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A Case Study of School Turnaround: How Leadership Behavior, Professional Learning, and Efficacy Building Can Impact Student Performance

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A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL TURNAROUND: HOW LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, AND EFFICACY BUILDING CAN IMPACT STUDENT PERFORMANCE

By
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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Winter Goodson under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Acknowledgments

Having been a product of two impoverished counties, I remember sadly that several of my classmates struggled with reading throughout school. I even remember reading a test to a classmate our senior year in high school. Even then I wondered how one managed to make it to their senior year lacking the basic skill of reading proficiently. I never imagined I would one day be an administrator. I feel strongly that leadership is critical for teacher success, and teacher success is critical for student success. I give all honor and glory to God that I am in a position to make a positive impact on students, just as my teachers and one very special principal did for me.

I would like to thank my husband Anthony for his constant encouragement throughout this doctoral journey. Your patience and love have meant the world to me, and I will never take that for granted. To my sons, Tyleif, Keyshorn, and Anthony, thank you for all you have taught me. Being a mother has made me a better person. I hope my journey has taught you that you can do anything in life if you trust God and do the work.

To my mother, thank you for surrounding me with books and making reading a daily part of our childhood. You gave me an irreplaceable gift and created a ripple effect for generations. To my father, I am forever grateful that I am your daughter. I miss you each day and carry your words with me. Uncle Calvin, thanks for always being there and for setting an example of excellence.

I would lastly like to thank Dr. Laws, Dr. Lamb, Dr. Artis, Dr. Stedman, and Dr. Yancey for all the unwavering support and those nudges to keep going.

Abstract

A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL TURNAROUND: HOW LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR, PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, AND EFFICACY BUILDING CAN IMPACT STUDENT PERFORMANCE. Goodson, Winter, 2022: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University. The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of school turnaround through an examination of educator perceptions of the implementation of Voelkel's (2014) framework for professional learning communities (PLCs), collective efficacy, and transformational leadership, which provided the theoretical framework for the study. This study explored the processes that take place in one of the previously lowest-performing elementary schools in the state to explore the patterns of behavior and beliefs of the team engaged in the work of turnaround. During this study, 19 educators completed a 25-question survey instrument with a 5-point Likert scale that measured the aforementioned constructs of collective efficacy, PLCs, and leadership. Grade level, exceptional children (EC), and curriculum team focus groups with four to six members each were conducted to give breadth to the quantitative data. Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses were followed up by another review of the literature to determine congruent themes. The findings of this study show that data-based decisions made through strong PLC collegiality, along with strong administrative leadership, are cornerstones for school improvement at the studied turnaround school.

Keywords: professional learning communities (PLC), efficacy, collective efficacy, transformational leadership, adult learning theory.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Education is critical to breaking the cycle of poverty. Educational quality, then, is of utmost importance in all schools, especially in schools with high concentrations of poverty. To increase opportunities for students who have limited access to resources, schools must provide a quality education. The implications of poverty include children entering school with a readiness gap (Roos et al. 2019). Many schools that are low performing are also high poverty, and school leaders are charged with making education equitable for all students. Doing that requires taking a close look at practices related to student learning, including teacher preparation and support in identified areas of need.

Principal leadership in a low-performing school requires working alongside and through different people (Papa & English, 2011), including school, home, and community. A great deal of that work will be within the walls of the school with the people who will have the most influence over student learning, the teachers. Papa and English (2011) found several leader beliefs and actions from their research on low-performing schools and turnaround principals. In addition to many other traits, these leaders encourage teachers to become learners again and build professional learning communities (PLCs) that guarantee excellence and competence. They invest in the people in the building.

This investment builds a sense of collectivity to spur change and a culture of excellence in schools that need it most. When looking at high-performing schools with high poverty, examining the perceived impact of leadership from the teachers who work with them can be beneficial. A study of one high-performing school with high poverty found that teachers overwhelmingly believed that the processes set in place by

administration were the reason for the excellent academic performance (DuBose, 2022). A study on teachers' motivation to stay in high-performing, high-poverty schools found that the administrators' appreciation for teachers' work, administrator support, administrator encouragement, and their recognition for the teachers' work well done were all extrinsic motivators in their decision (Gabriel, 2021).

The reciprocal relationship between principal and teacher in the quest for academic achievement for all students cannot be ignored. The two are essential for student success, and the nurturing of this collectivity is especially important in high-poverty schools.

School Reform in North Carolina

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is aimed at ensuring accountability for student learning that is inclusive of all students. Federal guidance is given to states to determine academic goals that support every student regardless of ability. Before ESSA, there was No Child Left Behind. NCLB and ESSA find their origins in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. ESSA requires states and school districts to describe in their Title I plan how they will support school improvements (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Quality Basic Education

In 1994, a student sued the state of North Carolina, claiming that he was denied the right to a sound basic education because his school essentially could not afford one based on the tax revenues of his community. This lawsuit was based on The Current Operations Appropriations Act of 1985, commonly referred to as the North Carolina Basic Education Program of 1985. The North Carolina Supreme Court ruled in 1997 that

it is the constitutional obligation of North Carolina to ensure a sound basic education. The North Carolina Supreme Court, in 2004, held that the state had failed to provide adequate resources, and the state was ordered to correct the deficiency. This Leandro right, named after the plaintiff, is the right to a sound basic education (Duke University School of Law, n.d.). The first provision of sound basic education is the capability of reading, writing, and speaking the English language (Duke University School of Law, n.d). This should come as no surprise when all other subject matters require this very basic skill. An education that does not provide the student with this most basic ability can logically be determined not to be sound at all.

In 2018, after plaintiff request, Judge Lee appointed WestEd, an independent consultant, to advise ways for North Carolina to remedy the constitutional violation and comply with the Leandro elements. Collaborations between WestEd, Learning Policy Institute, & Friday Institute for Educational Innovation at North Carolina State University (2019) led to a report outlining critical needs, and Judge Lee signed a consent order in 2020 requiring a plan of action to be completed within 60 days. Schools and districts must present a plan of action to provide competent, well-trained teachers and principals, sound instructional practices, and equitable resources for all students, especially those at risk ("Consent Order," 2020). Governor Cooper created by executive order a commission on access to sound basic education to meet the constitutional duty of the three areas in the original ruling (Commission on Access to Sound Basic Education, n.d.). The Commission includes members from early education to higher education and works in conjunction with WestEd. A comparison document of recommendations from both documents was created to provide a streamlined document of reference for school

districts.

Reading Instruction

One thing that is central to the Leandro ruling is that a sound basic education begins with the ability to read. Teaching reading is not simple. Many skills linking early language and literacy to future reading ability are woven into skilled reading (Spear-Swerling, 2015), and most teachers are not equipped for the challenges they meet in low-income schools where most students have not been exposed to vocabulary experiences that help determine comprehension. These are multi-faceted and continuously evolving skills requiring fluid application of scaffolded strategies (Wijekuma et al., 2019).

> If a child is struggling to read in upper elementary grades, it is unlikely that they are spontaneously going to become superior readers through some developmental change; it is more plausible that good instruction is the best antidote to poor reading. (Wijekumar et al., p. 7)

Preservice preparation and teacher experience are critical components of delivering quality instruction. Teachers who lack understanding of and preparation in the instruction of early reading skills are often not able to deliver evidence-based instruction, which is especially important for struggling readers. Many teachers do not have knowledge of the structure of spoken and written language (Moats, 2000) and in many cases do not deliver structured literacy (Spear-Swerling, 2018). Often, their actual and perceived knowledge of early literacy skills may differ (Cunningham et al., 2004).

When a school is low-performing, an obvious focus is to have tunnel vision on instruction, but that scope can be limited by teacher efficacy. Opper (2019) concluded that in terms of student performance on math and reading tests, a teacher is likely to have

two or three times the impact of any other school element. The impact of teaching and learning is highly contingent upon teacher leadership. Standard 1 of the North Carolina Teaching Standards requires that teachers take responsibility for all student learning while also advocating for positive change to affect student learning (NCEES Information and Resources, 2022). In order to consistently deliver fair and equitable educational opportunities, teachers must be knowledgeable of subject matter and instructional delivery. Principals must invest in the people in the building.

Reading, as a fundamental competency for access to a sound basic education, is well established. Understanding how to deliver quality reading instruction is a fundamental competency of educators and not just early elementary educators. Numbers indicate that many students are not proficient readers leaving fourth grade. While it does get increasingly difficult to close the reading gap after that critical pre-k through third-grade window is closed, that does not absolve educators from the obligation to do so. How that learning takes place requires knowledge that many teachers may not possess. Preservice education may not have prepared teachers to understand the diverse reading needs they encounter in elementary classrooms. The National Reading Panel and The Institute of Educational Sciences outline what teachers need to know and be able to teach. This includes the five components of effective reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000; Salinger, 2010).

A study of 99 teacher preparation programs and 2,337 preservice teachers by The Institute for Educational and Regional Assistance found that when given a knowledge assessment, preservice teachers answered 61% of fluency items correctly. They answered

58% of meaning items correctly, and they only answered 53% of alphabetic items correctly (Salinger, 2010). Lubell and Putman (2016) found that of 820 undergraduate elementary programs, 39% provide instruction in all the essential components of early reading instruction. Many other programs address no more than one of these components in their coursework (Lubell & Putman, 2016). Teacher preparation programs must ensure their elementary teacher candidates understand how children learn to read (Lubell & Putman, 2016). Preservice curricula and reading research often vary, but this research has not changed in 20 years since the National Reading Panel (2000) established best practices for early reading instruction. With teachers lacking the fundamental teaching skills, it is increasingly up to school leaders in low-performing schools to train teachers to provide quality reading instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Children who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade have a much higher risk of dropping out of school and living in poverty (Fiester, 2010) The National Assessment of Educational Progress (n.d.) shows the achievement gap between students at high-poverty and low-poverty schools has not changed and that the average fourth-grade reading score has not changed measurably from 2015 to 2017, with 35% and 36% proficiency respectively. The achievement gaps between White-Black and White-Hispanic students did not change measurably from 2015-2017 (de Brey et al., 2019).

Impoverished children generally perform lower on standardized assessments and have lower prospects for future educational and occupational attainment. These students need additional resources to lessen the effects of early childhood environments (Hair et al., 2015). Poverty is a great threat to healthy development and can impede cognitive

function and working memory into adulthood (Evans & Schamberg, 2009).

With all that is at stake, the urgency of increasing student reading acquisition is the burden of every principal. Principals and teachers who serve in high-poverty schools have many obstacles to overcome to help every student attain reading proficiency.

Setting of the Study

Rural County is a Tier I county, which means it is one of the poorest counties in North Carolina. In 2017, 21% of those 18 years of age and younger in North Carolina lived below the federal poverty limit; in Eastern City, almost 40% of children live in poverty (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2022). At City Elementary, 90% of students are economically disadvantaged. Eastern City, Rural County's prominent city, is centrally located and has one school feeder pattern from kindergarten through 12th grade. A Neighborhood Scouts report stated,

> With a crime rate of 63 per one thousand residents, [Eastern City] has one of the highest crime rates in America compared to all communities of all sizes–from the smallest towns to the very largest cities. One's chance of becoming a victim of either violent or property crime here is one in 16. Within North Carolina, more than 94% of the communities have a lower crime rate than Eastern City.

With the distinction of economic distress and high poverty comes a great need to create equitable learning for the youngest citizens of Rural County, Eastern City, and especially City Elementary.

Purpose of the Study

There are various methods of professional development to empower teachers to ensure that students are receiving a sound basic education. These include coaching,

mentoring, specific on-site and off-site professional development offerings, and continuing education courses, among others. Coaching and mentoring are heavily used in many districts through beginning teacher programs and district- and school-level instructional coaches. Coaching in particular has become the main method of professional growth. Coaching may be provided by instructional coaches, teachers, and administrators, as well as outside coaches, but principals are in essence the "lead coach."

Knight (2009) said this about the role of the principal in coaching:

> How principals view coaching influences the roles coaches fill. When principals view themselves as the sole instructional leader in the school, coaches assume roles that have less impact on teaching and student learning because they are respectfully deferring to principals. If principals abdicate their responsibility for instructional leadership to coaches, coaches have little hope of making a difference because teachers will believe that continuous improvement is unimportant. When principals engage coaches as co-instructional leaders, coaches will approach their work with heightened responsibility for students' academic success. (p. 17)

The principal's role in coaching teachers cannot be understated. While knowledgeable teachers may have an abundance of knowledge to share, most do not possess the training to transfer that to other teachers (Moss, 2015). Traditional professional development often lacks practicality; that is, there is a divide between what research says and actual classroom practice. This is not to say that pedagogy is not necessary. Coaching and group professional development can be done simultaneously and need not be separated into two disconnected categories (Driscoll, 2008). Effective

coaching of teachers requires a shared understanding between coach and teacher that includes, among other things, establishing a model of effective teaching and establishing a coaching perspective (Marzano et al., 2013). In order to transform a low-performing school into one where student learning takes place at an acceptable level, there must be a baseline standard of what good instruction looks like as well as an understanding of expectations and roles of both teacher and coach. This is where the shared understanding between coach and teacher is critical.

Transformational coaching involves training, counseling, confronting, and mentoring. Teachers will need specific skill training if they are to provide research-based instruction. After specific instructional training, coaches may have to confront issues or concerns that arise and create a less than desirable performance. When a relationship has been established and shared and understanding is in place, confronting is simpler and allows the coach to clarify goals and objectives and related current performance to find solutions (Crane & Patrick, 2017). Coaching, unlike mentoring, focuses on a specific skill or goals: Coaching normally entails rounds of classroom visits, followed by explicit feedback soon after the visit, followed by teacher reflection of their instruction (Buser, 2018). The transfer of learned skills through coaching is high because it is relevant to real problems in practice (Shernoff et al., 2014).

Mentoring provides another layer of professional development, as the mentee is essentially coached one on one to take on a leadership role. In North Carolina, mentors are assigned to all beginning teachers in Years 1 through 3 of teaching as part of the beginning teacher support program (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2022). Mentor meetings occur at least monthly, and mentors ensure that beginning

teachers comply with deadlines pertaining to licensure as well as district initiatives. An agenda is provided to school mentors by the district coordinator to help mentees set up their classroom, understand how to navigate the student information system, and monitor scheduling and other logistical matters. Mentors are people the mentees can go to for support.

