five.*** In addressing the concerns of declining reading performance at NBMS, the school
first looked at the data to ensure that reading was in fact, an area of concern. This process
was initiated by the principal and initially included only district and curriculum
specialists. Once this larger leadership team was able to define the problem, school-based
leadership worked on a plan to support teacher professional learning needs during a
school-wide improvement initiative.

The leadership/design team comprised of teacher-leaders across the school's
content areas. As a member of this team, the principal served as a support and guide to
initiative design decisions that were vetted by the teacher-leaders. In addition, the
improvement initiative included curriculum specialist and the literacy coach. These
experts gave direction, but did not dictate the overall process. Instead a collaborative
decision making process allowed for every teacher to give input and value to Hawk 5
reading strategies initiative. This was done during small group sessions, individual one-
on-one teacher supports, and school-wide learning walks to observe classroom
implementation.

Standard six. "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and
results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and
system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning"
([https://learningforward.org)](https://learningforward.org).

Once the professional learning is selected, data collection continues so as to
assess the program's impact on teacher change and student achievement (Guskey, 2002).
For example, professional learning improvement initiatives that include formative data on

program progress toward goals, improve the likelihood of effective implementation of an

improvement initiative (Guskey, 2002).

When planning professional learning opportunities for improvement, the school

must ensure that the "project meets real and existing needs of all participants" (Erickson,

et al., 2005, p. 795). Using data sources, such as student achievement and teacher input

to identify areas of improvement, will help ensure a "strong agreement from both school

and teacher on the purposes and …perspectives of the project" (Erickson, Brandes,

Mitchell, I., & Mitchell, J., 2005, p. 795).

Teacher observation and feedback of the initiative is a valuable piece of the

assessment process (Klapwijk, 2015; Thomas, 2015). One way to implement teacher

observation is through school learning walks. Learning walks, an organized, informal

observation tool, can be used as a formative assessment to assess the progress of an

improvement initiative (Fisher & Frey, 2014).

Feedback used for reflection is also beneficial in assessing professional learning

and its impact on student's achievement (Nichols, et al., 2008). Teachers gain feedback

when implementing new instructional practice from student engagement and learning. If

teachers don't see a relationship between the professional learning experiences and

observed student learning in their classrooms, the initiative will fail (King & Newmann,

2001; Nichols, et al.2008).

Including teacher feedback from learning walks can help leaders determine

whether the desired outcome or impact is being achieved. Leaders can respond to the

data with adjustments to the professional learning plan. Have the learning outcomes been

achieved? Do teachers need more learning opportunities? Do they need different

opportunities? Do they need specialized or individualized learning opportunities?

   Alignment of teacher capacity-building plan with Learning Forward, standard six. To support the collaborative learning needs of teachers, the Professional Learning Community (PLC) program, already in place at NBMS, was used. In this initiative expectation, PLCs were asked to share their efforts to implement reading instruction and their evaluation of its impact on student learning. PLC teacher groups were to implement one common assessment using the Hawk 5 program, report on its impact on student performance, and the teacher's instructional practice using Hawk 5 reading strategies. PLC groups at NBMS were still working to perfect the PLC initiative, therefore, the leadership/design team put little emphasis on this requirement as the improvement initiative progressed.

   In addition to measuring the PLC use of the initiative, the leadership/design team also used attendance and participation data as a measure of the school-wide effort to implement this change initiative. Data were collected on teacher attendance at the initial training, on-going supports such as refresher sessions and one-on-one work with a leadership team member.

   In assessing the overall impact of the improvement initiative, the principal worked with the leadership/design team to survey teachers following the end of the school year. Other data collected for the purpose of program assessment included leadership/design team meeting minutes and field notes. The field notes are the reflections and observations of the disquisitioner throughout the implementation, and include some notes from the leadership/design team members.

   Standard seven. "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and

results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for

implementation of professional learning for long term change"

(https://learningforward.org).

It is not enough to assert that the solution to poor reading comprehension is the

implementation of reading strategies. The solution must include teacher capacity

building, or as most educators know it, professional development (Fishman, et al., 2003;

Guskey, 2002; Imants, 2002) or professional learning. Unfortunately, many school

leaders provide professional learning at the start of new initiatives but fail to provide

ongoing support--*while* the initiative is underway (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Erickson, et al.,

2005; Fisher & Frey, 2007; Fishman, et al., 2003; Imants, 2002; Matsumura, et al., 2009;

Nichols, et al., 2008; Reed, 2009; Sailors & Price, 2009; Sailors, 2010). To ensure long-

term change, professional learning initiatives must include on-going support and

continuous capacity building.

In research by Draper in 2002, middle school teachers were found to most likely

respond positively to professional learning experiences that offered on-going support, in

contrast to those that occurred in a single-session event. On-going support and follow-up

gives teachers more comfort in implementing new instructional strategies (Klapwijk,

2015; Adams & Pegg, 2012; Nichols, et al., 2008). If teachers aren't supported during

implementation, instructional changes may not occur (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Fletcher, et

al., 2012; Nichols, et al., 2008; Thomas, 2015). When providing professional learning

opportunities, it is critical for leaders to think about teachers as learners. Just like their

students, teachers (and all adults, for that matter) learn at different rates and in different

ways. Some teachers (learners) will need additional time and support to learn the

material (Guskey, 2002). Leaders who design and provide professional learning opportunities must be willing to provide support including adjustment and differentiation of the learning opportunities (Guskey, 2002; King & Newmann, 2001; Sanholtz & Scribner, 2006).

Alignment of teacher capacity-building plan with Learning Forward, standard seven. The creation of the Hawk 5 toolkit employed commonly used research-informed reading strategies. The toolkit itself was designed to be a physical student resource; every student was given a hard-copy for use in every classroom.

Additionally, the literacy coach worked with the media specialist to create and maintain the Hawk 5 web resource page. This resource was used to show best practices during implementation of each strategy, offer instructional use ideas, and document school progress with pictures and student project examples using the Hawk 5 program and toolkit. The web resource was available for parent and student use and included an electronic version of the student toolkit, for use at home.

In creating and implementing the plan for professional learning, the leadership/design team, which included the disquisitioner, purposely and deliberately embedded on-going supports at the school level. Teachers were initially trained in small groups to foster collaboration during learning and teacher-leaders were identified as peer supports to meet the needs of individual teachers.

The disquisitioner also referred to improvement science principals to guide the planning of the improvement initiative. This disquisitioner introduced the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle as described in *The Improvement Guide* (Langley, Moen, Nolan, Nolan, Norman, & Provost, 2009) as a framework for implementation of the desired

improvements. Using this framework allowed for on-going, formative assessment of the

initiative's ability to build teacher capacity. Feedback was welcome as teacher

instructional practice was changed to implement the Hawk 5 reading strategies. The

leadership/design team met regularly to craft responses to teacher feedback, and make

adjustments to the implementation as necessary to ensure teacher capacity-building

efforts were in place.

Timeline of the Improvement Process

An implementation timeline of the Hawk 5 program is provided in Figure 6

(*Implementation Process Timeline*). This visual representation outlines the four phases of

the program and gives a list of the Hawk 5 improvement initiative components

implemented during each phase. Finally, this visual representation (Figure 6) shows the

capacity-building measures embedded to support teachers as learners at each phase, and

build their capacity to implement the Hawk 5 reading strategies into their classroom

instruction. The capacity-building measures are indicated with a check mark, and are

highlighted. Because the disquisitioner is also the principal of NBMS, the start of the

disquisition is identified to separate actions of the principal prior to the improvement

initiative.

Figure 6

Implementation Process Timeline

Aug-Oct 2015	o New principal baseline data collection and review as a function of leadership (not research)
	Disquisition Begins

Nov 2015	Phase I	o Principal & district leaders conduct data review
		o Problem is identified as 'reading'
		o Hawk 5 leadership/design team formed
		  • Improvement plan developed
		  • Reading strategies selected/renamed
		  • Professional learning plan outlined

Dec 2015	Phase II	✓ **Hawk 5 initial training of all NBMS teachers**
Jan-Mar 2016		✓ **Single strategy implemented, bi-weekly, every classroom** ✓ **Single-strategy refresher sessions, bi-weekly** • 5 sessions offered over 10 weeks ✓ **Collaborative teacher group support; common planning time** ✓ **PLC expectation of student improvement and teacher use of Hawk 5 for common assessment** ✓ **Leadership/design team offers one-on-one teacher supports** o School bulletin board with reminders and timeline o Hawk 5 target and popcorn party; formative assessment of teacher use of reading strategies
Mar 2016	Phase III	o Teacher selection of Hawk 5 strategy used during instruction ✓ **Web resources created for teachers and students** o Leadership/design team learning walks; formative assessment • Teacher peer learning walk expectations defined and shared with teachers ✓ **Peer learning walk rubric created**
Apr-May 2016		✓ **School-wide peer learning walks implemented**

Jun-Aug 2016	Phase IV	✓ **Teacher feedback**
		  • surveys
		  • focus group interviews

Aug 2016	Phase V	✓ **Hawk 5 re-training of NBMS teachers; back to school faculty meeting** ✓ **Hawk 5 leadership/design team named for 2016-2017 school year**

During the implementation of the Hawk 5 program for student use, the leadership/design team embedded process supports to address teacher professional learning and capacity-building. Since few middle school teachers see themselves as reading teachers (Phillips, et al., 2009; Thomas, 2015), it was important to this program's success to ensure the needs of the teacher-as-learner were supported (Erickson, et al., 2005; Fishman, et al., 2003; Guskey, 2002; Imants, 2002; King & Newmann, 2001; Reed, 2009). The timeline for implementation, the supports provided to build teacher capacity, and the professional learning standards (Learning Forward, 2015) important to the design, are presented in the following sections.

Phase I: November, 2015. The initial phase of the NBMS improvement initiative included (1) a base-line data review of student reading achievement and growth scores, (2) a focused needs assessment with the stakeholders to support the data review, (3) the selection of the leadership/design team to direct the improvement initiative, (4) the development of a framework for student use of reading strategies, (5) and the development of a teacher capacity-building plan to implement reading strategies into instruction with fidelity.

(1) Prior to the creation of the improvement initiative, the disquisitioner (NBMS principal) and the district level administration completed a review of the school's previous student achievement and growth scores. In addition to the school principal, the data review participants included the associate Superintendent, the middle and high school curriculum specialists (English/Language Arts and social studies, math, and science), and the district data coach. The school's literacy and math coaches were also present. The goal of the meeting was to advise the new principal on the school's current

academic condition, as reflected in school data from previous school years. The school

report card, including student performance and growth, as well as teacher effectiveness

data from the EVAAS system, were outlined and presented. The principal was able to add

her own data, collected from formal and informal classroom observations since her

arrival at NBMS. Once the data were discussed, the group concurred with the principal;

the school should focus on a literacy initiative to improve student performance.

(2) Following the initial data review, data were shared with NBMS school leaders

and a needs assessment took place. Stakeholders supported plans to design and

implement an improvement initiative that focused improvement efforts on increasing

student's ability to read for comprehension. The data review and needs assessment were

presented to all NBMS teachers, the school improvement team, and the parent Advisory

Council by the principal. These stakeholder groups agreed that student reading

performance would most benefit from an improvement initiative.

(3) The selection of the leadership/design team to direct an improvement initiative

was an important step in the improvement initiative. Using teacher leaders adds value to

the improvement initiative (Yager, S., Pedersen, Yager, R., & Noppe, 2011-2012) and

supports the efforts of all teachers to improve instruction. Stated another way, teachers

who feel included in the planning of professional learning have more buy-in and are more

likely to implement the changes (King & Newmann, 2001). The principal, also the

disquisitioner, selected five teacher-leaders to help create the plan for improvement,

called the leadership/design team in this disquisition. Also, the leadership/design team

included the district ELA curriculum specialist, the school literacy coach and the

principal (disquisitioner). The teacher leaders were selected for their content expertise,

their commitment to student improvement at NBMS, and their ability to impact other teachers and the teaching profession.

(4) The improvement framework included a review of the program used in the Anchorage School District for improving student reading performance (Goodman, 2005). The disquisitioner introduced this framework due to its focus on middle school reading performance. It was determined by the leadership/design team that a reading strategies tool kit, with a common language and common strategies, similar to that of the Anchorage School District, would most benefit the needs of students and would promote a school-wide improvement initiative. At this point, the Hawk 5 program was created. The first step taken by the leadership/design team was to finalize the tool kit, created by the literacy coach. The Hawk 5 reading strategies toolkit, which included five research-informed reading strategies, was used as a resource to support teachers and students during the improvement initiative. Having a designed framework for reading strategy instruction that shows measurable results in every classroom, will increase teacher use (capacity building) and therefore, increase student ability to read for comprehension (Klapwijk, 2015; Klapwijk & van der Walt, 2011; Guskey, 2002).

(5) Teacher professional learning is connected to student results (Fishman, et al., 2003). In this improvement initiative, it was important to ensure that building teacher's capacity to implement reading into instructional practices was paramount to all efforts. Not only do the students require training on the use of the strategies, but middle school teachers may lack training in reading for comprehension (Thomas, 2015) as well. The leadership/design team created a timeline for professional learning that included capacity-building supports. It was important to the leadership/design team, and the disquisitioner,

that the framework be outcomes driven. The goals set for the improvement initiative were 1) to build the capacity of all teachers to implement a reading strategies program, and 2) to increase student reading performance. Process goals were also defined to ensure the desired outcomes were met. The process goals included attendance and participation in the professional learning sessions, as well as the addition of peer learning walks to model expectations and generate teacher buy-in.

Phase II: December-March, 2015-2016. Phase II included the initial training and a detailed instructional implementation plan, carried out in every classroom in the school. The following sections outline the components of Phase II and detail the capacity-building supports embedded in the improvement plan.

December, 2015. Phase II included the single session, initial training of teachers from every content area at NBMS. In a traditional professional learning initiative, teachers are most often given a single session training during which an expert gives them resources on how they can improve instruction (Sandholtz &Scribner, 2006). This deficit-based model fails to maximize teacher expertise or even value their point of view (Sanholtz & Scribner, 2006). To counter this traditional model, the improvement initiative was designed to use the teacher resources already present at NBMS. Teacher-leaders, and members of the leadership/design team, served as the 'trainers' for this initial professional learning session.

In addition, the teachers of NBMS were not trained using a traditional, whole-school session. Instead, smaller teacher groups, defined by teacher planning times, were assembled. The method allowed for smaller, content focused discussion during the introductory professional learning activity and fostered collaboration immediately. The

session 'trainers' also shared this same common planning time and provided themselves as a resource for teachers once the improvement efforts began. Further, the small group sessions occurred on the same day. This ensured all teachers at NBMS were able to share the common goals, have a collective perspective, and collaborate immediately on instructional plans.

January-March, 2016. Continued during Phase II, the Hawk 5 reading strategies program was implemented in an organized, 10-week timeline. In addition, the program embedded the Learning Forward standards for professional learning to ensure the goal of building teacher capacity to implement reading strategies as instructional practice was achieved. These capacity building components included (1) expectations for learning communities to assess student reading and adapt instructional practices when using the Hawk 5 toolkit, (2) expectations of teacher participation in bi-weekly, refresher sessions, and (3) the leadership/design team's facilitation of on-going, individual teacher instructional support.

(1) Learning communities are a component of successful professional learning and provide teachers with peer collaboration and feedback (Learning Forward, 2015). By setting an expectation for the already established learning communities to assess student reading and adapt instructional practices when using the Hawk 5 toolkit, a reflection process was embedded in the improvement initiative (Klapwijk & van der Walt, 2011; Reed, 2009). The improvement initiative was designed to allow for teacher collaboration when implementing the Hawk 5 strategies. The leadership/design team added a PLC expectation of use of the Hawk 5 reading strategies for a common assessment of student reading comprehension. Ideally, this would provide teachers with data on the use of the

Hawk 5 program and its impact on student learning in their own classrooms, therefore possibly increasing their capacity to introduce reading into instructional practice.

(2) The implementation and process timeline (Figure 6) included the classroom use of a single reading strategy for a two-week period in each classroom, to support student immersion in use of the strategy. This portion of the Hawk 5 process is outlined previously in Table 2 (*The Hawk 5 Toolkit).* To support the teacher as a learner, a refresher session for each strategy's instructional use was offered at the start of the two-week immersion. The refresher session, offered during collaborative planning time during the school day, provided teachers the opportunity to work with their peers on lesson plans that incorporated the next reading strategy to be implemented. "Teacher learning is most likely to occur when teachers have opportunities to collaborate with professional peers" (King & Newmann, 2001, p. 1).

Observable classroom use of the Hawk 5 toolkit during instruction was an expectation of the improvement initiative. Since teachers will use the strategies if they have seen success in their own classrooms (Klapwijk & van der Walt, 2011; Reed, 2009), this time to collaborate on lesson planning with support from peers, served as another capacity building resource.

Teacher members of the leadership/design team served as facilitators in the refresher sessions. To show administrative support of shared leadership, (Matsumura, et al., 2010), funding for substitutes was budgeted by the principal. The teacher refresher session process continued for each of the five reading strategies, covering a 10-week timeline. To support teachers as professional learners and instructional experts, they were not required to attend the refresher sessions.

(3) Each session started with instructional examples, provided by the leadership/design team members for use of the reading strategies toolkit. This face-to-face instructional support allowed for content specific discussion about the implementation of the Hawk 5 program. In addition to this collaborative learning environment, the leadership/design team members offered individual instructional support to NBMS teachers. This included lesson planning, locating reading material for non-text classrooms such as physical education, and additional resource materials as requested. "(O)ngoing schoolwide initiatives that are responsive to teachers' perceived needs hold promise for increasing literacy instruction across the curriculum and improving some student reading skills" (Reed, 2009, p. 1).

Phase III: March-May, 2016. In this phase of the improvement initiative, the NBMS faculty selected and applied the Hawk 5 reading strategy toolkit as appropriate for instruction and learning, without a directed school timeline or refresher sessions. The leadership/design team continued to use professional learning standards (Learning Forward, 2015) to support capacity building and teacher growth during this phase. The on-going, capacity-building supports included (1) enhanced web-based resources to include classroom examples of best practices and additional teacher and student resources, (2) the leadership/design team use of learning walks for formative assessment of the improvement initiative, (3) the creation of a school protocol and timeline for teacher-peer learning walks (to allow for teacher review of the Hawk 5 program in all classrooms), and (4) the implementation of peer learning walks.

March, 2016. (1) A webpage was created as a resource for students, parents and teachers. The leadership/design team created and maintained the web-based resources to

include school examples of best practices and additional resources. The Hawk 5

webpage, accessible from the NBMS web page (https://nbms.buncombeschools.org/),

provides parents and students with information on the reading program, an electronic

version of the Hawk 5 toolkit, and exemplars and photos from classroom lessons.

(2) To assess the progress of the Hawk 5 improvement initiative, and its impact

on the teacher's capacity to implement reading during instruction, the leadership/design

team used learning walks for formative data collection. The disquisitioner used the

learning walk format, as outlined by Fisher and Frey (2014), to train the

leadership/design team members. The team then conducted their own learning walks to

assess the implementation plan and classroom instructional use. The learning walk format

included informal classroom observations in which small groups of three-four team

members observed a classroom for no more than fifteen minutes. During this time, the

group observed only; there was no interaction with the students or teachers during the

learning walk. Once the group had left the classroom, a brief discussion was held on the

observable components of the Hawk 5 program. Notes were taken and recorded as field

notes by the disquisitioner. In addition, the classroom learning walk notes were used by

the leadership/design team to assess the program's progress and to create a protocol for

peer (teacher) learning walks.

(3) A school-wide timeline and protocol for peer learning walks was offered as an

embedded support to the teacher-as-learner. The leadership/design team created a

protocol for planned, informal peer observations, or learning walks. This was the first

introduction of learning walks at NBMS. Important to capacity-building, the

disquisitioner recognized the need to allow for time for teacher review of the

implementation (King & Newmann, 2001). The data and notes collected by the

leadership/design team were used to create a rubric for teacher use during peer learning

walks.

April-May, 2016. (4) Teachers benefit from professional learning that includes the

opportunity to observe the learned strategies in use during instruction (Adams & Pegg,

2012), as is the case with learning walks for peer observation. "Teachers who go on non-

evaluative walk-throughs of their colleagues' classrooms can learn how to improve their

own instruction" (Fisher & Frey, 2014, p. 58). The peer learning walk protocol was

implemented over a two-month period. During this time, teachers were asked to

participate as a walker/observer at least two times. The classrooms to be observed were

unplanned, however, the date of the learning walk was announced so that every teacher

would be prepared for classroom visits. Fisher and Frey (2014), to build teacher capacity,

note that "the goal of learning walks is to make it part of the professional learning of the

entire faculty" (p. 60). The leadership/design team incorporated this theory by setting a

required participation expectation.

Phase IV: June-August, 2016. Following the end of the student school year,

teachers were invited to give feedback on the improvement initiative. Surveys were sent

electronically to all teachers via their school email accounts. Responses were anonymous

and voluntary. Teachers were asked to report on their student learning experiences, but

also on their own experiences in learning and implementing the reading strategies. Two

surveys were administered and survey questions are provided (see Appendix D).

In addition to anonymous surveys, teachers were invited to attend focus group

interviews with the disquisitioner. These focus group sessions provided more detail on

how teacher' used and perceived the improvement initiative. Three focus group sessions were offered: (1) the leadership/design team members, (2) the grade 7 and 8 science teachers, and (3) a mixed content area and mixed grade level focus group.

During this final phase, data from teacher feedback, along with student achievement data from EOG reading tests, were used to assess the program's impact on teacher capacity to implement reading strategies and student reading performance. Once data were collected, the results were shared with teachers and the Hawk 5 leadership/design team members. This data aided in decision-making about the future implementation of the Hawk 5 program.

Methods for the Evaluation of the Improvement Methodology

In this section, details are provided about the evaluation methods used to assess the progress of the goals and the impact of the improvement methodology. In evaluating any change initiative, it is critical to collect both formative (data collected throughout the improvement initiative to determine if the initiative is working in order to adjust the process) and summative (data collected at the end of the improvement initiative) assessment data (Bryk, et al., 2015). Both processes were completed, however, formative data analysis results were not included because the data were collected prior to Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and was not approved for use in subsequent applications. To uphold the ethical standards of the IRB, this disquisition does not include any formative assessment data or data analysis from the start of the improvements at NBMS (already in place prior to the disquisition process) through to the IRB approval, specifically from December, 2015 to June, 2016. Although data were not

provided, a description of the formative assessment processes is provided, followed by

summative evaluation methods and results.

Formative Assessment Measures

Formative assessment refers to data collected *during* the improvement initiative,

as opposed to summative data which are collected at the end of implementation (Bryk, et

al., 20015). The collection of data to measure the process goals was collected during the

improvement initiative cycle by the NBMS leadership/design team. Process goals were

set by the leadership design team to address the professional learning process as it was

occurring. The process goals were: (1) teacher participation in the on-going support

sessions, and (2) teacher participation in peer learning walks. These data are beneficial in

attempting to answer the question, "Is the improvement initiative working?" These

answers aided the leadership/design team as they considered possible changes and/or

alterations to the implementation plan. For inclusion in this disquisition, only summative,

quantitative data are examined in relationship to the process goals.

The leadership team followed the PDSA cycle (Langley, et al., 2009) and

formatively assessed the program details, made changes to keep momentum and support

going, and redirected program expectations to meet program goals. The leadership/design

team's formative assessment measures are outlined in Table 4 below. The following

paragraphs reference the formative assessment steps used to meet program goals.

Table 4

Leadership/Design Team Formative Assessment Measures

Timeline	Teacher Capacity-Building Component	Leadership/Design Team's Formative Assessment Measures
Phase I Dec 2015	Whole school introduction and initial training	Teacher attendance Teacher participation
Phase II Jan-Mar 2016	Bi-weekly refresher sessions	Teacher attendance Teacher participation Teacher questions
	Web resources added	Teacher use of web resources Teacher additions of lesson ideas and classroom photos using the Hawk 5
	Bulletin board with dates, data and reminders	Teacher comments
	Hawk 5 target assessment	Teachers self-report the number of times each Hawk 5 reading strategy was used each week
	PLC common assessment with Hawk 5	Common lessons and assessments using Hawk 5
Phase III Apr-May 2016	Leadership team conducted learning walks	Observation of instructional use of Hawk 5
	Peer learning walks	Teacher attendance Teacher comments Teacher participation

The leadership team implemented a web resources page for teacher use. This

resource was a place for teachers to access an electronic version of the toolkit and share

suggestions about instructional use of reading for comprehension. During the Phase II, the team created a bulletin board in a central location of the school (Appendix C). This visual resource provided an overview of the program timeline, data sources, and resources.

Another expectation of the Hawk 5 program was teacher collaboration and common use of the toolkit. Teacher PLC teams were given an expectation of creating a common lesson using the Hawk 5 strategies and teacher assessment of student ability to comprehend reading material.

To check on teacher perception of their own progress, the leadership team held a teacher 'popcorn party'. The leadership team felt the teachers needed a support booster and a reminder of the importance of the initiative. A large, paper, bullseye target was created that displayed each reading strategy (see Appendix B). Teachers were given stickers to add each time they used a strategy during the duration of the Hawk 5 initiative. Introduced at the end of Phase II, the teachers were able to give formative feedback on the number of times they used the strategies. The leadership team used this to formatively assess the use the toolkit, and buy-in for the program.

The leadership/design team's plan included another layer of support to the improvement initiative in order to address the second process goal of implementing learning walks. Peer learning walks were to be implemented school-wide. The purpose was to provide peer to peer feedback, examples of reading used during instruction, and overall understanding of the school's culture of learning. The Hawk 5 leadership/design team developed a rubric to be used during the peer learning walks (see Appendix A). The leadership team first completed learning walks using the rubric. Later, the learning walk

expectation was added to the embedded supports for building teacher capacity. Of the five learning walk sessions scheduled, teachers were expected to participate in two sessions. The leadership/design team kept learning walk participation data in addition to teacher comments and observations of Hawk 5 use.

To assess buy-in for the Hawk 5 initiative, teacher participation was also measured by teacher-reported use of the toolkit at periodic check-ins. Flipped faculty meetings, PLC minutes, and peer learning walk informal observations were used to inform the leadership/design team as to the progress of the program and teacher ability to implement reading as instructional practice. Initially, the leadership/design team requested PLC teams submit lesson plans, formative assessments and meeting minutes in which reading was used for classroom assessment.

Teachers were asked to share best practices with PLC's and grade level teams. The leadership team monitored this request in team meetings and were able to add them to the web-based Hawk 5 resource page (Appendix D). Photos of classrooms engaged in reading comprehension activities, using the Hawk 5 toolkit, were included in the public web page (see Appendix D).

Summative Assessment Measures

A mixed-methods design was used to collect and analyze data to determine: (1) whether the desired outcomes were achieved and (2) the impact of the improvement initiative. Before discussing those methods, it is important to re-state the original expected outcomes:

- Increased **teacher** capacity to *implement* research-supported reading comprehension strategies

- Improved **student** reading *achievement/ performance* across subjects

"The purpose of a convergent mixed methods design is to simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to understand a research problem" (Creswell, J.W., 2012). In this disquisition, quantitative (QUAN) and qualitative (QUAL) data sources are given equal value to the evaluation of the improvement initiative and were collected simultaneously. In using a mixed methods design, the disquisitioner ensured that student performance scores on state exams were not the only source of evaluation of the improvement initiative. Understanding that student performance scores cannot be the only indicator of an improvement initiative (King & Newmann, 2001; Guskey, 2002; Guskey, 2012), teacher professional learning is at the center of this disquisition. It is the evaluation of the relationship between teacher professional growth and student performance that will converge to provide results of this improvement initiative's impact at NBMS.

A convergence diagram of the relationship of quantitative and qualitative data used in the evaluation of the improvement initiative is illustrated in Figure7 (*Data Collection Process)*, as is necessary to a mixed methods design (Creswell, 2012). As discussed previously, this collection process reflects summative data.

Figure 7

Data Collection Process
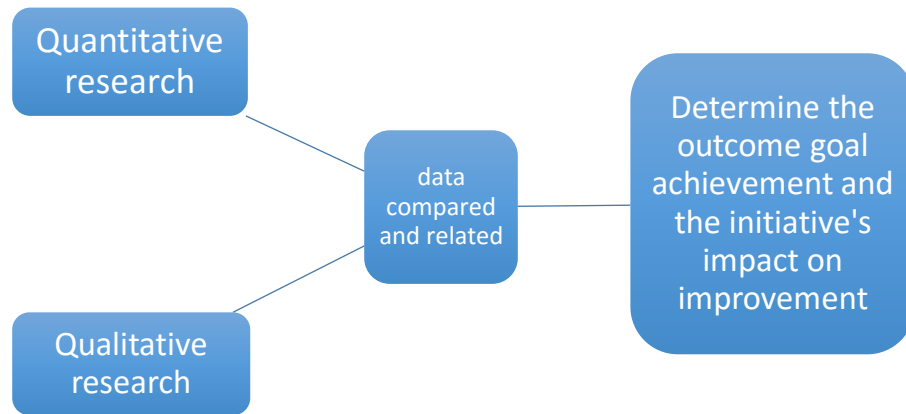
Before providing two separate discussions on the quantitative and qualitative

measures and processes used in this disquisition, a summary table, (Table 4) is provided

showing the relationship between outcome goals and the processes used to measure those

goals. As presented in *Learning to Improve: How America's Schools can get Better at

Getting Better* (Bryk, et al., 2015), measuring an improvement initiative's impact

includes multiple data indicators. "School systems now collect more data than ever"

(Bryk, et al., 2015, p. 91). Student performance measures are at the forefront of this data

collection, but they "rarely provide the detail needed to help teachers and schools actually

improve" (Bryk, et al., 2015, p. 91). Measurement for improvement, according to Bryk,

et al., (2015) supports a "system of continuous learning" (p. 98) and help to measure

"whether progress is being made on the specific problem to be solved" (p. 103).