Coaches and mentors use observation to provide teachers with feedback to support their professional growth. These observations may be quick walkthroughs at different times in the lesson or they may be formal and conducted through the duration of an entire lesson. Feedback should be FAST; that is fair, accurate, specific, and timely (Hattie & Yates, 2014; Reeves, 2016). Feedback that is provided in the moment helps the teacher make practical adjustments to instruction. Observations are useful for coaching and mentoring because they allow the coach and mentee to discuss progress between instances of observation. At times, there may be a need for continuing education courses that are specific to observed needs or personal growth goals. These courses may be in the form of a cohort that has the same need, self-paced online, or off-site professional development session. An example of this is a behavioral support cohort of teachers who have had observable difficulties with classroom management, led by an outside behavioral specialist to deepen understanding of classroom management and build a plan of action moving forward. This takes the form of coaching as teachers are supported through the process of establishing a positive learning environment.

Coaching can provide professional development that is not only linked to specific training but is ongoing and changing as deemed needed based on data. Students at low-performing schools have failed to read proficiently at an alarming rate. The challenge

rests with how leaders lead teachers to provide high-quality literacy instruction to all students, regardless of each student's individual abilities. This is a function of principal leadership wherein the focus is on tasks directly related to teaching and learning (Knight, 2009). The school in this study approaches teacher leadership systematically to ensure teachers provide quality instruction. This top-down approach includes PLCs led by the administration team and gradually released to teachers when they are ready.

PLCs provide a structure for teacher growth and understanding. They ensure that teachers are not working in isolation but rather grow collectively in meeting the school improvement goals. Teachers need the resources of time and instructional leadership in order to analyze data to make data-driven decisions (Ghosh, 2022). PLCs can provide the space for this meaningful work, and school leadership can provide the coaching that makes PLCs effective.

This dissertation contributes to the body of work on the things schools can do to impact low performance. Findings from this study will be shared with the district, as it has several schools that are designated as low and/or persistently low performing. The study will focus on reading instruction in terms of achievement data analysis.

Research Questions

The research study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school?
2. How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school?
3. How do teachers perceive transformational leadership in a turnaround school?

Overview of Methodology

This study sought to understand the phenomenon of improving the culture at a low-performing school for turnaround success. This case study describes the processes that take place in one of the lowest-performing elementary schools in the state to explore the patterns of behavior and beliefs of the team charged with the task of taking a school from failure to success. This study includes both qualitative and quantitative data collection done concurrently. This methodology was chosen to give a more robust study of turnaround work.

Significance

Leandro legislation in North Carolina provided for a sound basic education that at the very least provides students with the ability to read. City Elementary students are failing to read fluently, requiring a paradigm shift in learning culture at the school with a focus on reading. School leaders serving in high-poverty, low-performing schools have an obligation to advance the education of students who have been marginalized. This education begins with the ability to read proficiently. It is increasingly up to leaders in these schools to develop teachers to improve instructional delivery, making learning equitable for students who are behind. Successful administrators are able to lead this type of cultural change. This study was a voyage of understanding what it takes to create a culture of achievement in reading instruction.

Definition of Key Terms

Transformational Leadership

Administrator leadership that focuses on solving problems to improve school performance. Transformational leadership involves consensus building and collective

efficacy.

Transformational Coaching

The ability of school leaders to coach teachers at their level of need to meet the needs of all students.

Turnaround

The act of taking a low-performing school from a downward to an upward trajectory.

Turnaround Model

One of the intervention models for school reform in North Carolina. This model requires replacing the principal and 50% or more of the staff, providing charter-like flexibility, introducing instructional reforms, and increasing learning time. This model is one of four reform model options available to LEAs to support the reform of a school that has a recurring low-performing designation.

Restart

The Restart Model allows for the local board of education to operate the school with the rules and exemptions charter schools receive. This model is also one of four reform model options available to LEAs to support the reform of a school that has a recurring low-performing designation.

Organization of the Study

This study includes five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study and provides background, the problem statement, research questions, and an overview of the study.

Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant literature pertaining to the study. The review

includes a conceptual framework used to understand the dynamics of turnaround efforts. It includes a review of the tenets comprising each component of that framework: PLCs, efficacy, transformational leadership, coaching change, and a review of adult learning theory.

Chapter 3 is a review of the methodology and procedures that were used. It includes a discussion of the research design, the theoretical framework, the research questions, the setting, achievement data related to the setting and study purpose, data collection procedures, the data collection instrument, and data analysis procedures. This study is a mixed methods study that contains survey data and focus group data collected concurrently, in order to provide insight into the work of school turnaround.

Chapter 4 is a presentation and discussion of the data findings that include trends and themes that prevail from the analysis.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of findings and how they may impact future educational leadership studies. This section includes the analysis of the literature review, study implications, and limitations. This section also includes suggestions for school and district leadership that will be of use in other schools.

Summary

School leaders understand that they impact future generations and can possibly help end the cycle of poverty associated with illiteracy. The quality of a student's education should not be impacted by the location of their school, and it is up to school leaders to provide a high-quality education. If teachers are the most significant factor in the education of children, administrators have a great obligation to influence and facilitate the professional growth and efficacy of the teachers in their building. If the

ability to read is the foundation for future success and opportunity, school leaders are responsible for understanding and providing quality literacy instruction by empowering teachers with professional learning and leadership that increase collective efficacy in order to create a culture of literacy for all students regardless of background.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

There has been much research on at-risk schools and underlying causes of low performance. Research on efforts to reduce the achievement gap in these schools often focuses on what critical skills students are lacking and what schools and districts are doing to address the problem. Many factors contribute to the lack of student achievement in low-performing schools and many factors also contribute to the minimal teacher success in these schools. Change has to begin with the principal. The principal leadership effect on teacher performance and consequently student success is well documented. In 1998, Hallinger and Heck, examining 43 studies on principal leadership over a span from 1980 to 1995, found that principals have an indirect but measurable and significant effect on student success. Their impact on teachers and culture improves student achievement. Research from Supovitz et al. (2009) and Sawchuk (2014) further supported that principal leadership improves teacher practice. Supovitz et al. found, "empirical evidence that principal leadership influences student learning indirectly through teachers' instructional practices" (p. 46). A lack of principal leadership can be reflected in teacher ratings of professional learning as well (Sawchuk, 2014), further giving credibility to the idea that an effective principal supports effective teachers.

This understanding leads to an examination of transformational leadership, collective efficacy, PLCs, and learning theory. This chapter explores how these areas of focus can be utilized to positively influence student achievement. This review begins with a framework for student achievement underpinned by adult learning theory and the construct of collective efficacy from social cognitive learning theory, in order to provide

suggestions for best practice while contributing to the body of knowledge.

Theoretical Framework Overview

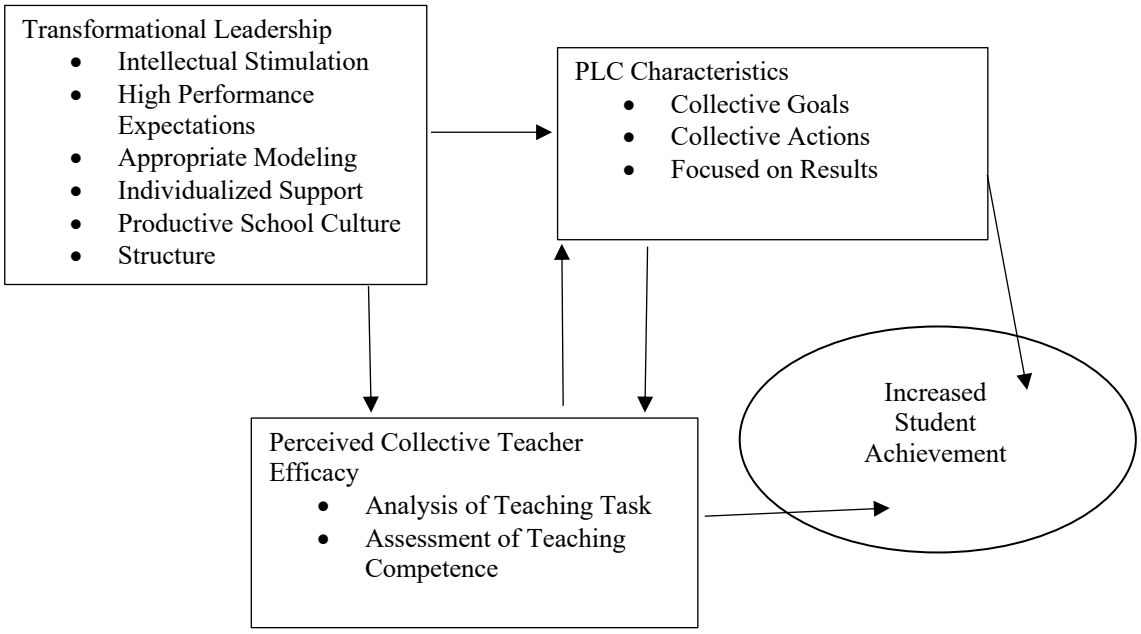
Voelkel's (2011) study inspected the relationship among collective efficacy, PLCs, and transformational leadership in schools. His study asked what the relationship of collective efficacy to PLCs is and the function of the principal in fostering PLCs. Voelkel (2014) found that there was a "clear association between a team's sense of collective efficacy, the quality of their PLC work and a positive perception of the principal's leadership" (p. 18). His case study explored these relationships through multiple sources of data. Voelkel (2011) used two sets of participants: teachers and principals showing both low and high efficacy and PLC characteristics, and all teachers and principals in the district. Interviews were conducted after an analysis of surveys was complete. Those invited to participate were teachers and the principal from four schools who showed both higher and lower efficacy levels within their PLC teams. The interview zoned in on the "construct of collective efficacy through the lens of a professional learning community model as defined by DuFour and Eaker (2009) and leadership" (Voelkel, 2011, p. 64). In addition to surveys and interviews, the study used documentation data indicated in the surveys and interviews. The document analysis gave better understanding of the degree of collective efficacy in a PLC model (Voelkel, 2011), gave greater insight into the phenomenon, and led to the emergence of themes.

Voelkel's (2011, 2014) findings support that meaningful collaboration strengthens collective efficacy and that leaders should focus on PLC processes as a means to increase collective efficacy. He found that teams that demonstrate a lesser degree of PLC characteristics have a lower efficacy perception, and the opposite is true when teams have

strong degrees of PLC characteristics. Teachers who viewed themselves as part of a functioning PLC team had a high perceived collective efficacy. He also found transformational leadership affected PLC processes positively, especially structure, support, and culture. The constructs of his reconceptualized framework link transformational leadership to effective PLCs and collective efficacy, which leads to a positive impact on student achievement (Figure 1). School leadership focuses on effectively supporting teachers through the collaborative learning that takes place within a PLC, focusing on student outcomes.

Figure 1

A Framework for Effective PLCs, Collective Teacher Efficacy, and Transformational Leadership



Note. This figure demonstrates the relationships between transformational leadership, perceived collective efficacy, and PLC characteristics and their ability to increase student achievement. This framework was introduced by Dr. Robert Voelkel (2014).

Voelkel (2014) found that the characteristics of transformational leadership (Leithwood, 1994) and the three fundamental characteristics of a PLC (DuFour & Eaker, 2009), interrelate with and promote collective teacher efficacy, which in turn produces an increase in student achievement. The Voelkel (2014) framework served as the theoretical framework in this study, underpinned by a review of how adults learn, the work of Bandura (1997) on collective efficacy, as well as DuFour and Eaker's (2009) PLC model.

The belief that all students can learn must be shared across the entire organization for cultural change to occur (DuFour, 2004). This relationship between leadership and PLC characteristics reinforces the awareness that adult learning that builds expertise while increasing collective efficacy, will impact student achievement. The impact of collective efficacy can be summarized with a simple statement, "we, is smarter than me" (Bloomberg & Pitchford, 2017, p. 24). Voelkel's (2014) study of 16 K-12 elementary, middle, and high schools in a public school district in central California, with a high concentration of socioeconomically disadvantaged students, found a strong association between PLC implementation and increases in student achievement with variances between school teams. There were commonalities among all teams, but there were two major differences between teams that were deemed more effective than others.

According to Voelkel (2014),

> First, the more effective teams report not just sharing data but using it to analyze and identify student needs and alter instruction to meet those needs. In other words, there was joint action as a result of looking at the data, which has been shown to be important for changes in teacher practices (Chrispels, Andres, & Gonzalez, 2008; Little, 2003). The less effective teams often did not engage in

> such practices. Second, the more effective teams engage in more intense collaborative work, are willing to take risks and experiment until they find strategies that increase student mastery of standards. They seem to be intensely committed to continuous improvement and are focused on results. For example, documents confirm the more effective teams use the data to re-teach and reassess as is evidenced by the teamwork completed after the initial assessment. The less effective teams do not have documents indicating re-teaching or reassessing beyond the initial sharing of data. (pp. 197-198)

Understanding the structure of PLCs, the role of leadership, and the process of building collective efficacy will enable teams to implement with fidelity and sustainment. The characteristics and structures of quality PLCs, transformational leadership, and collective efficacy are further discussed in this chapter.

PLCs

PLCs hold great promise for the work of school reform. Evidence suggests that significant school improvement can be achieved through turning schools into these collaborative communities of professional growth (DuFour & Eaker, 2009). That begins with an understanding of what a PLC is and its characteristics, culture, and processes.

Conception of PLCs

Teachers have long embraced working in isolation, and it continues to create a major obstacle to school improvement efforts (Elmore, 2004; Lieberman, 1995; Little, 1990; Sarason, 1996; Stewart, 2012). Peter Senge (1990) popularized the notion of learning organizations and shared vision in *The Fifth Discipline*. Charles Myers (1996), Shirley Hord (1997), and Richard DuFour (2015), among others, popularized the term

PLC in their books. Hord (1997) found that there was a need for teachers to engage in interconnected activities and shared professional labors with student learning as the purpose. Myers (1996) proposed that schools become PLCs in his presentation to the American Educational Research Association. Over time, PLCs emerged as common verbiage for schools and districts that claim to be learning organizations. The term PLC has been used for everything from an after-school staff discussion of the school calendar to a grade level meeting on field trips, but a PLC is more than a group. Schools and districts that commit to implementing the PLC process with fidelity will have to assign educators to collaborative teams. Teams work together to impact student learning through collaborative goal setting with evidence of improved learning outcomes (DuFour, 2015). In this way, leaders re-culture schools to move teachers from isolation to collaboration.