Following this example, this disquisitioner used an assessment framework (Table 5, *Data

Measures)* that assess measurement for improvement by connecting the data collected to

the outcome goals to determine results.

Table 5

Data Measures

Improvement Goals	Quantitative Measures	Qualitative Measures
Outcomes • increased teacher capacity to implement reading strategies • increased student performance	• Student EOG reading scores • Survey results from 2 surveys	• Focus group responses (attitudinal) • Open-ended survey comments (attitudinal)

In this section, quantitative data collection methods and qualitative data collection methods are presented separately. Each individual data collection method description includes (1) a definition of the data source and what it is generally used to report, (2) what the data source is intended to measure, specifically in this disquisition and, (3) the validity and reliability of each data source.

Quantitative measures. In measuring for improvement, the use of quantitative data methods is useful in the comparison of two variables while assessing the impact of the improvement initiative (Bryk, et al., 2015; Creswell, 2012). Quantitative data methods used in this disquisition are defined as numerical data collected and statistically evaluated in comparison to the desired outcomes.

During Phase IV of the improvement initiative, the leadership/design team collected quantitative data relevant to the desired outcomes of the improvement initiative. This disquisition specifically used the following data collection types:

- NC End of Grade Reading exam, student performance and growth scores

- Survey 1: intended to learn about teacher perceptions of the importance of reading in their classrooms following the initiative

- Survey 2: intended to learn about teacher perceptions of the professional learning supports offered during the improvement initiative, and the impact on classroom instruction.

NC End of Grade reading exam. Student EOG Reading performance and growth scores provide some evidence of student learning. The NC End of Grade reading exam is given to all students, in grades 3-8, and is aligned with the NC Standard Course of Study for ELA/reading (NCDPI, 2016). The exam is used to measure a student's ability to meet grade level performance standards. This disquisitioner considered all data sources, including the state mandated EOG reading scores to assess the improvement initiative's impact on increasing student reading performance, a specific outcome goal of the initiative. Although the EOG exams are given at the end of the school year, teachers see this test score as a culmination of what was learned and the student's ability to apply that learning (King & Newmann, 2001; Fishman, et al., 2003; Klapwijk, 2015; Klapwijk & van der Walt, 2011; Thomas, 2015).

The reliability and validity of the EOG exam is reported by the NC Department of Public Instruction accountability standards reports. "Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure when the testing procedure is repeated on a population of individuals or groups…(t)est scores must be reliable if any valid inferences are to be made on examinees' performances. The North Carolina Statewide Testing Program meets or exceeds industry norms for reliability" (NCDPI, 2014).

Survey 1. In Survey 1, teachers at NBMS were asked to reflect on the Hawk 5 initiative. As in similar professional learning studies, the survey was used as a data collection method so as to allow for teacher input as to how the professional learning supports impacted their classroom instruction (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Fishman, et al., 2003; Klapwijk, 2015; Thomas, 2015). Survey 1 contained four, closed-ended questions. The survey was open to teachers from the end of June, 2016 through July, 2016.

Teachers were asked to reflect on their perception of the use of reading in their content area, as well as in creating their own lesson plans. Specifically, teachers were asked to reflect on their own professional growth through the implementation of peer learning walks as a part of the Hawk 5 improvement initiative. In addition, teachers were also asked to rank the ten, on-going professional learning supports offered to them throughout the improvement initiative. Learning walks was included in this list of on-going supports.

The evaluation of the impact of the school-wide professional learning supports offered as a driver for the improvement initiative's desired outcome of building teacher capacity to implement reading comprehension strategies, required data collection methods that would assess teacher accountability in the improvement initiative. Survey 1 was used as a data collection method to measure the teacher's perception of their ability to implement the Hawk 5 research-informed reading strategies into classroom instruction.

Quantitative data analysis was used to measure the on-going support sessions offered to teachers, as teacher attitudes and beliefs about the support sessions may be a reflection of improved teacher capacity to implement reading for comprehension. Following the improvement initiative, a rating scale survey (see Appendix E) was used to

assess teacher perceptions on their use of the strategy, the support offered and gained, and the impact on student learning in their classrooms.

Survey 1 was sent to NBMS teacher via their school email accounts. The disquisitioner, also the school's principal, used Qualtrics data collection software to send and collect the responses. All questions were designed by the disquisitioner and were shared with the leadership/design team prior to survey distribution. The software ensured respondents could not complete the survey more than once. Teachers were given informed consent forms prior to any data collection, including this survey. Teachers were informed the survey answers were anonymous, meaning the disquisitioner was unable to connect responses to individual teachers. The survey was also voluntary; the disquisitioner could not discern which teachers had not completed the survey. Those excluded from the survey were student teachers, substitutes, teacher assistants, and non-instructional school staff. To protect the validity of the survey, teachers were also informed that any evaluation of job performance and expectation was in no way related to responses to the survey.

Survey 2. A second survey, Survey 2, was created later in the disquisition process. This survey contained 13 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question for teacher feedback. The survey was open to teachers in February, 2017 as a follow-up to the initial survey.

The questions in Survey 2 connected the on-going supports offered during the improvement initiative to the teacher's perception of the impact on the teacher's ability to understand the Hawk 5 program. Similarly, questions were asked specific to each on-going support offered, and the teacher's perception of the impact of the support on their

ability to integrate the Hawk 5 reading strategies program into classroom instruction. The

survey also asked teachers to reflect on the improvement of student reading

comprehension in their classrooms.

As a data collection measure, Survey 2 was used to assess the desired outcome

goals: 1) increased teacher capacity to implement research-supported reading

comprehension strategies into instruction, and 2) improved student

achievement/performance across middle school subject areas. Additionally, the desired

outcome of improved student ability to access and comprehend text for learning course

material, included in the disquisitioner's theory to improve student achievement, was

assessed with this data source.

Survey 2 was also sent to NBMS teacher via their school email accounts. The

disquisitioner, also the school's principal, used Qualtrics data collection software to send

and collect the responses. All questions were designed by the disquisitioner. The software

ensured respondents could not complete the survey more than once. Teachers were

reminded of the previously collected informed consent forms prior to any data collection.

Teachers were reminded the survey answers were anonymous, meaning the disquisitioner

was unable to connect responses to individual teachers. The survey was also voluntary;

the disquisitioner could not discern which teachers had not completed the survey.

Those excluded from the survey were student teachers, substitutes, teacher

assistants, and non-instructional school staff. Because of the timing of this survey,

teachers new to NBMS for the current school year were also excluded from this survey,

since their professional learning experience with the Hawk 5 program involved variations

to the initial experience. To protect the validity of the survey, teachers were also

informed that any evaluation of job performance and expectation was in no way related to responses to the survey.

Qualitative measures. In measuring for improvement, qualitative data collection methods are used to incorporate a participant's experiences into the research (Bryk, et al., 2015; Creswell, 2012). In contrast to the quantitative data collection methods outlined previously, qualitative measures use open-ended questions and may require more personal data collection (Creswell, 2012). This data collection method is a valuable resource when assessing an improvement initiative's impact on desired outcomes (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative methods used in this disquisition were gathered form these attitudinal, summative data sources to assess the teacher's attitudes and beliefs about the improvement initiative's impact.

During Phase IV of the improvement initiative, the leadership/design team collected qualitative data relevant to the desired outcomes of the improvement initiative. In measuring for improvement (Bryk, et al., 2015), this disquisition specifically used the following data types:

- Open-ended feedback in Survey 2

- Transcription of focus group responses.

Survey 2. Survey 2 gave NBMS teachers the opportunity to provide direct feedback to the leadership/design team. The survey included a question asking for additional comments or feedback concerning the Hawk 5 program and/or professional learning. This question provided overall reflection of the initiative, as it was administered following all other data collection methods.

Survey 2 was sent to NBMS teacher via their school email accounts. The disquisitioner, also the school's principal, used Qualtrics data collection software to send and collect the responses. All questions were designed by the disquisitioner. The software ensured respondents could not complete the survey more than once. Teachers were reminded of the previously signed informed consent forms prior to any data collection. Teachers were reminded all survey answers were anonymous, meaning the disquisitioner was unable to connect responses to individual teachers. The survey was also voluntary; the disquisitioner could not discern which teachers had not completed the survey.

Those excluded from the survey were student teachers, substitutes, teacher assistants, and non-instructional school staff. Because of the timing of this survey, teachers new to NBMS for the current school year were also excluded from this survey, since their professional learning experience with the Hawk 5 program involved variations to the initial experience. To protect the validity of the survey, teachers were also informed that any evaluation of job performance and expectation was in no way related to responses to the survey.

Focus groups. Three opportunities were created for teacher participation in a focus group for data collection. The three focus group sessions included the leadership/design team, the science teachers, in both grades 7 and 8, and a mixed subject area group including all teachers volunteering to participate. The disquisitioner led each focus group in an open- discussion format.

This qualitative collection method, provides evidence to the impact of the improvement initiative on teachers as reported through open-ended questions and group discussions. The data were used to assess the initiative's impact on both outcome goals of

building teacher capacity to implement research-supported reading comprehension strategies, and the initiative's ability to improve student achievement/performance across subjects.

Teacher attitudes about their own learning may be effected by peer observation and modeling of instructional practice (Erickson, et al., 2005; Fishman, et al., 2003; Imants, 2002; King & Newmann, 2001). To this end, learning walks were implemented as a process goal to allow for peer observation and review. Comments from teachers about the addition of learning walks are used to assess this process goal as a step to building teacher capacity. Questions specific to learning walks are included in the focus group interviews. It was predicted this data method would offer important teacher feedback on the impact of the improvement initiative on teacher and therefore, student learning.

All teachers at NBMS were provided with informed consent prior to being asked to participate. Specifically, the informed consent outlined the focus group data collection methods. In this qualitative data collection method, the focus group sessions were audio recorded, and then were transcribed professionally using online, transcription software. The disquisitioner made minor adjustments to the transcription where the transcription service had misunderstood the teacher's dialect. No adjustments were made to inaudible responses. The transcriptions were then analyzed by the disquisitioner, including the use of coding to report major and minor themes in the comments as to measure for improvement. Member checking, which allows for participants to review the accuracy of the transcription (Creswell, 2012), was used to validate the data collected. Each focus group participant was provided a copy of the transcribed interview. Teachers were asked

to make any corrections and to offer feedback to the disquisitioner. No corrections were

necessary according to the member checking process.

Summative evaluation methods, both quantitative and qualitative, were used to

assess the initiative's impact on the desired outcome goals and are summarized in Table 6

below. The individual goal is listed in the left column. The data source used for

assessment of the goal is then listed in the next column. For each data source, summative

data collected, if applicable, are included. All summative data was collected during Phase

IV of the improvement initiative.

Table 6

Evaluative Data Sources

	Data Source	
	Quantitative	**Qualitative**
Outcome Goal 1: Increased **teacher** capacity to *implement* research-supported reading comprehension strategies	Survey 1 Survey 2	Focus Groups Survey 2
Outcome Goal 2: Improved **student** *achievement/ performance* across subjects, through improved ability to read for comprehension	EOG Reading scores Survey 2	Focus Groups

Improvement Methodology Evaluation Results

As previously stated, only summative data methods were used for the evaluation of improvement initiative for reporting in this disquisition, due to the timing of IRB approval for data collection methods. This summative data was evaluated in comparison to the initiative's outcome goals.

Summative Evaluation Results

Data collection methods were employed at the end of the school year, during Phase IV, to for the purpose of evaluating the desired outcomes of the improvement initiative. These data methods included two attitudinal surveys, three focus group interview sessions, and state End of Grade reading test scores. The survey questions can

be found in the evaluation where appropriate, and the complete surveys can be located in

the appendix (see Appendix E & F). Survey results are noted in this section.

     The summative data were used in analyzing and identifying the improvement

initiative's ability to build teacher capacity as a driver for improving student reading

comprehension. The leadership team reviewed the results to check for accuracy. Once the

leadership/design team was confident their analysis was appropriate, plans were made to

publish the results of the initiative so as to inform future professional learning efforts at

NBMS.

     In the following paragraphs, outcome and process goals are reiterated followed by

summative data results indicating goal achievement.

     Outcome Goal 1: build teacher capacity to successfully implement reading

into daily, instructional practice. Outcome goal 1 was assessed using summative data

collected from both qualitative and quantitative data sources. Each of these data

instruments is listed below and data addressing the goal are provided. Following each

data instrument, a statement is made in regards to the results of the data collected and the

evaluation of the achievement of the outcome goal.

     Survey 1. In this quantitative data source, NBMS teachers were asked in a follow-

up survey to reflect on the resources offered to provide on-going support during the

professional learning initiative. The survey question used in this assessment is provided

below.

     Question 4: In thinking about YOUR professional learning process, please rank

the following list of supports offered to you during the Hawk 5 initiative. You may 'drag

and drop' your selections in order, with 1 representing the MOST beneficial support you

were offered.

The 10 supports offered: Toolkit

- *Literacy coach*

- *Principal's reminders*

- *Hawk 5 leaders*

- *Target for formative assessment*

- *PLC use of Hawk 5*

- *Team planning for Hawk 5 use*

- *2-week, single-strategy and implementation, school-wide*

- *learning walks/ evidence of reading*

- *follow-up refresher sessions*

In ranking the 10 offered supports, this question was used to assess the

improvement initiative's method for using on-going, embedded teacher supports to build

capacity to implement the Hawk 5 program. Finding trends in the responses would

indicate a possible relationship between the teacher's perception of support and their own

learning, therefore suggesting the teacher felt their own learning had been impacted,

building capacity.

The disquisitioner categorized the 10 resources into four resource types (Figure 8,

Capacity-Building Supports by Category Type) in an effort to identify trends. Figure 8,

Capacity-Building Supports by Category Type, shows the category types identified and

the corresponding resources offered.

Figure 8

Capacity-Building Supports by Category Type
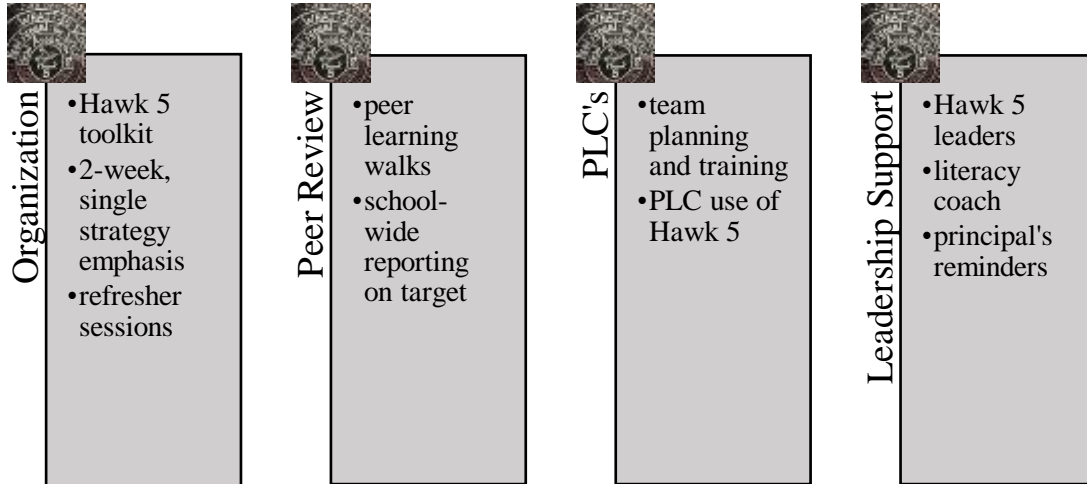
From Survey 1 data results, Table 7, *Teacher Ranking of Capacity-Building Supports*, trends are noted in the teacher's ranking of individual supports offered to them throughout the initiative. Teachers report resources from the 'organization' category were the most beneficial supports offered impacting their own professional learning process. The 'toolkit' was reported to have the highest favorability with 69.2% of teachers ranking this individual resource as most beneficial (ranking placement of 1-3 on scale of 10). Comparatively, those resources categorized as 'peer review' were reported to be the least beneficial to the teacher's own professional learning. Teachers ranked 'learning walks' as one of the least beneficial (ranking placement of 8-10 on scale of 10) individual supports offered during the initiative.

Table 7

Teacher Ranking of Capacity-Building Supports

Category Type	Capacity-Building Support	Most beneficial Ranked 1-3 (Scale 1-10)
Organization	Toolkit	69.2%
	2-week, single strategy, school-wide	53.8%
	Refresher sessions	42.3%
Category Type	**Capacity-Building Support**	**Least beneficial** Ranked 8-10 (Scale 1-10)
Peer Review	Learning Walks	57.6%
	School-wide reporting on target	50.0%

This quantitative data collected from Survey 1 represent the evaluation of outcome goal 1, the improvement initiative's ability to build teacher capacity to implement reading strategies into instruction. In identifying a trend in teacher rankings of the capacity-building supports, those supports associated with the 'organization' of the initiative were sighted by teachers as the most beneficial; no other category was identified in this 'most beneficial' ranking. As stated in the theoretical framework of the improvement initiative, teacher use of the on-going embedded supports may have an impact on their capacity to implement reading comprehension strategies. The quantitative data from Survey 1 suggests that teachers perceived the organizational supports to have the most benefit to them as a learner, therefore, possibly serving as capacity-building supports and meeting the desired outcome.

Survey 2. A second electronic survey asked teachers to specifically identify if the on-going supports available during the improvement initiative were sufficient to build their capacity to implement the Hawk 5 reading strategies program into instructional practice. This data collection method included both quantitative and qualitative methods, to evaluate the initiative relative to the outcome goal of increasing teacher capacity to implement reading comprehension strategies into instruction. Survey 2 is provided in Appendix F in its entirety.

A series of questions in Survey 2 were specific to the teacher's perception of the individual supports offered and their understanding of the Hawk 5 program as well their ability to teach or integrate the Hawk 5 reading strategies program. Those questions are included here.

*Question 1: Did the <u>initial training session</u> of the professional learning (PD) offered on Dec. 16, 2015, increase your **understanding** of the Hawk 5 program?*

*Question 2: Did the <u>initial training session</u> of the professional learning (PD) offered on Dec. 16, 2015, help you **teach, or integrate** the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?*

*Question 3: Did the <u>follow-up refresher</u> session increase your **understanding** of the Hawk 5 program?*

*Question 4: Did the <u>follow-up refresher</u> session help you **teach or integrate** the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?*

*Question 5: Did the <u>web resources</u> (including the digital toolkit) increase your **understanding** of the Hawk 5 program?*

Question 6: Did the <u>web resources</u> (including the digital toolkit) help you to **teach or integrate** *the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?*

Question 7: Did the <u>learning walks</u> increase your **understanding** *of the Hawk 5 program?*

Question 8: Did the <u>learning walks</u> help you **teach or integrate** *the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?*

Question 9: Did the support provided by the <u>literacy coach and the leadership team</u> increase your **understanding** *of the Hawk 5 program?*

Question 10: Did the support provided by the <u>literacy coach and the leadership team</u> help you **teach or integrate** *the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?*

This series of questions was asked so as to specifically connect the teacher's perception of the individual, on-going supports offered and support's impact on the teacher's perceived ability to understand and teach the Hawk 5 reading strategies. Quantitative data reported the percentage of teacher responses to the individual questions, and may, however, be important when analyzing the impact of the improvement initiative. For example, teacher's responses can be categorized into those that reflect the teachers reported ability to teach or integrate the Hawk 5 reading strategies into instruction. The results are illustrated in Figure 9, *Comparison of Teacher Understanding and Ability to Teach/Integrate Hawk 5,* below and provide the percentages of teachers who responded 'yes' to each of the individual questions.

Figure 9

Comparison of Teacher Understanding and Ability to Teach/Integrate Hawk 5
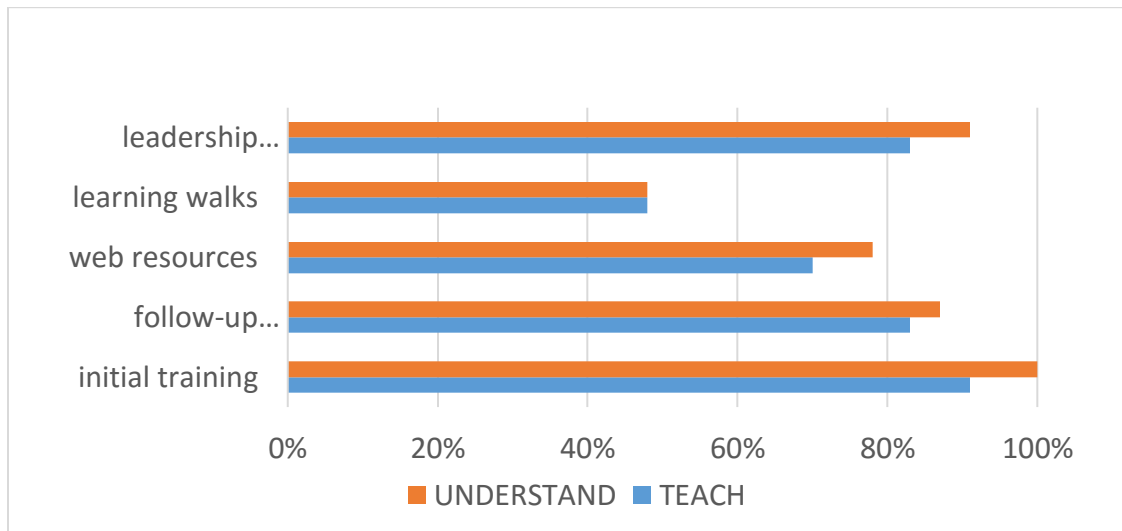
As reported in Survey 2, questions 1-9, the largest percentage of teachers perceived the initial training and on-going leadership support to have the most impact on their ability to understand and teach/integrate the Hawk 5 reading strategies program. In comparison, the same series of questions from Survey 2 show learning walks were reported by the fewest percentage of teachers as having an impact on their ability to understand or integrate the Hawk 5 program.

Additionally, Survey 2 asked teachers: *Question 11: Do you believe the professional learning supports offered (learning walks, refreshers, initial training session, help from the Hawk 5 leaders) were sufficient for developing your capacity to teach the Hawk 5 reading strategies?* In response to this question, 91% of NBMS replied "yes" and 9% replied "maybe" (Survey 2, 2017).

This quantitative data collected from Survey 2 represent the evaluation of outcome goal 1, the improvement initiative's ability to build teacher capacity to

implement reading strategies into instruction. The data show that, other than learning walks, 69% of NBMS teachers report the Hawk 5 embedded supports increased their ability to understand and teach/integrate the Hawk 5 reading strategies into their classroom instruction. In addition, Survey 2 data shows that 100% of NBMS report the possibility that the professional learning supports offered were sufficient in developing their capacity to teach the Hawk 5 strategies (Survey 2, 2017). The desired outcome of increased teacher capacity to implement a reading strategies initiative was met according to Survey 2 quantitative data.

Focus groups. Teachers were interviewed during voluntary focus group sessions following the first school year of the improvement initiative's implementation to gain qualitative data to evaluate the outcome goal of building teacher capacity to implement reading strategies into instruction. Three focus group sessions collected qualitative data and included the following groups: (1) the Hawk 5 leadership team, which includes five classroom teachers from various content areas and the literacy coach, (2) all science teachers from both seventh and eighth grade, and (3) a mixed content group consisting of two social studies teachers, one from each grade level, and one eighth grade ELA teacher. All teachers at the school were invited to participate in the focus group sessions.

The transcripts from each of the focus group interviews were broken down into four coded categories (Table 8, *Focus Group Interview Themes*). The categories emerged during second-cycle coding in which teacher comments were found to reflect four general themes; the general organization (ORG) of the Hawk 5 program, teacher needs or concerns as an adult learner (ADU), the issues relating to instruction using the toolkit (IMPL), and teacher-reported student use of the toolkit, including student reading

comprehension and student comments to teachers (STU). Table 8 further defines the

coding process, giving definitions and examples of each coded theme used.

Table 8

Focus Group Interview Themes

Emerging Themes	Definition	Examples of teacher comment topics
Organization (ORG)	Perception of school-wide improvement process	H5 leaders, principal, literacy coach, learning walks, formative assessment, coworker resources
Adult (ADU)	Perception of capacity-building process	PLC use, team planning, collaboration, supports offered to teacher as learner
Implementation (IMPL)	Perception of improvement process within classroom	Toolkit, two-week single strategy emphasis, refresher sessions, instructional support
Student (STU)	Perception of student experiences with Hawk 5	Student comments about use of toolkit in all classrooms; common language

Once categories were assigned, patterns emerged in the focus group data (Table 8,

Focus Group Interview Themes). The categorical comments were then coded once more

to assess if the teacher's comments were favorable (teacher reported capacity-building

with the Hawk 5 professional learning) or adverse (teacher reported their capacity was

not increased during the Hawk 5 professional learning). The outcome goal to increase

teacher capacity to implement reading as instructional practice was then assessed using

this thematic coding system (Figure 10, *Teacher Comments During Focus Group*

Interviews).

Figure 10

Teacher Comments During Focus Group Interviews
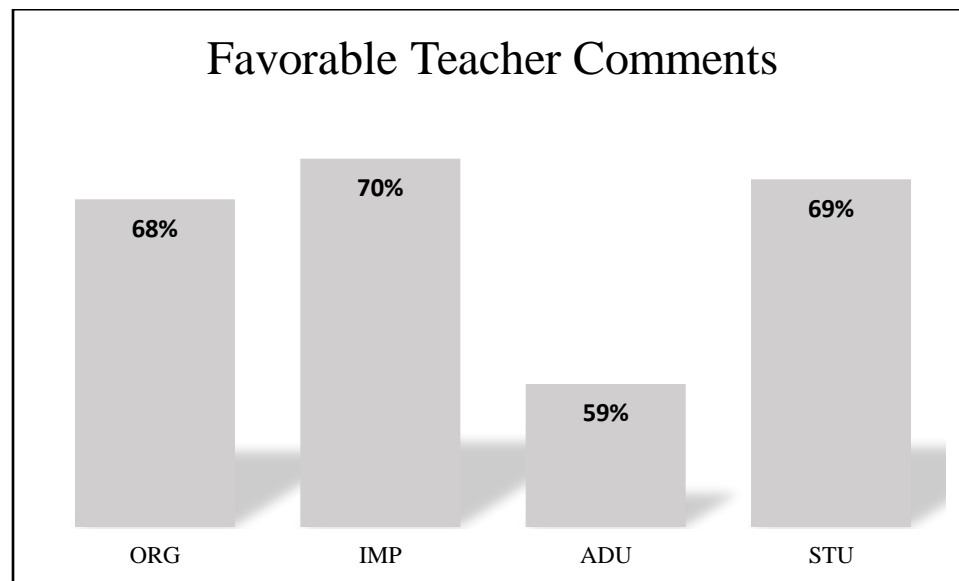
Implementation (IMP). In the theme categorized as 'implementation', teachers commented on their perception of the improvement process within the classroom. Some of these comments were the result of direct questions during the focus groups. Although only slightly higher, the majority (70%) of all comments about this theme were favorable.

When discussing the use of the toolkit for reading strategies during classroom instruction (IMP), one teacher noted the 'say something' strategy was useful with special needs students in his classroom. "I have a hard time trying to chunk it down and make it smaller for those guys. So, you can give a little larger test and read just a smaller section" with this strategy (Focus group 3, 2016).

The school-wide implementation of the initiative was also positively reported by the teachers. Teachers quickly noticed that students were hearing this information in all

their classrooms. "I know Mrs. H came down the hall and said 'you beat me to it!' I said, 'yeah, we needed to do some 'read around the text', so I did it" (Focus group 2, 2016).

Students (STU). Of the teacher comments during the focus group interviews concerning student use of the program, 69% reflected a favorable impact on student learning. When asked to reflect on the initiative's impact on students and the idea that reading is "important in every subject area," (Focus group 3, question, 2016), teacher comments stated, "it was very supportive to have use of that outside of ELA class" (Focus group 3, 2016). Another teacher commented that "having the common language seemed to be really helpful" (Focus group 3, 2016). The leadership team agreed noting how the program "showed school unity. This might not be important just in ELA. It might be important that I know what this person is talking about" (Focus group 1, 2016).

Organization (ORG). When asked to reflect on the components of the improvement initiative that were most beneficial to them as an adult learner, teachers in Focus Group 2 commented on the ease of the trainings (ORG), and appreciated that the leadership team "respected the fact that we were intelligent" (Focus group 2, 2016). Most teachers feel that professional development can be long and a waste of time, but the format used for this improvement initiative was "quick…He even set the timer" (Focus group 2, 2016). The non-ELA teacher comments were favorable when talking about the initial training and refresher support sessions. One teacher commented that because she is a science teacher, the face-to-face time with other teachers helped her to see how she "could use it this way with science content" (Focus group 2, 2016).