The Case for PLCs

There have been multiple studies that associate positive teacher perceptions of professional learning through PLCs and teacher-perceived effectiveness (Arroyo, 2011; Kastner, 2015; Mulligan, 2016; Reimer 2010). PLCs can function as the setting for professional learning that is job-embedded. Kastner's (2015) study included questioning to determine educator perceptions of the quality of professional learning through their PLC communities. Kastner found that partaking in quality PLCs led to areas of strength. Arroyo (2011) interviewed 13 administrators of middle schools in San Bernardino County for their study and found that by developing these learning communities, member learning increased and improved professional results. Reimer's (2010) study found that in schools that were overcoming barriers, essential PLC characteristics were present. Mulligan's (2016) findings reinforced the notion that student achievement and

collaborative cultures are very connected.

There are also studies that examine the perceived impact of PLCs from a school principal perspective. A study in Texas with 98 high school principal respondents found that regardless of demographic characteristics, principals overwhelmingly found PLCs to be an important influencer of school improvement (Guajardo-Cantú, 2017). The perceived levels of PLC effectiveness between principals and teachers in a district in South Dakota found that the effectiveness of implementation impacted the effectiveness of the PLC systems (Gillespie, 2016), suggesting the importance of implementation fidelity but also suggesting that doing the work together diminishes perception gaps between administration and teachers.

The PLC Model

There are various models for PLCs, but the most popular is the DuFour et al. (2016) model, which provides a comprehensive rationale for not only explaining but implementing the PLC process, beginning with ideas that drive the work. The first big idea is a focus on learning, or the notion that the main purpose of the school is to guarantee high levels of learning for every student (DuFour et al., 2016). This takes a collective vision of what must be done to ensure learning for all students and is an unambiguous understanding that being taught and learning are not synonymous. This laser focus provides a baseline for every decision by asking if these actions will actually ensure greater levels of learning for students (DuFour et al., 2016).

This learning is not limited to student learning. Carpenter (2008) found during his study, that sometimes school administrators and teachers need to shift the focus from teaching to learning; meaning both students and staff are learning. The second pillar of

PLCs is a collaborative culture and collective responsibility for ensuring that this shared responsibility and collaborative work is not optional but rather the expectation of employment. During his case study of three schools implementing PLCs, Carpenter further found that collective decision-making in building PLCs was a foundational structure.

Collaborative teams work together to reach shared goals for which they are mutually accountable (DuFour et al., 2016). Roles are interchangeable from session to session to build collective authority. Data analysis is done as a team to create common assessments, determine goals, and create a process of collective investigation and analysis. For teachers to improve schools, collaborative skills and relationships are necessary (Fullan, 1993). The third big idea is a results orientation. There is a focus on evidence of student learning to inform instructional practice. Educators use student data to make decisions that include analyzing instruction to determine effectiveness, determining learning strategies, and applying newly gained knowledge to make improvements. This creates a focus on positive outcomes, not good intentions.

Characteristics of PLCs

High-performing PLCs have six essential characteristics: a shared mission, vision, values, and goals; collaborative teams; collective inquiry into best practice and current reality; actionable steps or learning by doing; a vow to continuous improvement; and a results focus (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

The mission is the fundamental purpose of the school's existence, why do we exist? The vision addresses the question of "what must we become" to accomplish our mission? Values or collective commitments guide behavior, and goals are the standards

for measuring the success of the work. DuFour et al. (2016) described collaboration as the work educators do to impact student achievement, and it is guided by four driving questions for collective inquiry, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Guiding Questions of a PLC

Guiding question	Clarifying description
What is it we want students to know and be able to do?	What standards are priority? What are the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions that should be acquired?
How do we know if they have learned it?	What formative assessments are we using? What evidence of learning are we gathering through team-developed common assessments?
How do we respond if they do not learn it?	What instructional moves will we make when data indicates the students that need additional support on a standard per unit of instruction?
How will we respond to extend learning when they do learn it?	What instructional moves will we make to extend learning when data indicates the students that have demonstrated proficiency?

(Adapted from DuFour et al., 2016)

Time must be provided for common preparation that allows teams to unpack standards, identify learning targets, and analyze data using the guiding questions. This is a continuous process of improvement that includes a results orientation where clear and attainable team smart goals are created to drive the work of the team. These are goals that are strategic, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound. SMART goals are aligned to school and sometimes district goals. Team SMART goals should be aligned to the school improvement goals and should include the previous level of achievement as well as the improvement goal for the indicator that is being monitored (DuFour et al.,

2016). An example of a SMART goal for City Elementary is, “The number of students at City Elementary who demonstrate a 3, 4, or 5 for grade level proficiency in Reading will increase from 21.1% (97 of 460) to (125 of 460) 27% by the end of the 2018-19 school year as measured by the state End of Grade (EOG) assessment.” The guiding questions require educators to continuously go through the process of analyzing their instruction through formative and common assessment to determine instructional moves necessary to reach their SMART goals. This is a cyclical process and becomes the culture of the school; what is done every day (Eaker et al., 2002).

Common formative assessment is critical to the PLC process. Through the creation of these assessments, both student and teacher learning takes place. Teachers develop these assessments as a team through deep learning of objectives and questioning. Teachers determine what essential knowledge of standards students should possess in each unit and assessments should be aligned and created to measure that. The corresponding instruction should align with assessment proficiency criteria. Teachers are able to come together around data from the assessment and discuss instructional delivery and where they see strengths and weaknesses in shared strategies. This helps them determine the next step in instruction for each student, whether they learned it or did not learn it. Common formative assessment data shared with students help them comprehend their achievement goal they are trying to reach, their current achievement level in relation to that aspiration, and how to reach that goal (DuFour et al., 2016). The process brings teams together to analyze the impact of their instruction and improve practice.

PLCs are an internal reform in which teachers and instructional leaders take responsibility for the learning culture and start from the ground level. This approach,

when developed appropriately, will then be able to support initiatives that are sent down from the district, state, and federal levels. This is investing in knowledgeable practitioners who can make comprehensive decisions about how to structure education for students (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015).

According to DuFour and Fullan (2013),

> The PLC process is based on the premise that the quality of schools or districts can only be as good as the people within them, so improvement requires investing in, rather than demeaning or circumventing, educators. In PLCs, teachers, principals, and district leaders are not viewed as the cause of the problems in education, but as the ultimate solution to those problems. Building individual and collective capacity to engage in ongoing processes of continuous improvement becomes the focus of reform. (p. 28)

PLCs as a Vehicle for Job-Embedded Learning

The PLC process builds ongoing adult learning into the culture and systems of the school. There is no disconnection in professional development as is experienced in many traditional professional development sessions, where learning takes place but may never translate to classroom practice. PLCs provide for adult learning that is meaningful to practice and collective efficacy. PLCs accomplish this by providing professional learning that is job implanted, engages people in the job, is cooperative, is united with the school's goals, and is evaluated by results. This evaluation of results includes frequent feedback to further inform the work (Dufour & Fullan, 2013).

One research study of the perceived effectiveness of PLCs found that participants believed PLCs supported their professional development as educators (Hudson, 2015).

The findings from the examination of teacher experiences and perceptions after participating in a PLC for 2 years led to a training process for teachers on the structure and functioning within a PLC environment. A qualitative case study in a high needs school sought to understand how the PLC process can be used as a tool for teachers to contribute to student academic growth in school as well as to understand the impact on teacher relationships on the team. The findings revealed that instruction improved due to teacher collaboration in the PLC (Lewis, 2021). East (2015) found that the teachers perceive PLCs as a place to learn and develop collectively and continuously. They perceived PLCs as having a reciprocal relationship to school improvement. PLCs provide a safe place for teachers to refine their practice.

PLCs can be used to target professional development on specific instructional practices. A study on improving middle school writing instruction through professional development and PLCs found that all participants believed they were more prepared to teach writing as a result of the workshop and PLCs (Marculitis, 2017). A 2020 study of professional learning teams in one North Carolina school district found that the majority of teachers believe their work in their professional learning team positively impacted their teaching practices in biology and student achievement (Dawkins, 2020).

There are commonalities of effective and ineffective PLCs. Voelkel (2014) found that effective PLC teams engage in more intense collaboration and commit to continuous improvement with a results focus. They are risk-takers and use trial and error until they find strategies that increase standard proficiency for students. They use data to analyze and identify student needs and then adjust instruction accordingly. Teams that were not as effective often do not fully embrace these practices. They tend to share data but fall short

of the deep analysis, collaboration, and altering of instruction. A study of the influence of PLCs on English language teacher content knowledge found that ELA teachers were not experiencing a quality PLC because it was underdeveloped and underutilized (Pittman, 2015) and that there was a divide between their perception and practice (Pittman, 2015). This suggests that PLC results are dependent on the fidelity of implementation within the PLC systems.

A PLC, as defined by DuFour (2010), again, is a group of educators with shared beliefs, visions, or values that meet regularly and often, discuss best practice, share knowledge, and work collaboratively in recurring cycles to improve student outcomes.

Individual and Collective Efficacy

Efficacy finds its origins in social cognitive learning theory, an extension of social learning theory made famous by Albert Bandura (1977). The theory offers that people learn from social interactions, by witnessing others' actions and forming similar behaviors. Social cognitive theory includes an additional cognitive component of human agency, the belief that one has the capacity to affect their condition (Bandura, 2001). This perspective of agency holds that to be an agent is to choose to have influence over the environment and contribute to circumstances instead of merely becoming products of them. Bandura (2006) proposed a triadic reciprocal interaction among personal factors, environmental influences, and the behavior itself. This triadic reciprocal causation determines behavior, holding that behaviors are not hard-wired. Humans do not have to function as mere products of their environment. Dynamics change, and as agents in continually changing environments, we influence outcomes and behaviors. The idea of private agency speaks to one's deliberate behavior or capacity to conceive events and

different courses of action and then choose which action to take (Bandura, 2001).

Personal agency is further influenced by personal beliefs of efficacy or a person's perceived ability to perform a behavior. Social cognitive theory holds that ability perceptions guide a person's behavior by influencing what they consequently attempt and how much they engage in activities. Positive expectations will have a more significant effect than negative ones in choosing what to give energy to. Negative reinforcements further reinforce a lack of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2006). Optimism and positive thinking about the future are rooted in self-efficacy. When full of self-doubt in one's ability to exercise control of events and confidence that effort will not matter either, self-efficacy will be negative. Resiliency is necessary to overcome adversities and to improve one's personal life and that of others (Bandura, 2008).

The social cognitive learning theory distinguishes two additional types of agency: proxy and collective. When people cannot directly control conditions affecting their lives, they exercise proxy agencies by influencing those with resources and/or knowledge to act on their behalf and secure desired results. Collective efficacy is an organization's shared belief in its unified ability to perform and achieve goals (Colledge, 2002), while self-efficacy is one's belief in their own ability. The shared belief of a group of people to achieve desired goals is crucial to the collective agency. This shared belief in their collective efficacy influences what they can accomplish as a group (Bandura, 1999).

A synthesis of 40 years of research by Zee and Koomen (2016) on teacher self-efficacy and its implications provides interesting insight into the relationships between classroom processes, student academic adjustment, and teacher well-being. They identified studies on the significance or results of TSE from 1976 to 2014 (Zee &

Koomen, 2016). This time span was chosen due to RAND corporation's study that brought teacher self-efficacy to the forefront of educational research. They used three phases of searching before identifying a vast collection of suitable research papers. These included using keywords for classroom-based framework, then combining keywords with other keywords related to the parameters of the study, and lastly sifting through the vastness to identify those limited to empirical, English language articles published in peer-reviewed journals. Articles chosen for publication in their review specifically focused on individual teacher efficacy and factors connected with students' educational adjustment, teachers' satisfaction, or postulated classroom practices (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Their study found teacher self-efficacy to be relevant for each.

Self-efficacy is more than understanding that specific actions and achievements result in desired outcomes; there must also be the belief that one has the ability to produce such actions (Bandura, 1977), as with a teacher who understands the merits of a particular strategy. Teacher self-efficacy will be a determining factor in instructional decisions. For example, a belief that gradually releasing instructional responsibility instruction may lead to increased learning (outcome expectation) may motivate a teacher to use that strategy. Nevertheless, gradual release of responsibility as a strategy is unlikely to be utilized if teachers do not believe they are capable of supporting their students in the most needed areas (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

The teacher's belief that they can positively impact student learning regardless of factors outside of their control is a positive efficacy belief. It is a perception that no matter the home life and other factors or perceived barriers to education, they as the teacher can affect changes in student learning (Eun, 2018). The instructional choices

teachers select to promote student cognitive improvement may be encouraged by teacher self-efficacy. Likewise, efficacious teachers engage in professional learning that keeps them up to date with the profession, and they are more willing to try new approaches to improve their practice. Teacher self-efficacy affects outcomes at various classroom levels for both the teacher and student, including instructional decisions, expected behaviors, and social and emotional learning (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Teacher self-efficacy is essential to the implementation fidelity of programs in the school. Regardless of how research based an instructional strategy is, implementation will be heavily dependent on teacher-perceived ability to carry it out. The space between what teachers know to do and how to make it happen can be vast. Highly efficacious teachers are less critical of implementing new instructional methods because they see them as important and consistent with their own practices and are also more apt to work collectively with colleagues to increase the use of data to inform instruction and make decisions in class (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Efficacious teachers more willingly implement new and pioneering instructional methods (Allinder, 1994). Encouraging or building efficacious teachers to promote school improvement is a fundamental role of the administrator. Efforts must be taken to ensure that professional development not only equips teachers with proven practices but must also clear obstacles to implementation. Implementing in-school instead of external-based professional development is one strategy for achieving concerted development (Eun, 2018).

Bandura (1997) identified mastery experiences as the most effective basis of efficacy. Victories build self-efficacy, while failures reduce it; and a resilient efficacy demands experiences conquering obstacles by continued effort. For effective

implementation of programs, teachers have to receive the support to implement learning actionably. There is strong evidence that principals are performance drivers and that quality leadership is the best way to incentivize performance. This takes place through continuous instructional support of innovative instruction and the provision of sufficient resources (Eun, 2018).

Collective Teacher Efficacy

Hattie (2012) has done an extensive metanalysis of influences connected to student achievement. In his study, influences on learning results are ranked from those with the most positive effect to those with the most adverse effect. The average effect size of all the interventions studied was 0.40. In determining what works best in education, collective teacher efficacy has an effect size of 1.57, making it the most influential on student achievement, according to this metanalysis (Eells, 2011; Hattie, 2012). Collective teacher efficacy is rooted in self-efficacy and will rely much on beliefs of personal efficacy that are not detached from the larger system.

Donohoo (2018) expounded,

> Team members' influence on each other's abilities and their belief in the impact of the team's work are key elements that set successful school teams apart. School leaders must work to build a culture designed to increase collective teacher efficacy, which will affect teachers' behavior and student beliefs. The power and promise of collective efficacy is that it can be influenced within the school, so focusing on it as a change point is a viable path to greater student achievement, greater commitment to learning, and a more inviting place to come and learn. (Donohoo et al., 2018, p. 43)

A group of highly efficacious people will need to work together, or they may still perform poorly. The challenge is to build a community-wide sense of efficacy (Bandura, 2000). Collectivity, or teachers working together collaboratively, is the nature of true PLCs and one that shows promise for building collective efficacy. The research about the relationship of effective PLC implementation and collective efficacy, however, is not robust (Voelkel, 2011).

This is the challenge of principals in low-performing schools. A recent study of five principals in urban turnaround schools found that teacher efficacy increased as a result of the structures and systems the principal put into place (Mayo-Brown, 2018). These structures and systems included collaborative planning time within the school day and opportunities to jointly solve problems. Johnson (2020) conducted a study of strictly urban schools and the collective efficacy of teachers. Johnson found that even in the urban school context, teacher efficacy beliefs had positive implications for student achievement. Because of the unique issues within urban schools, such as teachers with limited teaching capacity, it is imperative that urban school principals use strategies that increase collective efficacy.

Teacher self-efficacy may vary by task or subject matter (Donohoo, 2018). For instance, a teacher may feel more efficacious with delivery of math instruction versus reading instruction. Collective teacher efficacy is also influenced by the perceived competence of the collective group, the amount of support received, and the difficulties of the educational charge (Donohoo, 2018; Goddard, 2001). Moolenaar et al. (2012) found association between collective efficacy and language achievement that was higher than the influence of SES in elementary schools. When teachers believe they can do the

job, barriers become opportunities to learn and grow. Students are not limited by circumstances outside of the school.

Transformational Leadership

Leadership and change go hand-in-hand (Leithwood, 1993). The transformational approach to leadership disseminated by Leithwood (1994) in the early 1990s has six dimensions: providing intellectual stimulation; building school vision and goals (school culture); demonstrating high-performance expectations; symbolizing professional practices and values; offering individualized support; and developing structures to nurture participation in school decisions. These dimensions provide a framework of the transformational leadership continuum that can be associated with specific transformational leadership behaviors (Adams, 2018).

Leithwood and Sun (2012) highlighted leadership practices for each of the six dimensions that are included in Voelkel's (2014) reconceptualized model. Practices of building on school vision and goals or having a productive school culture include reaching goal unanimity among staff, rousing with challenging but achievable goals, creating a shared vision that inspires staff, encouraging a consciousness of purpose for work among staff, and monitoring and reiterating goals during decision-making. Practices for providing intellectual stimulation include challenging staff assumptions, encouraging and reassuring creativity, and helping staff reevaluate, refine, and effectively carry out their practices. School leaders can provide individualized support by listening, being attentive to individual needs and opinions, mentoring, and coaching staff members with individualization, and supporting their professional development. Leaders model behavior or symbolize professional practice and values when they model what they teach;

instill respect, pride, and trust in staff; and demonstrate the ability to change practice when confronted with new understandings. Through their behaviors, leaders further demonstrate their expectations of high-level professionalism and innovation from staff, as well as high expectations for students. Strategies for building collaborative structures include ensuring staff is involved throughout the decision-making process for instruction and programs, instituting a collaborative work environment for planning and development, and broadly dispersing leadership.

Garland (2018) researched to pinpoint specific behaviors principals should focus on to improve their schools. Instructional leadership proved to be more important to improving school performance than the school improvement model employed. Walker (2022) researched specific differences in principal leadership actions from principals at low-, moderate-, and high-achieving schools and found that their leadership actions were essentially the same but that the effect of leadership actions on efficacy varied for low-, moderate-, and high-achieving schools. Walker further found that there was a negative affect across all levels in association with refining and aligning the organization. The remaining leadership actions included setting direction, developing people, and improving the instructional program. From their study, Walker suggested tiers of support for principals at each level, with high-achieving schools focusing on developing people and improving the instructional program, moderate-achieving schools focusing on developing and setting direction and developing people actions, and low-achieving schools focusing on developing and setting the direction and improving instructional programs. Both studies suggest that principals have the power to impact teacher efficacy and consequentially, student achievement.

The positive impact of principal leadership is well supported through 2 decades of research. Transformational school leaders focus on determining problems and solving them to improve organizational performance. Transformational leaders support teachers as allies in decision-making by providing intellectual guidance throughout the innovative processes of the organization (Marks & Printy, 2003). A competent principal will integrate the role of instructional leader into their transformational leadership, but the two are not synonymous. Marks and Printy (2003) found that transformational leaders work on instructional and transformational undertakings to build organizational capacity and efficacy across the school. Peoples (2020) found that the designation of low or high performing did not impact teacher perceptions of principal effectiveness. Principal self-efficacy is as important as teacher self-efficacy as it impacts teacher growth in the same way teacher efficacy impacts students. Efficacy in both cases has implications for the learning environment (Peoples, 2020).

Coaching Change

Administrators guided by their understanding of adult learning are more equipped to facilitate meaningful, impactful learning for the adults in their building. From an understanding of how adults learn and transformational leadership, coaching emerges as a means to aid the learner in the achievement of their learning. The administrator becomes the lead coach, although instructional coaches, teacher leaders, outside consultants, and district leaders can all assume the role of a coach. Adult learners, however, must be ready and interested in learning. They should also feel that there is a mutual responsibility for the attainment of that learning. They must have input and have their experiences valued in the learning relationship. When faced with the challenge of new learning that opposes

their perceptions and makes them question their effectiveness, the process of transformative coaching can begin. After all, the purpose of coaching is to exact a change in behavior, leading to a plan of action that results in learning objectives and goals being accomplished (Crane & Patrick, 2017).

When coaching is done by a trusted partner, people are more likely to feel helped and supported. Coaches should act as guides and challenge others to reach and exceed their goals and objectives, both personal and organizational objectives (Crane & Patrick, 2017). Transformational coaches appreciate the person they are helping to develop as well as the achievement results process (Crane & Patrick 2017). Leadership and transformational coaching are interconnected, and coaching is an important job of the leader (Crane & Patrick 2017).

Leading adult learning through coaching with andragogical and transformative theory is relational and builds on the learner's experience and needs from those experiences. Once need has been established and the learner is open to learning, the coaching relationship can begin. Coaching is similar to mentoring, but the two are not the same. Mentoring tends to be more general advice, and coaching responds directly to observed practices with targeted feedback aimed at improving practices (Blazar & Kraft, 2015). A coach guides others in attaining their personal and organizational performance objectives (Crane & Patrick, 2017).

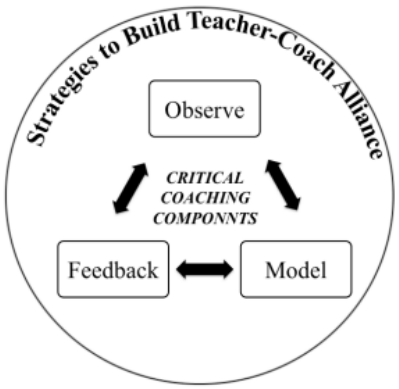
Effective Coaching Practices

Pierce (2015) identified a relational component of effective coaching practice as a reciprocal relationship in which alliance building or relationship strengthening takes place, resulting in conjunction with the practices of observation, modeling, and feedback.

Figure 2 shows how these strategies to build alliance interrelate in a continuous cycle of coaching to improve observed performance.

Figure 2

Effective Coaching Practices (Pierce, 2015)



Effective coaching does not take the place of specific instruction but is used in conjunction with training to make application of content to the learning environment in a way that improves outcomes. A report by WestEd (2019) National Center for Systemic Improvement identified two aims of coaching. Coaching should improve teacher practice and consequentially improve the academic and behavioral outcomes of the learner (WestEd, 2019).

Observation is monitoring the teacher in the classroom environment. It enables the coach to engage in modeling and provide performance feedback on practice (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010). A developmental approach to using data involves looking at behavioral actions, personal feelings, meaning-making, and understanding, instead of numbers alone (Drago-Severson, 2013).

Coaches will often demonstrate a practice to help teachers understand how the accurate use of the practice should look, as well as the impact of the practice on the

learner. The modeling component of coaching may occur if a teacher is incorrectly using a practice or simply does not know how to use a practice. Modeling can support improvements in teacher academic progress (Kretlow et al., 2012).

Feedback is the information given by the coach in relation to the performance or understanding of the person being observed. This feedback may or may not be corrective, but it is relative to performance and should take place in the learning environment it is addressing (Hattie & Timperly, 2007). Adults need to know that the feedback will improve something; be it a problem, performance, task, or relationship. Feedback should provide information about how the individual or group is performing in relation to goals, making clear the connections the coach sees between the coachee's actions or behaviors and performance outcomes, and should be actionable (Crane & Patrick, 2017). Effective feedback is specific, positive, timely, and corrective, when necessary (Solomon et al., 2012).

The teacher-coach relationship or alliance is a collaborative partnership between coachee and coach and is shaped by interpersonal skills, collaboration skills, and coach expertise. Examples of strategies include empathic listening or listening to understand while giving support instead of criticism, repeating and summarizing information expressed by the teacher, sharing expertise, and recognizing and working toward teachers' objectives and wants. Teachers often view coaching as evaluative if the relational component is not in place. Teachers with a positive perception of the coaching relationship are more likely to implement with fidelity because they feel supported (Pierce, 2015). Successful school leadership requires leaders who are committed to impacting student achievement for all students and are capable of carrying out

transformational processes necessary to the turnaround of a failing school.

Coaching as a process in principal leadership may be a means of increasing leadership capacity and efficacy in teachers. There is a growing body of research that supports the implications of good leadership on teacher efficacy. Dilliplane (2016) found a positive relationship between principal leadership behaviors and teacher efficacy in low-performing middle schools. There is evidence that more efficacious teachers also exhibit leadership behaviors. Marzano et al.'s (2005) leadership behaviors were found to correlate with the increase of efficacy most closely as measured by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk's (2001) Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale, which addressed three factors of teacher efficacy along with overall teacher efficacy. The factors in this scale measure teachers' sense of efficacy in student engagement, instructional practices, and classroom management. Kimmons (2022) found that teacher perceptions of their principal's leadership were correlated with their sense of self efficacy. Chastain (2022) found that when an evaluating administrator had a coaching managerial style, they may be more effective at acquiring higher teacher self-efficacy than those who do not take that approach to leadership.

Adult Learning Theory

Adults and children learn differently. Still, we often provide professional development to teachers in much the same way we provide it to students. Adult learning theory is nothing new. It is built on the concept of andragogy or principles and methods used in adult education. Pedagogy, a widely known term by educators is the methods and principles of children or pre-adult learners. Much of what we know about adult learning comes from the work of Malcolm Knowles. Knowles et al. (2015) penned *The Adult*

Learner, which is in its eighth edition and is still widely cited, even though new ideas have led to advancements in this area of study. The understanding that there are characteristics that distinguish adult learners from children should influence how adult learning is delivered.

Knowles et al. (2015) outlined fundamental principles of andragogy as learners need to know, self-concept of the learner, prior experience of the learner, readiness to learn, orientation to learning, and motivation to learn. Learning theory supposes that these principles affect the process of gaining knowledge and/or expertise in adult learners. Professional development experiences should be planned in a way that meets the desired outcomes of the school. Leaderships' understanding of these principles is critical. Teaching teachers is not the same as teaching children, and that shift in thinking is critical. The learning process of conventional versus adult education will have distinct differences. The experience of the student counts for as much as teacher or coach knowledge. Administrator leadership is essential to successful programs and professional development within the school. "The decisions that administrators make in planning a professional development program and the way in which they integrate these decisions during the program's delivery will determine whether or not teachers can assimilate and accommodate the course material" (Terehoff, 2002, p. 66) to meet their collective professional development needs.

Teacher self-concept hinges on the understanding that adults are not dependent but responsible for themselves and their learning. Their learning is connected to producing or doing more so than merely accumulating information. Adult learners desire freedom, learning choice, and relevant experience during learning (Terehoff, 2002).

Providing for the self-directedness of teachers can increase motivation to learn and increase capacity for accomplishing the mission and goals of the school. When learner experience is acknowledged and applied during the learning process, learning will be enhanced (Chen, 2013). Training should include multiple options for learning to give choices to adults. Some adults may learn quickly in a self-paced module, while others may need collaborative facilitation.

Adult experience is also a critical factor in adult learning. Adults, unlike children, bring a broader base of experience, which can be a valuable resource. To ignore that experience could prove counterproductive to the professional development process as adult self-identity is connected to experience. “If adults’ experience is not being used, or its worth minimized, it is not just experience that is being rejected, adults feel rejected as persons” (Knowles, 1980, p. 50). There should be opportunities to connect presented material to the prior learner experiences to segue from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Children accumulate facts and eventually experiences, while adult learners take new learning and apply it to the immediate problem or concerns to make the learning relevant. This active process is how adult learners comprehend their experiences (Tennant & Pogson, 2002) and may lead to transformation as longstanding beliefs are challenged with new information (Chen, 2013).

Adults’ need to know, or the ability to perform, influences their readiness to learn. When there is no perceived need for learning, adults will likely not give their best effort to learn the material or essential abilities. Children learn along with a curriculum with the pre-directed progression of the same material at the same time. Adults best learn through sequencing of activities into growing tasks to ensure that the learner has the opportunity

to apply what was learned when they are ready, but not before (Ingalls, 1973). This provides an opportunity to team teachers according to their individual needs for professional development instead of applying one approach for all learners. Subgroups can be used when professional development is necessary for the entire staff. This collaborative approach allows learners to share feedback, perspectives, and expertise. Training should be provided as close to the time it is needed instead of taking a learn now and retain for future use approach.

As mentioned before, children go through their schooling acquiring information and abilities that will mostly be used in the future. Adult orientation to learning is quite different. It is task-centered or problem-solution driven. The purpose of their learning is to improve something, be it a situation, performance, experience, goal attainment, or often a performance gap. Learning experiences then should be problem-solving or performance tasks that they will put to use on the job. In the case of performance, "a principal's assistance in assessing a performance gap can help a staff member see where he or she is and where he or she needs to be in order to increase the level of competence" (Terehoff, 2002, p. 69). Competency-based professional development will help to resolve a learner's problem areas through authentic and hands-on learning simulations where they not only acquire information but learn processes to make application of learning (Clapper, 2010). Orientation to learning has much to do with motivation. Adults want to know that learning activities benefit them in their jobs.