The Hawk 5 leadership/design team members also reported positive teacher comments about the organization (ORG) of the program, noting the addition of the online

webpage was helpful. "We should still keep the hard copies in addition to the electronic. I had one teacher say, 'I can't find my folder.' So, they could just go straight to the weebly" (Focus group 1, 2016). The 'weebly' refers to the location of the online Hawk 5 resources.

This qualitative data from the transcribed focus group sessions, when used as an evaluation of the outcome goal to build teacher capacity to implement reading strategies into instruction, show the goal was met. In reporting trends in the transcribed comments, and then second-cycle coding for teacher favorability of the emerging themes, NBMS teacher report highly in the areas of implementation (IMP), students (STU), and organization (ORG), with at least 68% of the comments meeting this favorable criterion. A fourth theme, adult (ADU), also was reported with over 50% favorability of all responses.

Open-ended feedback was also included in the qualitative data collection during Survey 2. Teachers completing the survey were asked: "*Do you have any additional comments or feedback concerning the Hawk 5 program and/or professional learning support for the Hawk 5 at our school*" (Survey 2, 2017).

With only four responses, these data may not work as an evaluation measure the program's assessment of achievement of the outcome goal. However, when compared to the teacher responses during the focus groups, these data can be added to the focus group categories of 'organization' (ORG) supports, and the impact on student (STU) learning (Survey 2, 2017).

Outcome Goal 2: increased student reading comprehension. Summative data were collected from both quantitative and qualitative data methods. Each data source is listed with the data results with respect to the evaluation of this outcome goal.

End of Grade reading exams. NBMS experienced gains in reading as measured by the state reading End of Grade exam during the improvement initiative school year (Table 9, *End of Grade Reading Data, NBMS*). The reading scores, a quantitative data collection method, measure student performance using an achievement and student growth score. These two data types are tallied by the state, along with math and science data, to create an overall performance score for the school. A comparison of this state EOG reading data is illustrated in Table 9.

Table 9

End of Grade Reading Data

School Year	Achievement	Achievement Rate of Change	Growth	Growth Rate of Change		Performance Overall Score	Performance Rate of Change
2013-2014	64%	NA	57.5%	NA		63%	NA
2014-2015	62%	- 2 percentage points	59.3%	+ 1.8 percentage points		61%	- 2 percentage points
2015-2016	66%	+ 4 percentage points	70.2%	+ 10.9 percentage points		66%	+ 5 percentage points

In the 2015-2016 school year, NBMS saw a three-year high in reading scores. Overall reading scores improved 5 percentage points over the previous school year, and 3 percentage points over the 2013-2014 school year. The greatest impact in reading was

reflected in student growth. Growth data compare individual students to other students with similar ability and historical test scores, and assesses the test score to show the student's progress toward one year of student growth in learning the subject area (NCDPI, accountability, 2016). In the 2015-2016, NBMS students increased 10.9 percentage points in reading growth. This is the largest gain for the school under this new state testing measure, implemented within the last three school years (NCDPI, accountability, 2016).

Although this is an impressive gain in student achievement for NBMS, these results may or may not be a result of the reading strategies improvement initiative. Other factors, including other literacy initiatives in individual classrooms and the addition of new teachers, cannot be ruled out as factors for improved reading scores.

Survey 2. Given to teachers after the improvement initiative was implemented, teachers were asked to report their perception of the impact of the Hawk 5 program to improve student reading comprehension (Survey 2, 2017).

Question 12: Have you noticed improvement of student reading comprehension in your classroom as a result of the use of Hawk 5?

Figure 11

Teacher Perception of Student Improvement
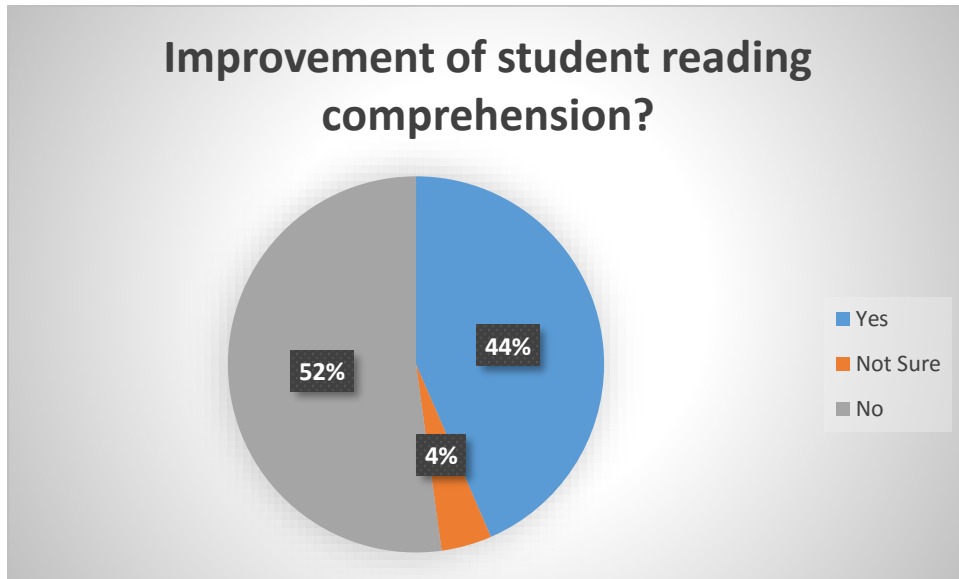
Specific to this question, 52% of NBMS teachers responding to this survey did

not see an increase in student reading comprehension as a result of the Hawk 5 initiative,

while 44% saw improvement (Figure 11). These data suggest that the teachers are divided

on the impact of the improvement initiative on student learning. For evaluation purposes,

this shows that more than half of the teachers at NBMS did not find a connection to the

Hawk 5 program and an increase in student reading comprehension. Though not a

majority found the Hawk 5 program to increase student reading comprehension, it is

important to evaluating the outcome goal to note that 44% of the teachers did report an

increase due to the initiative. Therefore, Survey 2 data results, when evaluated for the

outcome goal of increasing student achievement and performance, are inconclusive.

Focus groups. As previously stated, three focus group sessions were conducted at the end of the first year of the improvement initiative. Each session was transcribed and coded to reflect themes in responses. In evaluation of outcome goal 2, improved student reading comprehension performance, the focus group theme of 'student' was used.

When asked if the teacher had observed students "grow as readers," one teacher commented "I think they started to see, well you read a lot in social studies and you need that skill" (Focus group 3, 2016). Another teacher added, "I think they got used to that last year in my class" (Focus group 3, 2016). The ELA teacher noted the increase in student reading comprehension as a result of the Hawk 5 initiative in every classroom stating, "when they came into English class, the value of understanding what you've read and strategies to help you absorb that information, seemed to be unilateral emphasis or value. Helpful" (Focus group 3, 2016).

Teachers also reported a benefit to their students with learning disabilities. 'Say something', one of the Hawk 5 strategies, was used "with inclusion groups a lot, just because I have a hard time trying to chunk it down and make it smaller for those guys. So, you can give a little larger text and read just a smaller section" (Focus group 3, 2016). By the end of the school year, teachers saw student use of the Hawk 5 toolkit had "settled in their mind as well as mine, to be able to get a clear experience with one strategy so that by the end of the year we're pulling out (*the toolkit*), because it fits, its more natural" (Focus group 3, 2016).

In the evaluation of the focus group sessions, the comments coded with the theme of 'student' may be a measure of the outcome goal of increasing student reading comprehension and performance. Teacher comments state that students, once

comfortable with the Hawk 5 program, did have increased ability to access the text in multiple content areas. Although positive, these data may not be sufficient in stating the goal was met.

Additional outcomes. One of the ten capacity-building supports, peer learning walks (Fisher & Frey, 2014) were a new instructional expectation at NBMS during this school year and less than 5 teachers had previously used this tool. Learning walks were not a commonly used as a peer evaluation tool in the district or school at the time of this improvement initiative.

Valuable to the assessment of the desired outcome to increase teacher capacity to implement reading strategies, the impact of learning walks, or peer review, on the teacher as an adult learner can be considered (Adams & Pegg, 2012; Fisher & Frey, 2014). Learning walks provided teachers with a comparison of their own instructional practices to those of their peers. To evaluate learning walks independently of the other embedded, capacity-building supports, a specific question was asked in Survey 1.

Survey 1, Question 3: Thinking of your experience with LEARNING WALKS, how would you rate your personal, professional gain in the following areas:

- *Instructional strategies?*

- *Classroom climate?*

- *School climate?*

- *Our school's culture of learning?*

Rating categories used are: not at all important, slightly important, moderately important, very important, essential.

Figure 12, *Learning Walk Impact on Teacher Capacity-Building,* outlines teacher responses to the Survey 1 question about their personal, professional gain in their understanding and use of reading instructional strategies, classroom climate, school climate, and the school's culture of learning (see Appendix E). These data help to isolate teacher perceptions on learning walks, rather than use it in comparison to other supports offered. NBMS teachers reported learning walks gave them the highest gains in their own learning in the areas of school climate and the school's culture of learning, but report only moderate impact on their own instructional practice.

Figure 12

Learning Walk Impact on Teacher Capacity-Building
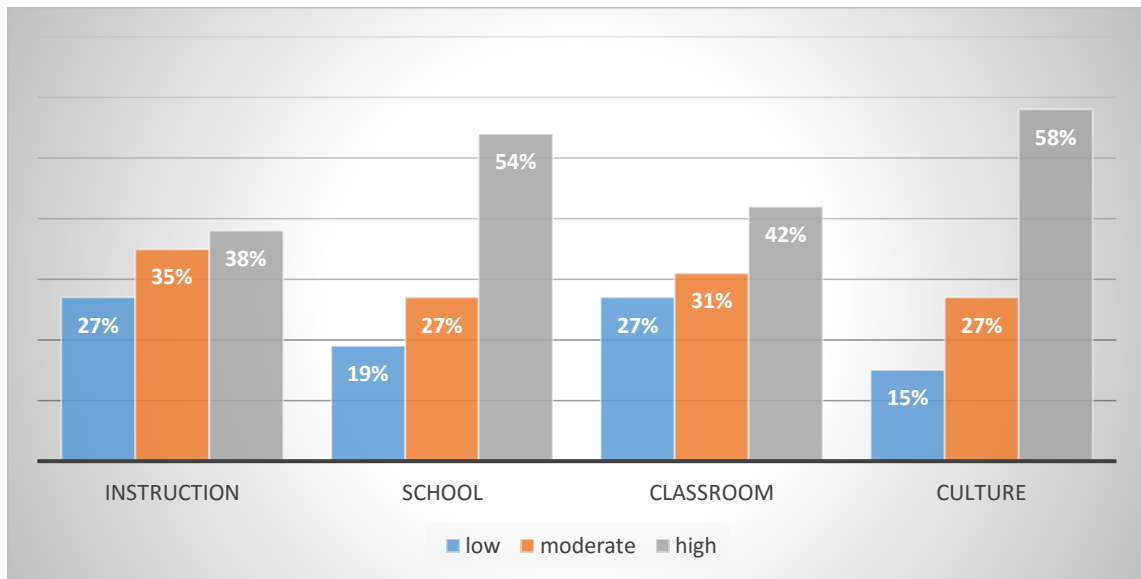
The adverse comments during the focus group sessions targeted the process and organization more than the experience of being in a peer's classroom. One teacher noted the learning walk didn't show her reading implementation, and she felt it was a "waste of 15 minutes" of her time (Focus group 2, 2016). This same teacher, and others in the

group, went on to note it was the organization of the learning walk that was difficult, stating it would be more "beneficial if we went in and we knew this teacher is doing this at this time that day" (Focus group 2, 2016). Suggestions were made by teachers to allow the classroom teachers being visited to sign up for visits, ensuring the peer observers would see the reading instruction in action.

Although possibly specific to the evaluation of outcome goal 1, learning walks is assessed separately, as a process goal rather than an outcome goal. Learning walks were introduced by the leadership/design team as peer assessment during the professional learning process. NBMS teachers, during qualitative data collection methods (focus groups) and in quantitative data collection methods (Survey 1, 2), show learning walks, as implemented, to be the least beneficial embedded support during the improvement initiative. Therefore, learning walks had little impact on the teacher as learner. This possible capacity-building support would require more discussion and planning prior to any continued implementation.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

This section details possible conclusions stemming from the evaluation results. Specifically, did the improvement initiative increase teacher capacity to implement research-informed reading comprehension strategies into instruction? Did the improvement initiative improve student reading comprehension achievement and performance? Were there components of the improvement initiative or process that were successful? What factors contributed to their success? Were there components of the improvement initiative that were not successful? What factors contributed to the lack of

success? In addition to answering these questions, this section provides a discussion of

additional findings (outside of the goals), and thoughts on overall impact.

Did the improvement initiative increase teacher capacity to implement research-

supported reading comprehension strategies into instructional practice?

Data analysis across evaluation measures suggests that the use of on-going,

embedded supports during a professional learning initiative has the possibility to increase

teacher capacity to implement reading strategies into their classroom instruction.

Teachers reported the organization of the improvement initiative, and the use of the

strategies in the classroom, as the most beneficial aspects of the program.

When teachers at NBMS were asked to reflect on the capacity-building

components of the Hawk 5 improvement initiative, the supports related to the

'organization' and the 'implementation' of the program received the highest ratings

(Survey 1, 2016; Focus Group 1-3, 2016). Survey 3 quantitative data show the initial

training, leadership team support, and the follow-up refreshers, all embedded supports

identifiable as 'organization' and 'implementation' categories, were of the most benefit to

teacher's ability to teach or integrate the Hawk 5 program into classroom instruction

(2017).

The theoretical improvement framework for this initiative included the use of on-

going, embedded, capacity-building supports as a driver of increased teacher use of the

Hawk 5 program. In this assessment of the outcome goal to increase teacher capacity to

teach the Hawk 5 reading strategies, these data reflect the possibility that the goal was

met.

Did the improvement initiative improve student achievement/performance across the subjects, through improved ability to read for comprehension?

Data collected from all evaluation measures used in this disquisition, show some impact on improved student achievement/performance through improved reading comprehension ability. However, other factors may have influenced this increase; subsequent years of data will need to be collected to make this assertion.

The NC End of Grade reading exam showed improvement in student achievement and student growth, the two measures of the exam. In setting an outcome goal to improve student reading comprehension, the leadership/design team ensured that teacher outcomes were aligned with student outcomes to support a stronger professional learning format (https://learningforward.org). Therefore, student test data, collected from the state reading test, were used for evaluation.

In the 2015-2016 school year, the first year of the Hawk 5 program at NBMS, student reading achievement, as measured by the state End of Grade reading exam, increased in 4 percentage points. This represents a three-year high in overall reading performance with a gain of 5 percentage points (NCDPI, 2016). The largest area of student reading performance was in the area of student growth. Growth data, which compares individual students to their own growth measures, reported an increase of 10.9 percentage points for the 2015-2016 school year (NCDPI, 2016).