Adult Learning Principles of Practice

Designing professional development with andragogical principles requires partnering with teachers in their learning. This process involves school-based learning

that includes setting the environment with adult learners in mind, involving learners in mutual planning, attending to needs and interests, setting program goals and objectives, designing an effective program, implementing the program, and evaluating the program (Terehoff, 2002). Administrators who recognize the differences between pedagogical and andragogical approaches to learning will be better able to facilitate growth for their teachers. The administrator takes the role of teacher and teacher of the student.

The environment for learning should be physically comfortable, positive, and interpersonal, as well as organizationally well-prepared. Teachers with knowledge and skills in the area of professional development should have the opportunity to lead or contribute. Adults are self-directed learners who need the autonomy to contribute and participate in ways that are meaningful to them. The setting for learning must make teachers feel safe and that they are respected, cared for, and acknowledged as able to make decisions for their learning (Drago-Severson, 2013).

Teacher input in professional development can be significant to the success of the professional development. Mutual planning employs collaboration and role-taking instead of role-playing. Teachers may take on the role of organizers, planners, facilitators, or experience and expertise sharers. When teachers help design or select training, they have more of a tendency to buy into that training (Duffrin, 2002). Through collective effort and collaboration in both the decision-making and process implementation, administrators can avoid the passivity and displeasure that is sometimes encountered during professional development.

The needs and interests of teachers will vary from individual to individual. What is needed or necessary to a beginning teacher may not be to a veteran teacher. These

considerations must be deliberated when planning. The needs of the school have to be juxtaposed with the training needs of individuals to contribute to schoolwide improvement. When planned thoughtfully, both needs are met by differentiating supports (Drago-Severson, 2013). A more "seasoned" teacher may have very little need or interest in new methods for instructional strategies, while a newer teacher may have a minimal repertoire; however, the newer teacher may have little need of training on new web-based applications for example, whereas the veteran teacher may have a greater need. Basic needs change as adults evolve in their lives and careers. When teachers are conscious of gaps in their level of competence, their needs may shift (Cox, 2015). Administrators must be able to help teachers assess these needs and provide professional development that increases competency and values. When implementing new programs, an individual needs assessment can help promote the successful implementation of the program as teachers will be aware of the program goals and their current knowledge and abilities.

Needs assessment data are critical in determining the goals and objectives of professional learning. The learning objectives should lead to the desired behavioral outcomes acquired as a result of professional learning (Knowles, 1980). These goals and objectives should explicitly lay out what new knowledge and skills the teacher will acquire as a result of participation.

It has been established that adults are more likely to learn things they perceive they need and are interested in learning; program design should consider these things. The learning can be designed to correlate with the support needed by learners. In order to support adult growth, policies should reflect an understanding of the continuum of competency development. This will aid in the support of adult growth and the design of

professional development that increases the capacity of the organization (Drago-Severson, 2013).

Successful implementation of learning hinges on the buy-in of the people tasked with learning. When administrators involve teachers in decision-making, they are invested in learning. The level of participation in decision-making impacts the level of commitment people have to that decision made (Knowles et al., 2015). Principals may set the tone for professional development and ultimately are the final decision makers; however, mutual responsibility is key to quality program design.

Steps should be taken to evaluate the learning process and outcomes of professional development during and after completion. Were the learning goals and objectives met? What are the implications of the learning on practice? The evaluation should provide results information to inform the success of the learning as well as next steps (Drago-Severson, 2013).

Transformative learning theory sheds some light on the conflict adult learners experience when made aware of gaps in their level of competence. Transformational learning emphasizes experience in adult learning (Mezirow, 1997). It addresses the shifts in thinking that will be critical for the adult learner to exact change in perspective that affects the learner's experiences and produces a significant social impact. Mezirow (1997) valued that learners make meaning from their experiences of the social context. Mezirow further taught that learners had to be faced with a dilemma before they would be genuinely open to perceptual shifts in learning or being coached because people reject ideas in opposition to their preconceptions. Adults begin to question their effectiveness when a dilemma presents itself that contradicts their expectations or values and beliefs.

An example of this could be data that suggest students are not making expected growth or adequate progress in spite of teacher perceptions that quality instruction is being provided. Mezirow's theory suggests that people go through transformation phases when conflicts such as these occur. These phases include self-examination and assessment of assumption, recognition that discontent and the transformation process are shared, exploration of options, course of action planning, reintegrating, and critical reflection. Critical reflection leads to the ability to accept new ideas that before confronting the problem would not have met or made it past the learners' preconceptions. This ability to think critically opens the learner to transformation and best judgment (Mezirow, 1997). Leadership now has the opportunity to provide professional development that will exact change in practice. Transformation is a big change that creates an environment that no longer resembles the former. This change is sweeping and necessary to change organizational practice in such a way that it no longer has the same characteristics it once had (Crane & Patrick, 2017).

Summary

In North Carolina, a sound education means a competent principal to lead and competent teachers who work together to provide a sound education for all students. There is evidence that transformational leadership, collective efficacy, and PLCs provide the structure needed to bring research to practice. This study of teacher perceptions of leadership, efficacy, and PLCs will contribute to the body of research on school improvement, especially for our most needy schools.

The findings of this literature review were that transformational leadership behaviors do have a positive impact on teacher leadership and efficacy and consequently

student achievement. The review further found that PLCs are an effective way to build professional learning and increase collective efficacy. This review proposed a framework for school improvement that focuses on leadership behaviors, professional learning, and efficacy building (Voelkel, 2014). Research from this review showed that in schools where these things were evident, there was a positive impact on student learning.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study examined how educators in one school perceived the impact of transformational leadership, PLCs, and collective efficacy on the upward trajectory of student achievement in reading in one previously low-performing school in eastern North Carolina. The data collected from this study will give school and district leaders useful recommendations to inform decision-making in other schools.

This chapter describes the steps I took to conduct the study. I describe the research design and method and how I arrived at the chosen course of action. The methodology was mixed to give both qualitative and quantitative data. I discuss the theoretical framework and research questions. This is followed by a description of the research setting and the participants in the study. Then I give a description of data collection. This chapter ends with a discussion of verification procedures and closes with a summary.

School principals and teachers working together have the potential to impact outcomes for the most at-risk students. Many simply do not know where to start. As expounded upon in the literature review, transformational leadership and PLCs can be effective ways to meet the needs of all learners and put the school on an upward trajectory. Many schools have implemented PLCs, but more information is needed about the perceptions teachers have of PLC implementation in their school, leadership actions, and efficacy beliefs.

The purpose of this study was to examine the educator beliefs as they relate to transformational leadership, PLCs, and efficacy in a previously low-performing school that is meeting and exceeding performance expectations.

Research Design

The school studied was a persistently low-performing Grade 3-5 school. The low status of the school made it an ideal place to conduct research on the perceived levels of PLC implementation, transformational leadership, and collective efficacy as related to school improvement. I chose to do a case study that had qualitative as well as quantitative data. This mixed methods study combined quantitative and qualitative data to give a richer understanding of the study elements and to strengthen the data interpretation when confirming findings. The data collection was concurrent. Data were collected over a shorter period of time than typical of a sequential design (Creswell et al., 2003).

Mixed Methods Research

Qualitative research is concerned with deeply understanding a problem and the dynamics of social relations that cannot be quantified, allowing the researcher to illustrate the various dimensions of the problem (Queirós et al., 2017). Maxwell (2013) described a qualitative case study as being flexible and exploratory, continuously evolving to accommodate new understandings.

> The purpose of such studies is to gather information and generate findings that are useful. Understanding the programs and participants' stories is useful to the extent that they illuminate the processes and outcomes of the program for those that must make decisions about the program. (Patton & Schwandt, 2015, p. 18)

Quantitative research is considered to have less bias and be more reliable. Quantitative research asks a question and then analyzes numerical data to determine if the researcher's idea or hypothesis is likely to be true, whereas qualitative case studies tend to examine a phenomenon in its real-world context (Yin, 2017). Using both can be beneficial to the

researcher.

Mixed method research is gaining popularity because of its combination of methods that provide a more thorough understanding in some cases. Mixed method research can be time consuming but can yield great results for the researcher who wants to deeply understand the topic or area of their research by using two distinct approaches through careful combination (Caruth, 2013). Data collection in a mixed methods design can be sequential or concurrent, as it was in this study. Mixed method research has both strengths and weaknesses to be considered. Strengths include narratives that add meaning to numbers and vice versa, the ability to broaden research questions, a stronger conclusion, enhanced validity and understanding, and an increased ability to discover results. Some potential weaknesses are that mixed method research may require a team of researchers, time and expenses may increase, and the researcher must learn multiple methods (Caruth, 2013).

The study began as an evaluation of a particular reading program but changed during the literature review when it became more apparent to me that other factors had more influence on the success of a school than what program was selected for instruction; factors such as teacher efficacy, leadership, and PLC implementation. During the literature review, I realized that if a teacher did not feel they were capable, there was a high likelihood that a reading program alone was not going to fix the reading problem. As the study further evolved, it became evident that I would benefit from a case study model using a mixed methods approach. This type of study would help to better understand the many interwoven pieces of transformational change in order to contribute to the research on school reform.

Theoretical Framework

Through an extensive literature review, it became apparent that adult learning theory was important to understanding how adults navigate professional learning, but a framework was necessary to understand how that can take place in school. A framework is important because it helps the researcher connect to existing knowledge and gives a basis for research methods. It also limits the scope of variables and helps the researcher to zone in on key variables (Evans et al., 2011). The Voelkel (2014) framework of transformational leadership, collective efficacy, and PLCs describes the ongoing learning process that takes place in successful schools and became the theoretical foundation for this study.

I used focus groups with structured open-ended questions and surveys using a 5-point Likert scale to answer the following questions in this study.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school?
2. How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school?
3. How do teachers perceive transformational leadership in a turnaround school?

Research Setting

Throughout this study, the local education agency (LEA) being studied is referred to as Rural County, the city as Eastern City, and the school as City Elementary. The study included 23 current teachers, three administrators, one school improvement grant

coordinator, and two instructional coaches.

In October 2016, City Elementary, the Grades 3-5 feeder school in Eastern City, located in the center of Rural County, North Carolina, was chosen to be part of the fourth school improvement grant cohort, sharing $38.1 million in school improvement grant funding. City Elementary received $1,275,879. The first year of the grant, 2016-2017, was considered a planning year. In the 2017-2018 school year, City Elementary was listed as the lowest-performing elementary school in North Carolina and in its second year as a school improvement grant school and was threatened to be taken over by the Innovative School District. The Innovative School District was created in 2016 through legislation to improve outcomes in low-performing schools across North Carolina, working in partnership with the local community to create innovative conditions to accelerate student growth and achievement (NC Innovative School District, n.d.). Backed by the community and local board of education, City Elementary successfully prevented the Innovative School District from taking over the school. A new principal was hired with a reputation for turning around low-performing schools, and a restart application was approved by the State Board of Education. This school reform model allowed City Elementary to have charter-like flexibility, including adding 30 minutes to each school day, providing five additional professional development days, hiring highly skilled persons who may not have a teaching license, and providing performance and growth bonuses to staff. The focus at City Elementary became “Building a Culture of Excellence,” and teaching students to read became the overarching goal. A focus on PLCs was implemented and made part of the protected schedule. This focus has held through additional administrator changes as the school continues to operate under restart

flexibility.

In North Carolina, reading proficiency is measured by the North Carolina End of Grade (EOG) tests. Students are considered proficient at Levels 3, 4, and 5. The reading trend at City Elementary has been well below state grade level proficiency (GLP) levels for years. GLP is measured by the percentage of students who passed with a minimum of Level 3 proficiency. In North Carolina, student GLP has not fallen below 54% for students in Grade 3-5, the grade configuration at City Elementary. GLP at City Elementary, however, has not reached 32% in any grade level over the 3-year trend (Table 2). Students have consistently failed to be proficient. The year City Elementary was threatened to be taken over by the state, the 2017-2018 school year, the overall reading composite for all students at City Elementary was 20.2%. This number is the average of the reading tests at each grade level. That meant that of 446 students, 89 students were proficient readers. These data points prompted intervention from the state and district which led to the turnaround status of City Elementary in the 2018-2019 school year. An upward trajectory after that move is evident in the data below.

Table 2

EOG Proficiency Percentages

Cohort	School Year		
	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
North Carolina 3rd	57.8	55.9	56.8
City Elementary 3rd	31.8	23.4	31.6
North Carolina 4th	57.7	57.8	57.3
City Elementary 4th	26.6	20.6	29.8
North Carolina 5th	56.7	54.1	54.6
City Elementary 5th	27.8	15.9	27.0

In North Carolina, students who achieve a Level 4 or 5 on an EOG assessment are

considered college and career ready (CCR). When determining the number of students who were CCR, the percentage dropped drastically to 15.9% in third grade, 10.3% in fourth grade, and 7.9% in fifth grade, with a composite of 11.5% (Table 3). This means that City Elementary had 53 of 446 students who were on the CCR track. Fast forward 1 year after the principal was replaced, and the percentages, while still terribly low, increased in every single measure (Table 4), and the school exceeded growth expectations. These data suggest that transformational leadership, PLCs, and collective efficacy may have implications for school turnaround.

Table 3

2017-2018 Reading EOG GLP & CCR

	Grade level proficiency	College and career ready
Third Grade	23.4	15.9
Fourth Grade	20.6	10.3
Fifth Grade	15.9	7.9

Table 4

2018-2019 Reading EOG GLP & CCR

	Grade level proficiency	College and career ready
Third Grade	31.6	19.7
Fourth Grade	29.8	13.2
Fifth Grade	27.0	16.8

The correlation between low socioeconomic status (SES) and literacy is evident in this county. “It is well established that children from lower SES build their vocabularies at slower rates than children from higher SES” (Hoff, 2003, p. 1368). This problem progressively gets worse as schools continue to play the “catch-up game,” with little to no understanding of how to increase reading proficiency for the most struggling students

who likely need to make 2 or more years' worth of growth in 1 year. In Rural County, one in 10 adults is completely illiterate; one in four reads below the third-grade level; almost 60% read below a high school level. This cycle of illiteracy is both generational and pervasive.

School leaders make decisions for their students based on the most urgent needs of their school. They have to consider the current condition of the school, using baseline data to determine how they want to change. Student reading proficiency is shown by data to be the urgent need at City Elementary. Students are failing to read proficiently at a rate well below the state average. Every student who goes to this school will matriculate to City High School, but prior to getting there, they go through City Middle where the North Carolina reading EOG scores were 23.4%. Students in Eastern City essentially spend their entire K-12 school years going through a low-performing feeder pattern, culminating at City High where ENG II proficiency is 15.4%. This study explored what was done at City Elementary to trend up and possibly impact the feeder system.

Data Collection

I used a mixed methodology that included a survey and focus group interviews. By using both quantitative and qualitative data sources, I increased validity. This study was conducted at City Elementary in Rural County. This study took place in the fall as teachers reengaged in the work of PLCs.

Participants

After receiving approval from district leadership and Gardner-Webb University, an invitation was sent to all classroom teachers, the assistant principal, and instructional coaches of the studied school. A proxy was used to distribute the survey and conduct the

interviews. Involvement in the survey was requested by district leadership and conducted by an outside evaluator. Participation was voluntary, and participants had anonymity with the survey and confidentiality with the interview. Participants were informed that they could skip any question that caused discomfort and that they could stop the interview or survey at any time. Participants included staff who were at City Elementary before the re-culturing/turnaround being researched began, as well as others who joined during the transformation.

Surveys

The survey took place in the fall of 2021 within the span of 1 week. The survey sections include teacher perceptions of both PLC characteristics as well as levels of collective efficacy. The survey allowed for the collection of educators' perceptions of each of these tenets. Each question had a 5-option rating to give me a range of values. The survey can be found in Appendix A. The participant consent letter can be found in Appendix B. The survey questions were administered via Qualtrics, and data were populated into an Excel spreadsheet. No personally identifiable information was obtained in the administration of the survey. The spreadsheet data were studied and organized for meaningful analysis.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were conducted in the fall of 2021 and were conducted by an external proxy to ensure anonymity. The focus groups consisted of five major questions with sub-questions. The focus groups took place in groups that represented each grade level and special area, such as instructional coaches. The questions allowed the participants to provide feedback on their thoughts about the PLC, which included themed

questions that explored efficacy and leadership within the PLC. Questions were not shared with participants prior to the interview. Focus groups were face to face and took between 30 minutes to 1 hour. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed. These data were used to determine how teams implement and perceive PLCs, the perceived role of leadership, and their sense of collective efficacy. All participants signed a consent to participate in the interview and to allow for audio recording (Appendix B).

This survey and interview instrument has been validated and used in a successfully defended dissertation at the University of California, San Diego (Voelkel, 2011). Permission was granted to use the validated instrument by Dr. Voelkel on May 26, 2021 (Appendix C). Permission to conduct research was then requested and approved by the school district superintendent (Appendix D).

Artifacts

The recorded interviews were transcribed; I did not have access to the audio recordings, just the transcriptions. Scribie transcription service was used, and the transcribed documents were sent back to the external proxy, who read and redacted any identifiable information. The written transcriptions allowed for the coding and analysis to recognize themes across focus groups. These themes were then compared to the literature and the survey instrument to determine homogeneity.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the interview, survey, and document data, I used the following strategies. Descriptive statistics were used to organize and summarize the quantitative data and identify the mode or central tendency. Focus groups were transcribed using Scribie audio transcription and coded for themes and trends. The planned analysis and

display of data relating to each research question varied, as shown in Table 5. Pseudonyms were used for the participants and school name to maintain confidentiality. Transcriptions from the focus group and answers from the survey were analyzed for elements related to the literature review. I juxtaposed the data analysis with the conceptual framework and theory, making notes from the analysis. After analyzing qualitative and quantitative data, a narrative was written with identified themes.

Table 5

Data Analysis Procedure

Research question	Data collection	Data analysis/display
How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school?	Teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal surveys, interviews, and artifacts	Qualtrics metrics will be used to identify the frequency in quantitative data. Quantitative data will be displayed in a table.
How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school?	Teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal surveys, interviews, and artifacts	Qualtrics metrics will be used to identify the frequency in quantitative data. Quantitative data will be displayed in a table
How do teachers perceive transformational leadership in a turnaround school?	Teacher, instructional coach, and assistant principal interviews.	Data will be coded and themes identified and expounded upon. Qualitative data will be displayed in a table and narrative.

Verification Procedures

"Of what relevance is the self for deciphering truth in qualitative research" (Davidson, 2012, p. 2). Qualitative research can be subjective. Researchers choose a topic that interests them. They likely have an idea they believe to be true, as is the case in this study. I believe there are certain leadership and teacher beliefs and habits that lead to

achievement. This led to a search for the truth in the data, something more concrete than an idea. If schools can indeed be turned around and students be given a better chance at life, leaders need the formula for such success, so students do not remain subject to poverty and illiteracy. To learn the truth, bias must be limited.

I am also the principal of the school being studied. In order to reduce bias, an external proxy was used for interviews, and I never heard the interviews. All interviews were transcribed, and pseudonyms were used. Surveys were individual and anonymous.

Summary

This case study examined a much-needed focus in the area of school reform, the actual work of turning low-performing schools around, described by the educators involved. In 2018-2019, there were 491 low-performing schools in North Carolina. Of those 491, 426 were recurring low-performing, meaning they were low performing in any 2 of the last 3 years. This was before a global pandemic and virtual learning. We have yet to see the academic achievement results of learning loss associated with remote learning. Understanding teacher perceptions of their efficacy, collaborative work, and leadership's role will help to inform practice and future studies.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter provides the research results of a mixed methods study that examined the perceptions of PLCs, collective efficacy, and leadership in a turnaround school and their implications for increased student achievement. This study included teachers, instructional coaches, and an assistant principal to specifically examine their sense of collective efficacy, characteristics of PLCs, and perceptions of leadership within the setting of school turnaround.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school?
2. How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school?
3. How do teachers perceive transformational leadership in a turnaround school?

Data Collection

The first two questions, "How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school," and "How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school," were researched through a quantitative method using a 25-question survey instrument with a 5-point Likert scale with ratings: 1, not at all; 2, very little; 3, some degree; 4, quite a bit; and 5, a great deal (Appendix A). The last question, "How do teachers perceive transformational leadership in a turnaround school," was answered through qualitative method focus groups. The focus groups also gave breadth to the quantitative data by helping to answer the how and why of the survey questions. Twenty-

three teachers and instructional coaches and an assistant principal were invited to participate in the survey; 21 completed the survey within the survey window, resulting in an 87.5% completion rate. It is important to note that of the 21 surveys turned in, two were missing more than 15 values. Those two surveys were excluded from the study, for a total of 19 complete surveys included in the data gathering. Focus groups were between four to six people per group and consisted of general education teachers in Grades 3, 4, and 5, exceptional children (EC) teachers, instructional coaches, and an assistant principal. Focus groups were guided by four areas of discussion, with an opportunity for recommendations in closure. Focus groups lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. All focus groups were recorded by an external moderator and transcribed using Scribie transcription services. All names were redacted prior to transcriptions being sent to me. Once received, the data analysis began.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Survey responses had five categories: quite a bit, 5; a great deal, 4; some degree, 3; very little, 2; and not at all, 1. In analyzing positive and negative perception responses, “a great deal” and “quite a bit” are considered positive responses; responses of “some degree,” “very little,” and “not at all” are negative responses. The quantitative data were analyzed using Qualtrics statistics to determine the mode for each question. Responses are displayed in a frequency distribution table. A chi-square goodness of fit statistical analysis was done to determine if the sum of differences between what is observed and expected is statistically significant and to ensure the validity of the data. The number of responses multiplied by the probability was .20, or 19 divided by five for an expected 3.8. The measure of what is observed and what is expected provides a *p* value. A *p* value less

than 0.05 is considered insignificant. No question had a *p* value at or above 0.05, confirming that the observed value of each question is not significantly different from the expected value, and there is a normal distribution.

Table 6 shows the survey questions used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. Research Question 1, "How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school" is addressed by Survey Questions 1-13 that collectively measure PLC characteristics. Research Question 2, "How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school" is answered through Survey Questions 14-25. The survey responses can be found in Appendix E.

Table 6

Research Questions and Survey Item Correlation

Research question	Survey questions
How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school?	Survey Questions 1-13
How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school?	Survey Questions 14-25

Data from the PLC section of the survey showed a positive perception of the degree of implementation of the PLC as determined by PLC characteristics present within the school. The DuFour and Eaker (2009) PLC characteristics were the basis for questions. Table 7 shows the results of the data analysis.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics: PLC

	Positive responses		Negative responses			
Survey questions	A great deal	Quite a bit	Some degree	Very little	Not at all	*p* value
1. Essential outcomes	11	7	1	0	0	.002
2. Common pacing	12	5	2	0	0	.002
3. Judge student work	5	9	4	1	0	.009
4. Practice judging (#3)	5	9	4	1	0	.009
5. Monitor learning	16	3	0	0	0	.001
6. Interventions	7	9	3	0	0	.001
7. Additional support	6	6	6	1	0	.046
8. Use student data	13	6	0	0	0	.001
9. Practice data use (#8)	12	6	0	1	0	.001
10. Norms/protocols	7	10	2	0	0	.002
11. S.M.A.R.T. Goals	7	10	2	0	0	.002
12. Celebration	12	7	0	0	0	.001
13. Shared vision	9	9	1	0	0	.008

All items, with the exception of Question 7, “Students are required rather than invited to devote extra time and receive additional support until they are successful,” had a positive distribution of 14 or higher. Question 7 had a response distribution of 12 positive and seven negative responses. This is significant because educators at the school do not agree that students are required to devote extra time and receive additional support until they are successful. This question is further analyzed in Chapter 5’s conclusions because of its negative rating. There were no outliers. This suggests the school has a high level of PLC characteristics present.

Six questions received positive responses between 18-19 or above. Question 1, “My team works together to clarify the essential outcomes for each unit of instruction,” received 11 “a great deal,” seven “quite a bit,” one “some degree,” and no “very little” or “not at all” responses. Question 5, “My team monitors the learning of each student at

least four times each year on essential outcomes through a series of team-developed common formative assessments," received 16 "a great deal," three "quite a bit," and no "some degree," "very little," or "not at all" responses. Question 8, "My team members use student achievement results from a variety of assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses in our individual and collective practice," received 13 "a great deal," six "quite a bit," and no "some degree," "very little," or "not at all" responses. Question 9. "My team members use the above-mentioned student achievement results to improve our effectiveness in helping all students learn," received 12 "a great deal," six "quite a bit," no "some degree," one "very little," and no "not at all" responses. Question 12, "Improved results, achievement of goal, and the work of teams are the basis for a culture of celebration within classrooms and the school," received 12 "a great deal," seven "quite a bit," and no "some degree," "very little," or "not at all" responses. Question 13, "The shared vision and values among my school's staff influence policies, procedures, daily practices, and day-to-day decisions of all staff members," received nine "a great deal," nine "quite a bit," one "some degree," and no "very little" or "not at all" responses. All but one of the survey responders believe that teams work together to clarify essential outcomes and use student achievement data to improve instructional effectiveness and that the shared vision and values of the school's staff influence policies, procedures, practices, and decision-making. Each of these questions falls within one of the three big ideas of PLCs: tenets of collective goals, collective actions, and a focus on results. Instructional staff believe that their team members use student achievement results to identify strengths and weaknesses in their individual and collective practice.

Six questions had positive ratings that were between 14-17. Question 2, "My team

works together to establish a common pacing for each unit of instruction," received 12 "a great deal," five "quite a bit," and two "some degree" responses. Question 3, "My team works collaboratively to clarify the criteria used to judge the quality of student work," received five "a great deal," nine "quite a bit," four "some degree," and one "very little" response. Question 4, "We practice applying the above-mentioned criteria until we can do so consistently," received five "a great deal," nine "quite a bit," four "some degree," and one "very little" response. Question 6, "Students who experience academic difficulty are guaranteed systemic interventions that provide more time and support," had seven "a great deal," nine "quite a bit," and three "some degree" responses. Question 10, "My team has adopted specific and explicit norms and protocols that guide us in working together," had seven "a great deal," 10 "quite a bit," and two "some degree" responses. Question 11, "My team works interdependently to establish and achieve SMART goals," had seven "a great deal," 10 "quite a bit," and two "some degree" responses.

Data from the collective efficacy survey questions showed a positive perception of the level of collective efficacy within the PLC. These data are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics: Collective Efficacy

Survey questions	A great deal	Quite a bit	Some degree	Very little	Not at all	*p* value
14. Challenging students	4	11	4	0	0	.002
15. Motivate students	2	11	5	1	0	.003
16. Master curriculum	9	7	2	1	0	.002
17. Hard work	0	2	0	3	14	.001
18. Possess needed skills	0	1	5	10	3	.002
19. Close learning gap	3	8	7	1	0	.009
20. Engaging lessons	1	11	6	1	0	.001
21. Learning motivation	2	1	8	6	2	.046
22. Structures/practices	7	7	5	0	0	.009
23. Safety concerns	0	0	4	5	10	.001
24. Home life difficulties	5	7	6	1	0	.037
25. Critical thinking	5	9	3	2	0	.015

Items 17, 18, 21, and 23 are reverse analyzed because the rating is positive to negative from 1-5 of the scale instead of the negative to positive as it is for all other questions. For example, when surveyed on Question 23, “Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety,” had 19 positive responses on the reversal. Ten educators perceived that safety was not at all a concern for students, five perceived it was very little a concern for students, four perceived there was some degree of concern. while none perceived students were concerned quite a bit or a great deal. Question 21, “Students here just aren’t motivated to learn,” had two “not at all,” six “very little,” eight “some degree,” one “quite a bit,” and two “a great deal” responses. Question 18, “Some teachers at my site lack the skills needed to ensure every child can master the grade-level curriculum,” had three “not at all,” 10 “very little,” five “some degree,” one “quite a bit,” and no “a great deal” responses. Question 17, “If a child doesn’t want to learn, teachers here give up,” had 14 “not at all,” three “very little,” no “some degree,”

two “quite a bit,” and no “a great deal” responses.

A total of two questions (Question 18 and Question 23 analyzed above) had positive ratings between 18-19. A total of six questions had positive perception ratings between 14-17. Question 14, “Teachers work together to meet the needs of challenging students,” had four “a great deal,” 11 “quite a bit,” four “some degree,” and no “very little” or “not at all” responses. Question 16, “Teachers in this school believe it is their responsibility to help every child master grade-level curriculum,” had nine “a great deal,” eight “quite a bit,” two “some degree,” and two “very little” responses. Survey Questions 17 and 21 were reverse analyzed due to the structure of the questions. Question 22, “The structures, practices, and procedures of this school are designed to help ensure all students learn,” had seven “a great deal,” seven “quite a bit,” five “some degree,” and no “very little” or “not at all” responses. Question 25, “Teachers in this school help each other incorporate critical thinking opportunities for their students when planning lessons,” had five “a great deal,” nine “quite a bit,” three “some degree,” two “very little,” and no “not at all” responses.