In addition to the data from state reading EOG's, quantitative frequency data were collected in Survey 2. In reporting on their own assessment of student improvement in reading comprehension, 44% of the NBMS teachers reported that students in their

classrooms had improved. The same data collection method, Survey 2, showed 52% of the teachers were unsure of improved student reading comprehension.

Focus groups sessions were coded to reveal themes for teacher comments. Favorable teacher comments, relating to outcomes for students learning during the improvement initiative (STU), measured 69% of all comments about student use. The category labeled 'student' (STU), had the second largest number of favorable comments during the focus groups. These comments included an increase in student use of the Hawk 5 reading strategies as well as student conversations about reading across various content classrooms (Focus Group 2-3, 2016).

Other factors, in addition to the improvement initiative, may have impacted an increase in student reading comprehension performance. Therefore, these data provide an inconclusive evaluation of the initiative's goal to improve student reading performance and achievement.

Were there components of the improvement initiative or process that were successful?

The most successful components of the improvement initiative's framework were the use of on-going, embedded supports for professional learning, and the school-wide focus of the initiative. Both areas were important to the fidelity of the implementation.

The individual professional learning supports were reviewed in Survey 2. The 'initial training session', offered in December, 2015, was reported by the largest number of teachers to be the most impactful on their understanding (100%) of the Hawk 5 program and their ability to teach/integrate (91%) the program into classroom instruction (Survey 2, 2017). Close to this number, the 'leadership supports' offered to teachers

shows the second highest impact with 91% of teachers showing its connection to their

understanding of the Hawk 5 program, and 83% stating this support benefited their ability

to teach/integrate the Hawk 5 reading strategies program.

Teachers also saw an increase in student reading comprehension ability in non-

ELA content areas. A leadership/design team member, and a Career and Technical

Education teacher, noted the program's impact on students showed "school unity. This

might not be just in ELA. It might be important that I know what this person is talking

about" (Focus group 1, 2016).

What factors contributed to their success?

The organization of the improvement initiative was a factor in the success of the

program. The common language and school-wide implementation created a unified

school effort from the student perspective, but also kept teachers informed and at the

same implementation pace. Further, this program, and teacher capacity-building supports,

were job-embedded; teachers did not have to leave the school building for training or

support sessions. All efforts of this professional learning initiative were directly

connected to the needs of the school, its students and teachers.

Were there components of the improvement initiative that were not successful?

Learning walks, one of the on-going professional learning supports, is assessed in

all data collection sources. As a new expectation at NBMS, this informal peer

observation process was considered by the leadership/design team to be an important

measure of the expected outcome of building teacher capacity to implement reading

strategies into instruction. When evaluating the impact of learning walks, it is clear

teachers did not find it to be a capacity-building support; the least beneficial support

offered and the least impactful on the climate of their classrooms (Survey 1, 2016). Focus group transcriptions also noted teacher's negative comments about learning walks with one comment that they were "a waste of 15 minutes of my time" (Focus Group 2, 2016).

Teacher concerns during focus groups were also noted in reference to their own professional learning and the expectation of collaboration during PLCs. "I don't think we collaborated in our PLCs...just because we were all not on the same page and on the same subject every single day or week. I think we just used (Hawk 5) when we chose to" (Focus group 2, 2016). Teachers reported their PLC group did not implement the Hawk 5 into common lessons, "because we were a couple of weeks away from each other" in our lesson pacing (Focus group 3, 2016).

The use of the online web page resources had mixed results from teacher comments. One teacher saw the web resources as "my go to resource. Having it digitally was helpful. It really helped me …go outside my personal content, and think about how other teachers can use it. It helped me grow as a teacher and …see it from outside of my bubble and see into the bubble of the kids" (Focus group 3, 2016). However, other teachers in the same discussion stated "I didn't use it", "I don't know that I ever accessed the weebly (web resources)" (Focus group 3, 2016).

What factors contributed to the lack of success?

Many factors may contribute to the lack of success for these components of the improvement initiative. The learning walk process was new to NBMS. This additional 'new' expectation may have been a factor in teacher attitudes, leading to negative feedback and a lack of teacher buy-in for the addition of peer observation. Further, the PLC process at NBMS is still growing. Although the implementation of PLC's was

several years ago, the program has failed to move beyond the initial implementation phase. Many teachers at NBMS were still working to improve the collaborative efforts of PLCs at the time of this initiative. The use of the online web page may be more a reflection of the teacher's comfort with technology than an evaluation of the embedded support.

Additional Findings

The Hawk 5 reading initiative at NBMS proved to be a change agent for instructional practice. Teachers comments in focus groups and responses on surveys reflect on increase in the discussion about the importance of reading in every classroom; a change from the principal's initial assessment when starting at the school, prior to the improvement initiative. Further, although not an exclusive measure of student ability, NBSM did see gains in student reading as reflected on the state End of Grade Reading exam. Because this school had seen a decrease in reading scores in the past, this small step supported the efforts of teachers.

Although the data were collected in regards to the two outcome goals, other important findings were noted by the disquisitioner that were not original to the disquisition. One example, is observations of teachers as learners. Most professional learning efforts, at least for this disquisitioner, are off-campus and presented by an expert in the field. Teachers leave the session looking to implement change into instruction, but often are the only teacher from their school with this new knowledge. This isolation was non-existent in the improvement initiative. Teachers were initially trained within our school, with other NBMS teachers; all content areas participated. The on-going supports offered, were job-embedded and every teacher in the school was a resource, not just the

leadership/design team. Teachers were collaborating, even showing off their instructional changes to add more reading. Ideas were shared and appreciated; it was a school-wide effort to meet a common goal.

These reflective statements come from the disquisitioner, and the school's principal, and are not supported with research data. Instead, these additional findings show the impact of this initiative on future improvement activities at NBMS.

Recommendations for School Leaders

As a new principal at NBMS, the disquisitioner gained insight into the school's learning culture during this improvement initiative. As such, the disquisitioner experienced her own increased professional learning and growth as an instructional leader, as well as in transformative leadership. In the subsequent paragraphs, this professional reflection is shared.

Implementation of the Hawk 5

The Hawk 5 reading strategies initiative required planning as well as input; teachers, curriculum specialists, even students played a part in providing input that impacted the direction of the Hawk 5 program. As a leader, it was important to support the leadership/design team during the improvements, while keeping the school's vision for student learning as a focus.

The reading strategies tool kit, which was the first step in creating the program, was in many ways, a gamble. Asking career, professionals to use a school-wide toolkit seemed almost like a step backwards; teachers have moved beyond textbooks, why would they use a printed, folded sheet of paper? Keeping the focus on student needs, based on student test scores, and school-wide collaboration, based on previous experiences at the

school with professional learning, helped ensure the program was implemented with enthusiasm and professionalism.

Building the Capacity of NBMS Teachers

One of the best comments noted in the focus groups was "we are all smart…just give us a quick summary…you know we all know how to teach" (Focus group 2, 2016). Teachers at NBMS didn't need to be told what they 'couldn't do,' they needed to be reassured they could do it! This was an important lesson for a new principal. Using the standards for professional learning (Learning Forward, 2015) provided a template for the creation of the on-going teacher support sessions. Not only did the professional learning supports meet the needs of teachers as learners, these embedded on-going supports encouraged a common school-wide goal of improvement, while recognizing the expertise of the teacher.

Deficit-model thinking could have been disastrous in this school, and a new program could have been the professional breaking point for many teachers. This was not initially apparent to the disquisitioner. Listening to teacher needs, asking for feedback and honestly seeking improvement, were, according to this disquisitioner, the details that kept this faculty moving forward in this program, and ultimately, the facilitation of change for improvement.

Leadership Recommendations for the Implementation Processes

In this section, the disquisitioner offers insights to those looking to effect change for improvement. Using only information from this disquisition process and included research, the implications, limitations and recommendations are presented as they

connect to this professional learning improvement initiative for the teachers, students and leaders of NBMS.

Reading for comprehension is an important component of learning in middle schools. However, adult learning must also be taken into consideration. Teachers need on-going support with any new professional learning initiative. For the middle school in this initiative, teacher capacity to implement the Hawk 5 initiative was impacted by the on-going support of a school-based leadership/design team that included formative assessment of the program and the ability to make changes to meet the needs of the teacher as a learner.

There were several factors that impacted the results of this improvement initiative that should be considered when implementing this kind of professional learning in other middle schools. First, the school climate should be considered. At NBMS teachers were ready for new initiatives with the addition of a new principal. Some schools may not be ready to implement school-wide changes at the same time as a change in leadership.

Second, the selection and the value of the leadership/design team is an important variable. The teacher-leaders were not only able to make valuable suggestions to improve the initiative, but they were also willing to make decisions that would impact the entire school, including taking an initiative already in place (PLCs) out of the improvement plan. A less than eager leadership team could have an adverse effect on an improvement initiative if they are unable to take strong steps to ensure program success.

Finally, the goals of the improvement initiative must have strong support from all teachers. If any program is to be implemented for the purpose of improving learning, school-wide, it is important it's something teachers can understand as see as a useful

benefit to every classroom. By focusing on reading, all teachers at the school were able to make connections between changes to instructional practice and student learning beyond content specific curriculum. The end result was more reading instructional practices and improved student achievement in reading in all classrooms at NBMS.

The limits of this improvement initiative are its assessment of student reading achievement. As no other student data were explored, it is unclear if the improvement in student achievement was seen across all content areas or only specific to the state reading EOG. Assumptions can be made that improved reading will impact all subject areas, but this study did not measure the impact of the program for increased student learning in multiple content areas, and that connection is not supported in this disquisition.

Future improvement initiatives at NBMS will be able to use similar processes to target the school's response to improvement, by implementing initiatives that include ongoing teacher support for capacity building. In continuing the Hawk 5 program at NBMS, the leadership/design team imbedded more structured supports for teachers including year-long timelines for implementation, rotation and retention of Hawk 5 teacher-leaders, and a professional learning focus that allows for integration of this program along with other school initiatives, such as PLCs. These steps required not only leadership from the principal, but also an improved method at NBMS to identify and grow teacher-leaders. In the studied improvement initiative, the teacher-leaders were selected by a new principal. Once the program moved into its second school year, teachers were identified as leaders for other required school roles that were mandated by the district and, in some content areas, state initiatives. With the loss of teaching positions

each school year for the last three school years, teachers are finding it more difficult to do more with less, causing a lack of personal leadership goals for many NBMS teachers.

Educational leaders must consider several factors when implementing a professional learning improvement initiative that is directed at building teacher capacity to impact student learning. The issues at NBMS were possibly consistent with those in other middle schools, however some middle schools may find external issues too large for this type of school designed professional learning initiative. Suggestions to other middle school leaders, specific to this type of initiative are detailed here:

- Consider other initiatives within the school before starting a new program. If the new initiative can't support what's already happening within the school, make changes before implementation. Stated another way, don't put too many new expectations on teachers at one time.

- Move slowly and utilize the PDSA cycle. Have a strong plan outline in place helped to ensure goals are addressed throughout the program.

- Assess what you are doing and how it's going often! Include all teachers, if possible, in the formative assessment of the initiative.

- Use current school data to support the initiative. Gaining teacher buy-in before implementation is critical. Using teacher responses from pre-initiative data, along with state student achievement data, was an important factor in gaining teacher attention early in the process.

- Motivate teachers, but consider their needs as learners. Not every teacher at NBMS was able to implement the toolkit with fidelity; some issues were due to teacher needs as a learner. Some teachers will need more

support than others, but are not always easily identifiable. The use of

teacher leaders helps to gain a peer assessment of teacher needs.

- Keep goals of the initiative within sight of all teachers. Transparency

  about where 'we are' as a school is important to teacher understanding of

  changes and alterations to the initiative.

- As the principal, be ready for questions! Teachers need to feel they are

  important to the execution of the improvement initiative. Being accessible

  to all teachers helps create shared leadership. Even with a strong

  leadership/design team in place, teachers need to know the principal is

  following the initiative and assessing the school-wide goals as well.

Leadership Practices for Social Justice

The definition of social justice as it applies to school leaders and is used in this

disquisition is important to note: "principals for social justice influence professional

development toward socially just teaching and socially just student learning" (Kose,

2009, p. 630-631). The definition is used in the following discussion of the

disquisitioner's ability to integrate socially just practices into this professional learning

improvement initiative.

As a first-year middle school principal, it was important to not only implement a

change initiative, but to create a school shared vision of improvement, that is socially just

in its application. The lack of student reading comprehension ability is often blamed on

earlier grade levels, and middle school teachers may simply keep moving with their

instructional pace and hope that students are able to catch up. This disquisitioner, wanted

to create a school-wide initiative, in every classroom that would reach every child.

Instead of remediation, which can leave marginalized populations segregated from instruction, this improvement initiative would impact every child in the school, regardless of their current ability to read for comprehension. By assuming that every student can grow and learn, this method was an attempt to give every child the same resources so that they may implement reading skills in every content area. In turn, the teachers, by also using this common reading strategy language, would foster the inclusion of every learner; all students used the same toolkit of reading strategies.

To address this concern, this disquisitioner followed a transformative framework for social justice in professional learning, presented in *The Principal's Role in Professional Development for Social Justice: An Empirically-Base Transformative Framework* (Kose, 2009). The framework, as determined by Kose (2009), includes "five comprehensive and interrelated roles" (p. 631) of the principal in professional learning initiatives. The transformative leadership roles include visionary, learning leader, structural leader, cultural leader, and political leader (Kose, 2009). Table 10 (*Social Justice Practices),* outlines the practices of the disquisitioner during the improvement initiative that reflect transformative leadership for social justice.

Table 10

Social Justice Practices

Disquisitioner's Leadership Role	Practices to Support Outcomes
Transformative visionary	• School-wide expectation for every child
Transformative learning leader	• Teacher-leaders for design team • Support for teacher-as-learner • School-wide effort to improve • Job-embedded learning • Evaluation of initiative impact
Transformative structural leader	• Professional learning standards • Common purpose & goals • Collaboration time to learn • Includes every student
Transformative cultural leader	• Collective responsibility; data • Learning walks for peer feedback • Standards for professional learning embedded
Transformative political leader	• Funding resources • Establish the need for change • Common framework to support change • Pacing of the implementation

Transformative Visionary

"Principals play an important visionary role in creating the purpose and conditions for professional learning" (Kose, 2009, p. 640). In this improvement initiative, this disquisitioner respected the need for a shared vision. Implementing school-wide expectations for professional learning was important to the outcome of building teacher capacity to implement a reading strategies program into instructional practice. In the pre-planning stages of this improvement initiative, the disquisitioner collected school data,

observed the school's current culture of learning, and involved all stakeholders in planning the improvement for change.