A total of four questions had positive percentage ratings lower than 14. Question 15, “Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their student,” had two “a great deal,” 11 “quite a bit,” five “some degree,” one “very little,” and no “not at all” responses. Question 19, “If these students come to school unprepared to learn, teachers have the skills to close the learning gap,” had three “a great deal,” eight “quite a bit,” seven “some degree,” one “very little,” and no “not at all” responses. Question 20, “Teachers provide so many engaging lessons that the students here are bound to learn,” had one “a great deal,” 11 “quite a bit,” six “some degree,” one “very little,” and no “not

at all" responses. Question 24, "Teachers at this school have strategies for supporting students who face home life difficulties," had five "a great deal," nine "quite a bit," three "some degree," two "very little," and no "not at all" responses.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The third research question, "How do teachers perceive transformational leadership in a turnaround school," was answered through qualitative data analysis. For the qualitative portion of data collection, five focus groups were conducted, consisting of teachers of each grade level (3-5), instructional coaches, and an assistant principal. These focus groups were conducted during the week of December 6-11, 2021, at the school in a conference room. They each lasted between 45 minutes to 1 hour. The moderator recorded the focus groups and then uploaded each focus group recording into Scribie transcription services, where it was transcribed. After transcriptions were received by the moderator from the transcription service, the moderator redacted all names before sending them to me. These focus groups provided further clarity to the quantitative survey data.

Participants were identified by speaker number. At times, speakers remain unidentified due to the transcription service's inability to determine which speaker is speaking. Participant experience ranged from first-year teacher to 24 years in education.

Focus Areas and Themes

There were four areas examined during the focus groups: the work of the PLC in the school, the evolution of the PLC, collective efficacy, and leadership. Respondents were also given an opportunity to make recommendations. Several prompts or probing questions were included with each focus area.

The Work of the PLC in the School

Interview Question 1. "I am really interested in learning about how your PLC works and the types of work you do together during your meetings. What is the team you consider to be your primary PLC, and how long have you been a member of that team? How many years have you been teaching?"

Focus Group 1 was the EC group and had four participants with experience of 24 years, 18 years, 17 years, and 6 years. All in this group had been at the school for at least 2 years and with the district for at least 6 years.

Focus Group 2 was the third-grade teachers and had five participants with experience of 8 years, 1 year, 14 years, 24 years, and 6 years. Third grade had two participants who were in their first year at the school and district, one of whom was in her first year of teaching altogether. All other participants have been at the school for at least 2 years and at least 6 with the district.

Focus Group 3 was the fourth-grade teachers and had six participants, three of whom were in their first year of teaching. Focus Group 3 also had three participants with experience of 5 years, 12 years, and 14 years, one of whom was in her first year at the school. The participants with 5 and 12 years of experience had been at the school for their entire careers.

Focus Group 4 was the fifth-grade teachers with experience of 3 years, 7 years, 6 years, 5 years, and 3 years. All team members had been with the school and district for at least 3 years.

Focus Group 5 was an instructional coach and assistant principal with experience of 17 and 15 years. They had been at the school for 3 and 10 years and with the district

for 15 and 17 years.

All groups agreed that PLCs were an established part of the school culture, although the EC group's feedback had the least narrative evidence of a structured PLC format: "Lots of times we have an agenda we go by" (EC Speaker 3). Other groups described having an agenda, changing roles, and taking minutes: "We have a notetaker" (Third-Grade Speaker 5). "Each person has an assigned duty" (Fourth-Grade Speaker 3). "We have an outline that we follow" (Fourth-Grade Speaker ?). "In each PLC, everybody…there are roles. So, somebody is a timekeeper, notetaker" (Fifth-Grade Speaker ?). "Somebody would be typing in things as you're going along, taking notes to make sure that what is said is taken down" (Fifth-Grade Speaker ?).

When asked about what a typical meeting was like, multiple themes emerged. Shared work, using data to make decisions, high expectations, and growth mindset were salient themes throughout the focus groups. On shared work, Speaker 5 from the third-grade focus group said, "You would see a lot of collaboration among the teachers." Third-Grade Speaker 6 said, "The collaboration piece of our team is, Oh, I think that's what makes us most effective." Additional comments were, "Each person has an assigned duty and we collaborate with each other to figure out the best way to teach our students" (Fourth-Grade Speaker 3); "What I would see is collaboration and teachers working together" (Curriculum Team Speaker 3); and "And then going through planning, pulling together, discussing common misconceptions, discussing ways that it [the standard] is evaluated and assesses, and making sure that that's being addressed in the instruction" (Curriculum Team Speaker 2).

The ways teams use data to make decisions were mentioned throughout all

groups. Speaker 3 from the third-grade focus group said, “We really do use our assessments, and we make sure that even our lower performing students still have the same vocabulary, and so they still get the [instruction] just at their level.” Speaker 2 from the third-grade group contributed, “We look at it as a grade level, what needs to be worked on, area of reinforcement and refinement, and then we take a look at our own individual class to see what we need individually.” Speaker 4 from the EC focus group said, “And then we have someone who’s functioning higher or doing better, we just create another group…we try a different approach or try a different person [teaching].” Other comments were

> If we have some data points to discuss, we’ll discuss the data points, and then if we need to intervene with any kids or if we have any kids that might need some extra help on the previous standard that we were working on or the current standard that we are about to work on (Fourth-Grade Speaker ?);
>
> We all focus on the lowest standards, and we talk about ways that we can improve the lowest standard. We also look to see what the highest standard was to see what we have been doing as far as teaching the best. (Fifth-Grade Speaker 3)

The discussion of students and how data are used to determine need was a subtopic in the data conversation focus as well. Groups were asked, “What does the team do in rethinking lesson planning when a student is performing below expectations? Performing above expectations?” Among the responses were,

> I had I think, three students in my classroom that I thought would benefit from her math class, so what they do is go to her math class during her math time, and then she has some students that would benefit from my math class, which was going at

a lower and slower pace. (EC Speaker 3);

and "We go over our data. The children that scored proficiently and below proficient, and then we'll go back and re-teach is whole group, and then we break it down with our smaller groups and re-teach it then" (Third-Grade Speaker 4).

High expectations and growth mindset for students and staff are two companion themes that were evident in the perceived work of the PLC. Focus groups were asked, "Can you describe a time since the beginning of the year, when you felt the PLC worked together exceptionally well? What did you do? How did it benefit you as a teacher and your students? Why was it such a positive experience?"

EC Speaker ? said the PLC, "helps me to learn how to become a better teacher." EC Speaker 4 said, "It helps me with looking at different strategies, or a different way to approach a child." Speaker 4 from the EC focus group added, "And I really appreciate that coaching and that veteran with me this whole time, watching me transition." Speaker 3 from the third-grade focus group had this to say: "So the expectations are always there that all kids can grow, and that our kids can meet the standard, and even our higher kids can go even higher." Speaker 6 from third grade, attributed the effectiveness of the team to the PLC collaboration and added, "Because I think we all truly have the same common goal, that we want each student to grow to the maximum of his or her ability." Speaker 2 added, "I'm understanding the lesson planning as a whole now." In fourth grade, the conversation was the same: "And I believe that another thing we add to our PLCs is we talk about growth and how the kids are growing and if they're struggling with anything and how we need to intervene to help those students" (Fourth-Grade Speaker 5). Fourth-Grade Speaker ? added,

> So I think it's constantly adding and changing the way that I think and the way I teach, because we have so many different diverse teaching styles that come together, and then with us collaborating during this PLC, it really helps me to think and rethink how I teach.

There is an idea of job-embedded professional growth within the PLC that can be summed up by comments from Speaker 2 from the curriculum team:

> I can see where it does grow them, and it provides information for them about how to teach their standards that I don't believe they would have gotten another way. I don't know of other ways that they would grow as much as they do, except for during the PLC time and those discussions with their peers about how they're teaching things and the best practice.

The Evolution of the PLC

Interview Question 2. "Your district has been engaged with PLCs for several years now. Can you tell me how the PLC has evolved or changed during that time? In what ways do you feel the PLC's work is improving student outcomes? What factors seem to be sustaining the PLC work in your school? What might be getting in the way of sustaining PLCs in your school and district?"

It was interesting that some of the things that were discussed in the work of the PLC also showed up as things that sustain the PLC. There was a reference to the shared work that takes place in the PLC. Speaker 4 from the EC focus group said, "I remember when we first started having PLCs it was more of one person doing everything. So now I think the PLC is more of a team meeting, and everybody's involved in it." Speaker 2 from the curriculum team focus group said, "Without that PLC time, I believe they would

be too overwhelmed on their own to really take the time to understand what they're about to teach." Data focus was mentioned multiple times. "I think the students benefit because we focus a lot more on student data" (EC Focus Group Speaker ?). Speaker ? from the fifth-grade team shared the following:

> I think more emphasis in now being placed on data, where they are. I think before when persons were planning, we were just planning. What is the upcoming topic? I think that was the thing. I'm noticing here at this school, the main focus is their data, the good, the bad, the indifferent, or the lack of. So everything is focused on getting the kids to a point or surpassing it. Everything we do literally revolves around the data.

Data even impact the schedule according to Curriculum Team Speaker 2: "We were finding we didn't have enough time to talk about data in our weekly PLCs, so she [the principal] scheduled extra time for those."

High expectations and growth mindset are also influencers of the evolution of the PLC. "Yeah, growth is the biggest work here" (EC Focus Group Speaker 2). "I feel like one thing that's sustained our PLC is Mrs. Goodson expects this to be done and be done in a certain way, we have to…It's…we're checked behind" (EC Focus Group Speaker 2). Speaker ? from the fifth-grade focus group added,

> Case in point, today, we had a data dive with the children, with our admin. Each child knows they have a data folder. So they know their score at the beginning of the year, where they are now, they're able to project their own scores, what they would like to achieve, and they know about MOY [middle of year], we are gonna meet again. We'll go to the data bank to see, "am I meeting my goals? Am I not?

If not, what can I do as a child to help myself?

Time seemed to be a conflicting theme with teams saying the principal gives ample time or they never feel that there is enough time. EC Focus Group Speaker 3 said, "I can truly say there is nothing standing in the way of a PLC here. I can truly say that. We always have time, but as far as the district, time might be an issue for them." "Yeah, we had a half day for teachers to plan" (Speaker ?). When asked, "What might be getting in the way of sustaining PLCs in your school and district," Third-Grade Speaker 2 and Speaker 5 both said "time." Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said, "There's attempts to protect that time but nothing in life is perfect…if anything, to just have that time protected more." Fifth-Grade Speaker ?: "so it's time....it's time." Speaker ?: "It's a time factor."

A new theme that emerged from third grade was unpacking standards. Speaker 5 from the third-grade focus group said,

> Well, I know when we first started and we were doing PLCs, we weren't really digging into it and really breaking down the standards so you know what you're really teaching. So I think that has changed over the past few years so that you can understand what you're actually teaching instead of just saying this standard, but you really know what comes with the standard, if that makes sense.

Speaker ? from the third-grade focus group added,

> I agree our PLC meetings are very helpful to come in and say, okay, here is the standard we are working on, and then we can use our brainpower more and say, okay well, how are we going to teach this to the student body that we have, versus here is the standard, Here's what the book says to do, okay, just go ahead and do it.

Another new theme that emerged, which is further discussed in the next section, was collective efficacy.

> What the PLC has turned into now, I actually walk away feeling like I'm going to be a better teacher next week. And I really think that that's really important that we have our commonality, but we also have our differentiation. (EC Focus Group Speaker 6)

Speaker 4 from the third-grade focus group added, "Sometimes I'll walk down the hall and just look and be like, 'Okay, I need to see what she's doing there because that looks like it would work better for me than what I'm doing.'" Speaker ? from the fourth-grade group said,

> I know in order to attach the academic problems that our students may be having, you can't do that as a single teacher, it's impossible. You cannot. So it just makes sense to attack it from a standpoint with teammates.

Speaker ? from the fifth-grade group mentioned vertical planning with fourth grade during a session and said they discussed

> where they were, where they were going, and what they need to move to fifth-grade…and were also able to share with fourth-grade resources that they thought could help prepare the kids to understand the content a little bit more.

Collective Efficacy

Interview Question 3. "Working with diverse students is a challenge (efficacy). Can you share a time in which your PLC worked together to ensure that all students were learning at high levels?"

Planning differentiated learning activities in the PLC as a way to ensure that all

students are learning at high levels surfaced as a theme across focus groups. Speaker 2 from the third grade said, “I think when we start planning our small group we definitely think about high, medium, and lows.” Speaker ? from fourth-grade shared,

> We have these data dives where we actually just stop and look at the kids’ data for whatever…and we definitely go from there and plan on, these kids are this level, these kids are our bubble kids, these kids are our lower kids, and what are we gonna do to address each level?

Additionally, Speaker ? added, “So we try to make sure that the lesson plans are equipped for those students and the kids who are higher (than) grade level, we make sure we don’t leave them out.” Fifth-Grade Speaker ? contributed, “So you gotta go in with the mindset of, how can I reach this lowest child, to bring him to his highest potential and not leave out my child that’s over the top.” Fifth-Grade Speaker ? added,

> So we stress like the DOK level questions and we also try ways to make sure whatever we’re teaching in the class is matched to the EOG, the keywords, or what normally tells us is rigor. So, we’re not just creating level one questions or doing level one activities. We try to aim for the three, four, fives.

A good summary of the work that respondents do in PLCs to ensure all students are learning at high levels came from Curriculum Team Speaker 2:

> Because of the high number of students that perform below grade level, whenever planning for instruction, we tend to go ahead and think about, okay, what are we gonna do with the kids that don’t understand this? We always have a chunk that they’ve shown up on grade-level or above, and so we don’t want them bored, and we don’t want them losing ground. So, we’re always thinking about that group

> too. And so, I can think about times when simultaneously in the PLC, we've even kind of split...and there's a little group that's working on the re-teaching lesson, there's a little group that's working on the grade level group [middle group]. I would say, that's what's gonna be their independent practice from this standard, and then that group that's higher, that they've got this material, how are we going to challenge them without just going ahead of everybody, …but how can we just enrich the standard, try to stay together…when that has happened that's been very successful, and all student groups were being considered.