The inclusion of a shared vision was purposefully used to ensure the change initiative would benefit every child, regardless of background or content area level, in the application of the reading strategies support. This support was offered in classrooms identified as exceptional child or special education separate settings, exceptional child inclusion classrooms, academically gifted clustered classrooms, advanced courses, and standard courses covering every content area available at the school. Core content classrooms (math, ELA, science, social studies) and exploratory classrooms (art, band, chorus, Spanish, CTE, and PE) were all expected to implement the reading strategies for instruction.

Transformative Learning Leader

In the selection of the leadership/design team used to drive the improvement initiative, this disquisitioner applied the knowledge that teachers with "greater expertise (may) provide important learning scaffolds for those with less expertise" (Kose, 2009, p. 646). Phase I of the initiative included the selection of a leadership/design team of teachers and school support staff who had some level of expertise, either in literacy content or as a leader for social justice. This careful selection would help to ensure the needs of all learners (teacher and student) were addressed.

Phase II of the improvement initiative was organized to support a school-wide effort for improvement. By training all teachers on the five common reading strategies, setting expectations for use in every classroom, and using a designated timeline for student immersion in the use of the strategies, the school's vision emerged. The design of

this professional learning initiative was purposeful and supported the outcome

expectations to build teacher capacity to implement reading strategies to improve student

performance. By incorporating this common language, various groups of teachers were

able to discuss common instructional practices and better address individual student

needs.

Embedded support for teacher-as-learner was utilized throughout all phases of the

initiative. To ensure the tenants of social justice are also applied to the teacher-as-learner,

the leadership/design team (which included the principal/disquisitioner) added on-going

supports such as training in small, professional learning groups and refresher sessions to

help teachers recall and review information from the initial training.

Evaluation of the improvement initiative must also include socially just methods

(Kose, 2009). This school-based initiative was designed to ensure teacher feedback about

the process for improvement and the evaluation of its impact on student learning. During

Phase IV, teachers were given access to an anonymous on-line survey. The surveys (see

Appendix E & F) included questions about the impact of the embedded supports offered

to teachers on their professional learning. Every teacher in the school, regardless of their

use or perceived participation in the initiative, were given access to the surveys. In

addition to two surveys, teachers were invited to participate in focus group interview

sessions during Phase IV. Since the disquisitioner is also the school's principal, steps

were taken to address teacher participation in the focus groups. The teachers were given

informed consent prior to any participation to ensure their professional relationship was

not compromised as a result of participation or non-participation.

Transformative Structural Leader

Standards for professional learning (Learning Forward, 2016) were used as a research-informed model for meeting the learning needs of the teacher in the improvement initiative. The standards, previously outlined in Table 3 (*Professional Learning Plan)*, give a common structure to professional learning that supports the collective purpose and goals for the change initiative. Including a framework helps to ensure equitable implementation by supporting the learning needs of a diverse, adult population (Kose, 2009).

The improvement initiative design included time for teacher collaboration in their own learning process. Understanding the need to avoid isolation and share in feedback and discussion is an important aspect of support for teacher-as-learner (Erikson, et al., 2005). Therefore, the initiative's design included small group sessions that supported teacher needs while working toward the common goal of adding student reading comprehension to instructional practice to improve student achievement.

This common goal was a target for every child in every classroom. Socially just practices of the disquisitioner ensured the inclusion of every child in the improvement initiative. No single group was excluded, nor was a group exclusively added. Instead, the design of the initiative provided that every teacher use the reading strategy initiative towards an improved student reading comprehension. The leadership/design team individually worked with teachers to address modifications to the program to support the needs of special populations. However, no student was denied this improvement initiative.

Transformative Cultural Leader

In a principal's first year at a new school, it is expected that achievement date be reviewed for gaps. This improvement initiative began with a data review on past student performance. The disquisitioner worked with district school leaders to identify possible areas of improvement, and shared this with the entire school community. In implementing the change initiative, this discussion led to a collective responsibility. Teachers from all content areas, were able to see the benefits of this improvement initiative to increase the reading comprehension of every student.

However, as stated previously, not all teachers had the capacity to teach reading as an embedded instructional practice. To aid teachers and ensure socially just practices for all at our school, the disquisitioner introduced learning walks as a model of best practices and for peer feedback. This process created a shared 'culture of learning' that was necessary to reach the initiative's goals.

Transformative Political Leader

To support transformative change initiatives, principals must work within their role as political leader to "build collective agreement for engaging in professional learning" (Kose, 2009, p. 633). This disquisitioner employed this belief by including student performance data as the premise for the necessity for change. During Phase I, the school's reading performance and growth data were shared with district level leaders, school teacher-leaders, the school improvement team, and parents involved in the school's Advisory Council. All stakeholders felt they could support the initiative and connected the need for an improved reading strategies program as a possible resource to for improved student performance.

In Phase III of the initiative, peer learning walks provided teachers with informal observations. This provided teachers with their own data on the implementation of the initiative; comparing their classroom practices to that of other teachers. The implementation of a school-wide learning walk expectation facilitates on-going review of the program and supports Kose's (2009) framework for professional learning for social justice. The larger framework and design of the initiative and its collective use by all teachers, is further evidence of the disquisitioner's efforts to empower change using transformative leadership for social justice.

In a political leadership role, the disquisitioner was able to designate school funds for the purpose of supporting teachers as learners. Funding for resources and substitutes was made available to the leadership/design team so that budgeting would not impact the implementation.

Although a framework and timeline for this initiative was provided to teachers, pacing of the instructional improvements was carefully considered. In keeping with the need for social justice in every aspect of the design, the principal was mindful of teacher needs. The expectations for implementation were shared school-wide, however, in accordance with the research by Kose (2009), teachers were given professional discretion to implement the program as they felt comfortable. This ensured the teachers implemented changes to instructional practice at their own pace.

In Summary

Middle school teachers are dedicated professionals that look for solutions to student learning needs. As school initiatives strive for increased student achievement, more emphasis is placed on the need for quality professional development (Adams &

Pegg, 2012; Guskey, 2002; Nichols, et al., 2008). For NBMS, addressing limited student

reading comprehension skills was an important step in increasing student performance

and achievement in all content classrooms.

The aim of this improvement initiative was to build the capacity of all teachers at

North Buncombe middle school to implement a school-wide, research-informed, literacy-

initiative (see Table 3). Throughout the improvement initiative, the leadership team

embedded teacher supports that reflect the standards for professional learning as outlined

by Learning Forward (2015) to ensure the improvement goals served as guiding

principles. All teachers were charged with the task of learning and implementing five

specific strategies to support and improve student reading comprehension, in a school

where literacy had not previously been an instructional focus.

Favorable comments, those comments showing the teacher's perception that the

initiative did improve their own capacity to implement reading comprehension strategies,

were determined to be more prevalent (Survey 1, 2016). Non-ELA teachers were

implementing a reading strategy program for the first time. "I personally like that it was

something that we didn't have to grade, because it's hard for me to grade written

work…but...it was a great class starter…reading a short article just to get the kids

interested in what we're about to do" (Focus group 2, 2106). This belief may reflect a

larger school-wide teacher willingness to use the Hawk 5 program, and therefore possibly

implement more student reading, during instruction.

Teacher comments were positive about the learning walk experience during the

sessions and in focus group interviews (Figure 10, *Teacher Comments During Focus

Group Interviews*), but did not compare well to other supports offered to teachers in the

teacher survey data (Table 7). Given the variance of teacher responses on the learning

walk experience, more research is required to assess the effectiveness of peer learning

walks on teacher learning and subsequent impact on instructional practice. Implementing

a detailed learning walk plan, including a relevant rubric, and conducting more training

on the learning walk process will benefit future studies using this method. NBMS

teachers did state support of peer observations, so learning walks will be used in future

school initiatives.

NBMS did experience gains in student performance as reported from student

scores on the NC End of Grade reading exam, but too many variables may contribute to

this outcome to rely on the framework alone. Limits may include, the absence of data

showing individual student gains from multiple school years, classroom pre- and post-

initiative student performance measures, and teacher observation data showing the

correct use of the Hawk 5 program. What can be observed, is that NBMS faculty were

able to form a school-wide collaborative, professional learning initiative that created

momentum toward a goal of improved student reading, with successful results for this

middle school.

References

Abdal-Haqq, I. (1996). *Making time for teacher professional development.* Washington,

DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education. (ERIC Document

Reproduction Service No. ED 400259)

Adams, A.E. & Pegg, J. (2012). Teachers' enactment of content literacy strategies in

secondary science and mathematics classes. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult

Literacy, 56*(2), 151-161.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.*

Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Blank, R.K., de las Alas, N., & Smith, C. (2007, February). *Analysis of the quality of

professional development programs for mathematics and science teachers:

Findings from a cross-state study.* Washington, DC: Council of Chief State

School Officers.

Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., & Wallace, M. (with Greenwood, A., et

al.). (2005, May). *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning

communities* (Research Brief RB637). Nottingham, United Kingdom: Department

for Education and Skills.

Borko, H. (2004, November). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping

the terrain. *Educational Researcher, 33*(8), 3-15.

Bowen, N. K. & Bowen, G. L. (1998). The mediating role of educational meaning in the

relationship between home academic culture and academic performance. *National

Council on Family Relations, 47*(1), 45-51.

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P.G., (2015). *Learning to Improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*: Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Education Press.

Buncombe County Public Schools. (2017). https://buncombeschools.org/

Chambers, J.G., Lam, I., & Mahitivanichcha, K. (2008, September). *Examining context and challenges in measuring investment in professional development: A case study of six school districts in the Southwest region* (Issues & Answers Report, REL 2008-No. 037). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest.

Cheney, D. & Barringer, C. (1995). Teacher competence, student diversity, and staff training for the inclusion of middle school students with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders, 3*(3), 174-182.

Cohen, D. & Hill, H. (2000). Instructional policy and classroom performance: The mathematics reform in California. *Teachers College Record, 102*(2), 294-343.

Creswell, J.W., (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Boston, Massachusetts: Pearson.

Croft, A., Coggshall, J.G., Dolan, M., & Powers, E. (with Killion, J.). (2010, April). *Job-embedded professional development: What it is, who's responsible, and how to get it done well* (Issue Brief). Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.

Datnow, A. (1999, April). *How schools choose externally developed reform designs* (Report No. 35). Baltimore: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk.

Desimone, L., Porter, A., Garet, M., Yoon, K.S., & Birman, B. (2002, Summer). Effects of professional development on teachers' instruction: Results from a three-year longitudinal study. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(2), 81-112.

Dede, C. (Ed.) (2006). *Online professional development for teachers: Emerging models and methods.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Draper, R. J. (2002). School mathematics reform, constructivism, and literacy: A case for literacy instruction in the reform-oriented math classroom. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 45*(6), 520-529.

DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Solution Tree Press.

Erickson, G., Brandes, G. M., Mitchell, I., & Mitchell, J. (2005). Collaborative learning: findings from two professional development projects. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 21*(2005), 787-798.

EVAAS/ SAS [accountability software and training videos]. Cary, NC. Retrieved from https://ncdpi.sas.com/

Fisher, D. & Frey, N. (2007). A tale of two middle schools: the differences in structure and instruction. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 51*(3), 204-211. doi:10.1598/JAAL.51.3.1

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2014). Using teacher learning walks to improve instruction. *Principal Leadership*, *14*(5), 58-61.

Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Williams, D. (2002). Seven literacy strategies that work. *Educational Leadership, (60)*3, 70-73.

Fishman, B.J., Marx, R. W., Best, S., & Tal, R.T. (2003). Linking teacher and student learning to improve professional development in systemic reform. *Teacher and Teacher Education, 19* (2003), 643-658.

Fletcher, J. F., Greenwood, J., Grimley, M., Parkhill, F., & Davis, N. (2012). What is happening when teachers of 11-13-year-old students take guided reading: a New Zealand snapshot. *Educational Review, 64*(4), 425-449.

Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change* (4th ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Garet, M.S., Porter, A., Desimone, L., Birman, B., & Yoon, K.S. (2001, Winter). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 915-945.

Goodman, A., (2005). The middle school high five: strategies can triumph, *Voices from the Middle, 13*(2), 12-19.

Griffith, P.L., Kimmel, S.J., & Biscoe, B. (2010, Winter). Teacher professional development for at-risk preschoolers: Closing the achievement gap by closing the instruction gap. *Action in Teacher Education, 31*(4), 41-53.

Guskey, T. R., (2002). Professional development and teacher change, *Teachers and Teaching: theory and practice, 8*(3/4), 381-391. doi:10.1080/13540600210000051-2

Guskey, T. R., (2012). The rules of evidence. *Journal of Staff Development, 33*(4).

Hall, G. & Hord, S. (2011). *Implementing change: Patterns, principles, and potholes* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Haslam, M.B. (1997, Fall). How to rebuild a local professional development infrastructure. *NAS Getting Better by Design.* Arlington, VA: New American Schools.

Hord, S.M. (Ed.). (2004). *Learning together, leading together: Changing schools through professional learning communities.* New York: Teachers College Press & NSDC.

Huberman, M. & Miles, M.B. (1984). *Innovation up close: How school improvement works.* New York: Plenum.

Imants, J. (2002). Restructuring schools as a context for teacher learning. *International Journal of Educational Research 37*(2002), 715-732.

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Kennedy, M. (1998, March). Education reform and subject matter knowledge. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 35*(3), 249-263.

King, M. B. & Newman, F. M. (2001). Building school capacity through professional development: conceptual and empirical considerations, *The International Journal of Educational Management, 15*(2), 86-96.

Kitchenham, A., (2008). The evolution of John Mezirow's transformative learning theory. *Journal of Transformative Education, 6*(104). doi:10.1177/1541344608322678

Klapwijk, N. M. (2015). EMC^2=comprehension: a reading strategy instruction framework for all teachers. *South African Journal of Education, 35*(1), np.

Klapwijk, N. M. & Van der Walt, C. (2011). Measuring reading strategy knowledge

transfer: motivation for teachers to implement reading strategy instruction. *Per*

Linguam: A Journal of Language Learning. 27(2), 25-40. doi:10.5785/27-2-106

Knapp, M.S., Copland, M.A., & Talbert, J.E. (2003, February). *Leading for learning:*

Reflective tools for school and district leaders. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study

of Teaching and Policy.

Kose, B. W., (2009). The principal's role in professional development for social justice:

an empirically-based transformative framework. *Urban Education, 44*(6), 628-

623.

Langley, G. J., Moen, R. D., Nolan, K. M., Nolan, T.W., Norman, C. L., & Provost, L. P.

(2009). *The improvement guide: A practical approach to enhancing*

organizational performance. San Francisco, USA: Jossey-Bass.

Learning Forward (2015). Retrieved from http://learningforward.org/

Leithwood, K., Louis, K.S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership*

influences student learning: A review of research for the Learning from

Leadership Project. New York: Wallace Foundation.

Lieberman, A. & Miller, L. (Eds.) (2008). *Teachers in professional communities:*

Improving teaching and learning. New York: Teachers College Press.

Manset-Williamson, G. & Nelson, J. M. (2005). Balanced, strategic reading instruction

for upper-elementary and middle school students with reading disabilities: a

comparative study of two approaches. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 28*(1), 59-

74.

Matsumura, L. C., Granier, H., Junker, B., Resnick., & Bickel, D.D. (2010). Investigating the implementation and effect of the content-focused coaching program on instruction and learning. *The Elementary School Journal, 111*(1), 35-62.

McLaughlin, M.W. & Talbert, J.E. (2001). *Professional communities and the work of high school teaching.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ness, M. K. (2009). Reading comprehension strategies in secondary content area classrooms: teacher use of and attitudes towards reading comprehension instruction. *Reading Horizons, 49*(2), 143-162.

Nichols, W. D., Young, C. A., & Rickelman, R.J. (2007). Improving middle school professional development by examining middle school teachers' application of literacy strategies and instructional designs. *Reading Psychology, 28*, 97-130.

Nichols, W. D., Rickelman, R. J., Young, C. A., & Rupley, W. H. (2008). Understanding and applying reading instructional strategies: Implications for professional development in the middle schools. *College Reading Association Yearbook*, *23*, 220-236.

North Buncombe Middle School, (2015). Principal's Monthly Report, December.

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2017). *K-12 standards for curriculum and instruction: Standard course of study, English/Language arts.* Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/languagearts/scos/

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2014). *School attendance and accounting manual, 2014-2015.* Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/fbs/accounting/manuals/sasa.pdf

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, (2013). *NC school report cards*.

Retrieved from http://www.ncpublicschools.org/src/

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, (2013). *State board of education, policy*

manual. Retrieved from http://sbepolicy.dpi.state.nc.us/

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, (2014). *North Carolina school report*

cards. Retrieved from https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, (2015). *North Carolina school report*

cards. Retrieved from https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, (2016). *North Carolina school report*

cards. Retrieved from https://ncreportcards.ondemand.sas.com/

Odden, A., Archibald, S., Fermanich, M., & Gallagher, H.A. (2002). A cost framework

for professional development. *Journal of Education Finance, 28*(1), 51-74.

OECD. (2011). *Strong performers and successful reformers in education: Lessons from*

PISA for the United States. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Paige, D. D., & Magpuri-Lavell, T. (2014). Reading fluency in the middle and secondary

grades. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 7*(1), 83-96.

Penuel, W.R., Fishman, B.J., Yamaguchi, R., & Gallagher, L.P. (2007, December). What

makes professional development effective? Strategies that foster curriculum

implementation. *American Educational Research Journal, 44*(4), 921-958.

Perry, J.A., (2012). To Ed.D. or not to Ed.D.? *Phi Delta Kappan, 94*(1). 41-44.

Phillips, D. C. K, Bardsley, M. E., Bach, T. & Gibb-Brown, K. (2009). "But I teach

math!" the journey of middle school mathematics teachers and literacy coaches

learning to integrate literacy strategies into the math instruction. *Education,*

129(3), 467-472.

Reed, D.K., (2009). A synthesis of professional development on the implementation of

    literacy strategies for middle school content area teachers. *RMLE Online, 32*(10),

    p. 1-12.

Reeves, D.B. (2010). *Transforming professional development into student results.*

    Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Ringler, M. C., O'Neal, D., Rawls, J., & Cumiskey, S. (2013). The role of school leaders

    in teacher leadership development. *Rural Educator, 35*(1).

Sailors, M., (2008). Improving comprehension instruction through quality professional

    development. In S.E. Israel & G. G. Duffy (Eds.), *Handbook of research on*

    reading comprehension. New York, New York: Routledge Pubishing.

Sailors, M. & Price, L. R. (2010). Professional development that supports the teaching of

    cognitive reading strategy instruction, *The Elementary School Journal, 110*(3),

    301-322. doi:10.1086/648980

Sandholtz, J. H. & Scribner, S. P. (2006). The paradox of administrator control in

    fostering teacher professional development, *Teaching and Teacher Education,*

    22(2006), 1104-1117.

Saunders, W.M., Goldenberg, C.N., & Gallimore, R. (2009, December). Increasing

    achievement by focusing grade-level teams on improving classroom learning: A

    prospective, quasiexperimental study of Title I schools. *American Educational*

    Research Journal, 46(4), 1006-1033.

Shulman, L.S. (2000, January-February). Teacher development: Roles of domain

    expertise andpedagogical knowledge. *Journal of Applied Developmental*

    Psychology, 21(1), 129-135.

Somers, C. L., Owens, D., & Piliawsky, M. (2009). A study of high school dropout

      prevention and at-risk ninth graders role models and motivations for school

      completion, *Education 130*(2), 348-356.

Spillane, J.P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J.B. (2001, April). Investigating school

      leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher, 30*(3), 23-

      27.

Supovitz, J.A. & Turner, H.M. (2000, November). The effects of professional

      development on science teaching practices and classroom culture. *Journal of

      Research in Science Teaching, 37*(9), 963-980.

The Glossary of Education Reform (2016). *Teaming.* Retrieved from

      http://edglossary.org/teaming/

Thomas, A. F. (2015). Literacy professional development brings change to rural school.

      Global Education Journal, 2015(2), np.

Torgesen, J., Meadows, J.G., & Howard, P. (n.d.). *Using student outcome data to help

      guide professional development and teacher support: Issues for Reading First and

      K-12 reading plans.* Tallahassee, FL: Florida Center for Reading Research.

Town of Weaverville, NC (2016). Retrieved from http://www.weavervillenc.org/

Tschannen-Moran, M., & McMaster, P. (2009). Sources of self-efficacy: four

      professional development formats and their relationship to self-efficacy and

      implementation of a new teaching strategy. *The Elementary School Journal,

      110*(2), 228-245.

United States Census Data, (2010). Buncombe county. Retrieved from

      https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml#

US Department of Agriculture, (2016). Food and Nutrition Service. Retrieved from

    https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/income-eligibility-guidelines

Waters, J.T., Marzano, R.J., & McNulty, B.A. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30*

    years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement.

    Aurora, CO: McREL.

Watson, G. (2004). The legacy of Ishikawa, *Quality Progress,* 54-57. Retrieved from

    http://www.gregoryhwatson.eu/images/6-QP_Watson_-_April2004_-

    _Legacy_of_Ishikawa.pdf

Western Carolina University, (2016). *Ed. D. handbook (Scholar-practitioner handbook).*

Western North Carolina Vitality Index, (2016). Retrieved from

    http://www.wncvitalityindex.org/overview/about-wnc-vitality-index

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of

    professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning,

    Teacher and Teacher Education, 24(2008), 80-91.

Yager, S., Pedersen, J., Yager, R., & Noppe, R. (2011-2012). Impact of school leadership

    on teacher's professional growth: teacher perception of administrative support,

    National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal, 25(1&2), 12-21.

York-Barr, J. & Duke, K. (2004, Fall). What do we know about teacher leadership?

    Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Educational Research,*

    74(3), 255-316.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Learning Walk Documents

1. A Learning Walk is a time for us to assess our school's 'Culture of Learning'. Although we hope to see the Hawk 5 in action, its more about looking for those details that help define what we do every day to support learning (including reading).

2. Learning Walks ensure we have input, assessment, and collaboration in all that we do! This is a way to experience what our students experience; great teaching and interactive learning!

3. Learning Walks help us to get out of own heads! Sometimes, we need to take a breath of fresh, teacher air! We will feel empowered in our won classrooms as we feel the vibes of great teaching all over the school. We will motivate each other!

4. Learning Walks are NOT judgmental or negative! It's all positive and reflective!
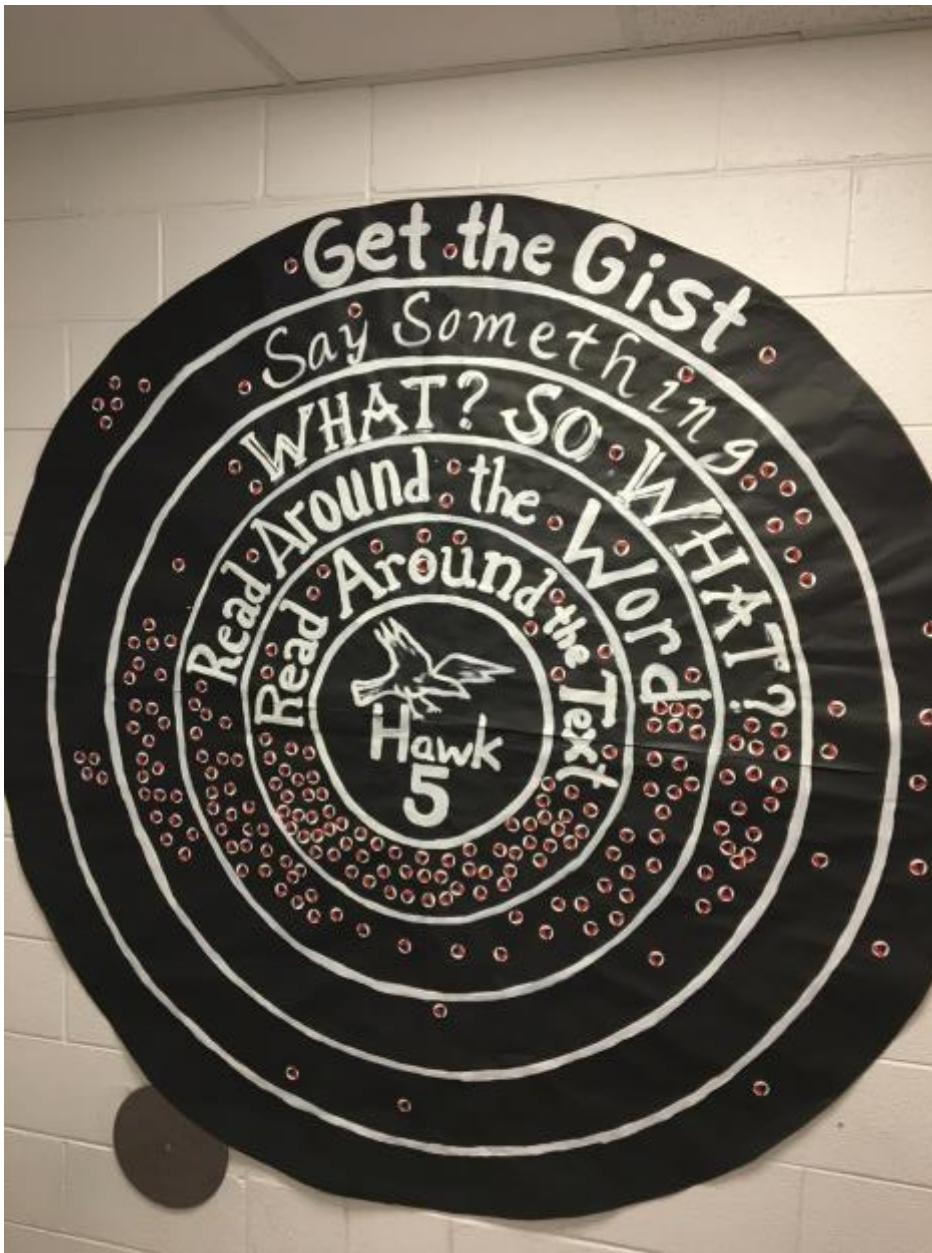
Process:

- Teachers sign up for two 'walks' on selection of assigned dates and times.

- Teachers enter the classroom as a group, no interaction with teacher.

- Teachers stay in the classroom for 10 minutes or less; share positive feedback with walker group in hallway immediately after each classroom visit.

Rubric (used by Hawk 5 leaders, but discontinued for peer learning walks):

- Is the use of Hawk 5 toolkit evident?

- Are the students reading? Writing? Speaking? Listening? Using vocabulary?

- Two stars and a wish: I wish there would have been__; I really liked __ and __.

- Have all teachers record answers on a google doc to share with peers.

Appendix B: Toolkit Target

Appendix C: Bulletin Board Reminder

Appendix D: Hawk 5 Web Page Resources

Appendix E: Survey 1

Reflect on your experiences this semester with the Hawk 5 Reading Toolkit initiative. A
rating scale will be used: **1**-not at all important, **2**-somewhat important, **3**-important, **4-**
very important, **5-** essential.

1. As the classroom teacher, how important is reading to support learning in your
    content area?

2. As the classroom teacher, how important is reading in your lesson
    planning/instructional design?

3. Thinking of your experience with **Learning Walks**, how would you rate
    your personal gain in the following areas:

    instructional strategies?

    classroom climate?

    school climate?

    our school's culture of learning?

4. In thinking about your professional learning process, please rank the following list
    of supports offered to you during the Hawk 5 initiative. Use **1 to identify the
    MOST** beneficial support offered. **Use each number 1-10 only once.**

- Toolkit
- Lit coach
- Principal's reminders
- Hawk 5 leadership team support
- formative assessment (stickers and target)
- PLC use of the strategies
- team planning for Hawk 5 use

- 2-week, single strategy implementation school-wide

- follow up refresher sessions every 2 weeks

- Learning Walks to identify evidence of reading

Appendix F: Survey 2

All responses are "Yes, No, Not Sure" other than the last question.

Responses are anonymous and confidential.

1. Did the beginning professional development session offered on December 16, 2015 at NBMS, increase your understanding of the Hawk 5?

2. Did the beginning professional development session offered on December 16, 2015 at NBMS, help you to teach or integrate the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?

3. Did the follow-up refresher sessions increase your understanding of the Hawk 5 program?

4. Did the follow-up refresher sessions help you to teach or integrate the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?

5. Did the web resources (including the digital tool-kit) increase your understanding of the Hawk 5 program?

6. Did the web resources (including the digital tool-kit) help you to teach or integrate the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?

7. Did the learning walks increase your understanding of the Hawk 5 program?

8. Did the learning walks help you to teach or integrate the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?

9. Did the support provided by the literacy coach and the leadership team increase your understanding of the Hawk 5 program?

10. Did the support provided by the literacy coach and the leadership team help you to teach or integrate the Hawk 5 strategies into your classroom?

11. Do you believe the professional learning supports offered (learning walks, refreshers, initial training session) were sufficient for developing your capacity to teach the Hawk 5 reading strategies?

12. Have you noticed improvement of student reading comprehension in your classroom as a result of the use of Hawk 5?

13. Would you like to have additional professional learning (PD) opportunities to increase your capacity to effectively use Hawk 5 in your classroom?

14. Do you have any additional comments or feedback concerning the Hawk 5 program and/or professional learning support for the Hawk 5 at our school?