When asked about some of the challenges in helping all students meet standards, student motivation was repeatedly a topic of discussion. Third-Grade Speakers 2 and 3 answered with "student motivation." Speaker 3 further elaborated: "A lot of them come and they're already defeated so even though you might have something that's an exciting way of teaching it, they've spent two years in the pandemic still, and then just motivating them." Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said, "How do you get to motivate students intrinsically that really are not motivated without impacting the rest of your class, because if it's not addressed, it will impact the rest of your class." Fifth-Grade Speaker ? added, "Motivation is one. The reality is, even if you pull all the stops out, some children are not motivated."

When asked how the PLC supported meeting these challenges, a theme of shared responsibility arose.

> I really think, again, that it just comes back to that we have our expectations for ourselves and for our students, and that we're willing to find resources, pull things out…create stuff, and we share it with each other…because we really don't want

> any student to not grow. And I wouldn't hesitate to go and ask anybody for help, and I think that that is a good standard that we have. (Third-Grade Speaker 3)

Fourth-Grade Speaker ? stated,

> And even though I don't share kids with her now that we get in PLCs, I may say, "Hey, I have these kids that are struggling, what are you guys doing for your children that are struggling?" How can I help them? How can we help this group? So, I feel like we talk more now than we used to.

When asked what kind of work the PLC needs to do if all students are to meet NCLB (ESSA) proficiency standards, responses varied from, "I would like looping where I get my kids, say, in the third grade and I stay with them fourth grade, fifth grade until they go out" (EC Speaker ?), to "PLCs would have to be centered around intervention and then it's like, where does that leave new instruction if we do that?" (Third-Grade Speaker 3). Third-Grade Speaker 5 redirected the team in a more positive mindset and focused on work they are doing and how,

> The last couple of years have probably been the most challenging for closing the gaps but I do still want to say that we do, and I'm propping you guys up, do a great job of coming together and just chatting it up, "Hey this worked for me, this worked."

The idea was shared that when the principal takes the role of instructional leader that also supports the work of the PLC. Third-Grade Speaker 3 added,

> We brought all or kids to the cafeteria, and Mrs. Goodson went over the data…all the testing, and the kids got to hear…I thought it was great for the students to hear Ms. Goodson, the principal shouting them out and then telling them what they

> needed to do to go forward. Mine were excited. They were excited when they came back to the room and that excited me…so I think that did them a lot of good. I think just letting them realize, having more meetings with the students included in their growth, not just one-on-one with the teacher. I thought that was excellent.

When asked what opportunities they had to learn how to be an effective PLC, the fifth grade talked about instructional leadership and modeling. Speaker ? said, "We've been provided with professional development, they provide opportunities here for us to develop, read face-to-face or online, they provide through leadership, when they meet the grade level, clearly outline what is expected." Speaker ? added,

> Right, and for me, if you ask them like, if you're not understanding something and you're direct and you ask them [curriculum team], they're always willing to demonstrate what it is they want you to do…I asked for help with modeling, I got it like that.

Speaker ? also added,

> If they can't do it, they will find the resources for you. If there is anything, anything that you ask for, it is a matter of opening your mouth to ask. If you ask for it, you might not get it right then, but you can rest assured it's coming.

Leadership

Interview Question 4. "The next topic I would like to explore is leadership."

When asked how leadership is shared, PLC respondents talked about rotating roles. EC Speaker 1 said, "We try to rotate the roles." Third-Grade Speaker 2 said, "and then we switch roles monthly," and Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said, " I can say that

leadership is shared because we each take a turn being the leader for the PLC…. We take different roles in the meeting, I'll say it that way." When further prompted on if each leader of the PLC team meets together, Curriculum Team Speaker 2 shared, "Yes, we do. Sometimes more frequently, than the PLCs [grade level] meet, we meet weekly."

When asked to share a time when teachers felt empowered in having the ability to implement their own decisions and how administration is involved when making such a decision, Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said they felt ideas were "given to us," and that they may "share ideas as far as how to teach it and what resources they use." Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said that they were, "trusted in the classroom to do what you think is right for the kids. It's not a dictatorship situation here. You are free to do what you think is best for your class, unless proven otherwise."

When asked to share an example of teachers feeling empowered and accepting shared responsibility for ensuring all students meet grade-level standards and how the principal supported that work, Third-Grade Speaker 2 said,

> when she has the data dives, I think that's when we can say, okay, here's our data…and the majority [of students] missed this question. What was going on with this question? I think that's empowering when we do that. When she brought the whole grade level students and teachers into the cafeteria and presented the data for our grade level. I feel like that was very empowering on a number of levels.

When asked what the principal's vision is for PLCs at this school, growth, using data, and unpacking the standards were all reiterated. Third-Grade Speaker 2 said, "I'm assuming that her vision is to have us work together so that we can have the

students make growth. I feel like it is communicated often, growth, growth, growth and collaboration." Third-Grade Speaker 5 agreed and said, "It aligns with the school improvement plan." Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said, "I think her vision is that we're all, that the students are growing…and she definitely tells that to the staff. I mean I think the staff agrees, so that's, I mean, that's why we're here." Additional Speaker ? added, "Right, I mean she's very big on data. I think that is how you implement the PLCs." Curriculum Team Speaker 2 said, "I feel like her vision for PLCs is about coming together and growing together." Fifth-Grade Speaker 1 said, "She expects us to share data. She expects us to break down the standard." Additional Fifth-Grade Speaker ? added,

> The one thing that I know she is big on is that each teacher when they leave, they have a clear understanding on how the standard is supposed to be taught, what the child is supposed to learn. How you as the teacher, plan to reach and teach each child that's in that classroom. So that you, yourself will feel more confident in what it is you're doing when you stand before your classroom.

In further talking about what role the principal plays in the collaborative process, monitoring and distributed leadership were mentioned. EC Speaker ? stated, "She expects it to happen consistently," with Speaker 2 adding, "correctly," and further stating that teachers "have a voice in when those meetings occur…and everyone knows what you're expected to do and that you're expected to be at your PLC whenever that time span is." Fifth-Grade Speaker 3 stated, "I know that she facilitates the curriculum team…and she does attend our PLCs and is not hesitant to chime in and share strategies and …"; Third-Grade Speaker 2, "expectations." Third-Grade Speaker 5 contributed the following:

> Yes, I think she's top tier. She gives the expectations to the math curriculum person and the ELA one and then they tell us, cause I know there have been a couple of times when we mentioned some things, and they said, "No, these were the expectations that _____has so we need to stay in this realm." So I think she uses the chain of command well and then she walks through the PLC, through each one. And when we're working, she'll walk through and see what we're doing and make sure we're sticking with where we need to be.

Curriculum Speaker 2 had this to say:

> And her role in it is well, it's had to be fairly primary since she stepped in for our coach who is on maternity leave. Yeah, she's now with the reading PLC, but before that, I mean she was present. It's rare when we had a PLC where she was not present for some part of that time. And so I feel like that has shown to me and to the teachers, how much it matters to her that we have successful PLCs.

When asked to share a time when they felt well supported by their principal and how it helped them and the team, principal support and listening were repeatedly discussed. Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said, "I think she's pretty good at making sure we have that we need, like material wise. Cause she will ask us, occasionally, what can I do for you? What do you need from me?"; to which Fourth-Grade Speaker ? added, "consistently."

Curriculum Team Speaker 3 said,

> And she's just supportive overall, anyway, she's never not supportive, she's never hiding down in her office, she's always out, she's visible, she's coming in. she's coming by…And if she's got time in her schedule, she's gonna step

> in and be there, whether it's regular classroom schedules or if it's PLCs, if she's got the time to come in and be a part of that, she's gonna be a part of that, and she'll also provide some input based on what she's hearing.

Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said,

> We had a 3-hour planning time and I sent _____ an email telling her how I thought it was great, and everybody I spoke to thought it was great. If it's something she could consider doing again, and she actually thought about it and made the decision that we can have it once a month.

Fifth-Grade Speaker ? added,

> So we told her, "thank you," but she really doesn't know what she did as far as our mental stability and our capability of being present and inviting for the students here, when you come in and you're well prepared.

Third-Grade Speaker 2 said,

> I felt supported in my pre-observation, just walking through what I wanted to do in my lesson and she gave me suggestions on what think might add to the overall lesson. So, I felt supported during my observation process, just her hearing my thoughts about what I wanted to be done in my room and her giving me feedback on what she felt could be added or could be useful.

Additional Fifth-Grade Speaker ? stated,

> So, to me being heard from my admin with certain stuff makes me feel, it makes me feel like somebody is listening to you and backing you. Even if you and the person might not get along in that moment, but you know she will tell you, " ____you were wrong with this or this is how this should have been

> handled," or whatever. But you know at the end of the day, she's coming from a place of love.

Additional Speaker ? added, "When you feel appreciated by your admin, even if you feel tired, like I am tired now, you will want to come to work."

When asked about what ways the principal helps PLCs be at their best, Speaker 2 from the third-grade team shared, "I feel like the last PLC when we did data, I feel like her core questions to us were thought provoking and the way she helped interpret the data, I understood it. I feel like that was effective."

When asked if there were practices that diminish the work of the PLC, teams said that more time was needed and reading each assessment question in review took away from time. Third-Grade Speaker 2 said, "Yes. I feel like reading each question individually and going over everything… I feel like that's diminishing when we walk through every question of an assessment." Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said,

> Yeah, time, right? The end of the day, it's not a good time because if we have issues on the school bus or if our kids didn't get picked up or the interruption or the timing of it is really the only thing, I will say I'm just not a fan of virtual meetings or PLCs.

When asked how the principal supports teacher and PLC team learning, teams mentioned monitoring to ensure they happen as a support. Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said, "By making sure it happens. All this PLC talk, so make sure it happens." Fourth-grade additional Speaker ? stated, "She sits with the reading teachers…and then the math PLC, they actually have a coach that sits with them as well. I mean, so she's making sure that it is happening and that's happening correctly."

When asked what structure would ensure more positive experiences during collaboration time, teams said providing more time was a structure that will ensure this. Third-Grade Speaker 4 said, “It’s still the time.” Third-Grade Speaker 5 said, “I think where it’s always gonna be just a factor, it is time and scheduling, and there’s just some things that are beyond people’s control.” Fourth-Grade Speaker ? stated, “The more time, which I mean, she’s working on so, Yeah, I think just more time.”

Recommendations

Interview Question 5 (Closure). “If you had three wishes for making your PLC more effective, what would they be?”

When given the opportunity to provide recommendations, the EC team had no recommendations other than, “snacks” (EC Speaker 2). The curriculum team said that mental attendance was their wish. Curriculum Team Speaker 3 stated, “Attendance in terms of just showing up, not necessarily physically, but you know.” Curriculum Team Speaker 2 stated, “Mentally…absolutely. That’s it. That’s my only wish.” Third grade would like more flexibility and pre-planning. Third-Grade Speaker 5 said, “Allow some flexibility so that teachers can add some creativity and put their passion into the lesson plan.” Third-Grade Speaker 4 said, “If students struggle with something, go ahead and have the research-based [strategies, materials], up for us, and so we won’t have to research it ourselves.” Third-Grade Speaker 3 would like “ready cash” that they can use to purchase things without having to wait weeks. Fourth grade said they would like more time, more focus (from the team), and snacks. Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said, “Time would be the first wish. I can say sometimes we are off task, …so we have to stay focused, that would be my second wish…and more snacks.” Fifth grade did not think that anything

needed to be improved, because they felt they had addressed needs previously and it was being improved.

Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said, and the group agreed,

> I really think we can't think of anything because, at the beginning of the year, she asked us what are some things that she could do to help us. And she really has delivered and then so...so it would be really hard to pull something from behind, 'cause she has really asked us at the beginning of the year. And she has…She has delivered.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine teacher perceptions of PLCs, collective efficacy, and leadership in a turnaround school in hopes of helping districts understand the phenomenon of school turnaround. I used a mixed methods design to examine themes in the literature and investigate the experiences of teachers in a previously low-performing school that has done the work of turning around and meeting growth expectations for multiple years.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the work of school turnaround as it occurs and to better understand the perceptions of those engaging in the work. Impoverished children generally perform lower on standardized assessments and have lower prospects for future education and occupational attainment. These students need additional resources to lessen the effects of early childhood environments (Hair et al., 2015). This study examined the things schools can do to impact student achievement in low-performing schools.

The literature review revealed that adult learners need to have input and ownership of their learning processes and a belief that they are capable of being successful in their work. It further revealed that PLCs are a way to facilitate adult learning and to improve collective efficacy. Moreover, the research revealed transformational leadership as essential to teacher efficacy and effective PLCs.

This chapter consists of a discussion of the findings from the research questions. This includes my analysis of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future studies regarding school turnaround and the constructs of collective efficacy, PLCs, and transformational leadership as a driver for student achievement and school improvement. Educator responses collected from the Voelkel survey and focus groups revealed areas of strength and concern educators in low-performing schools face.

Participants/Setting

This study was conducted at one high-poverty school that had previously

been persistently low-performing and at one time was in the lowest 5% of schools in the state of North Carolina. City Elementary is a Tier I county, which means it is one of the poorest counties in North Carolina (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 2022). At City Elementary, 90% of students are economically disadvantaged. This school is no longer under low-performing status. Participants in this study consisted of teachers across Grades 3-5 and EC, as well as an instructional coach and assistant principal.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school?
2. How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school?
3. How do teachers perceive transformational leadership in a turnaround school?

Research Design

The research questions are answered through a mixed methodology of data collection along with previous research found in the Chapter 2 literature review. I chose to do a mixed methods study to give perspectives from each in order to balance limitations from each method and better understand the evaluation of collective efficacy, PLCs, and leadership in school improvement. To answer Research Questions 1 and 2, I used focus groups and a survey that employed a Likert scale rating for each question as well as a review of the literature. To answer Research Question 3, focus groups were conducted and a review of the literature

was done.

The survey provided numerical data displayed in a frequency distribution chart. The quantitative data were analyzed using Qualtrics statistics to determine the mode for each question. A chi-square goodness of fit statistical analysis was done to determine if the sum of differences between what is observed and expected is statistically significant and to ensure the validity of the data. No question had a *p* value at or above 0.05, confirming that the observed value of each question was not significantly different from the expected value and there was a normal distribution.

The qualitative data provided a rich discussion narrative on each topic to provide a deeper understanding of educator perceptions. The qualitative data were collected through focus group interviews conducted by an external moderator.

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis was juxtaposed with the literature review of collective efficacy, PLCs, and transformational leadership, underpinned by andragogy or adult learning theory. Voelkel's (2014) framework for effective PLCs, collective teacher efficacy, and transformational leadership provided the theoretical framework for the study.

Review of Methodology

The data collection took place within two phases. In the first phase of research, the first two research questions were answered through the survey and analyzed for interpretation of data. In the second phase, focus groups were conducted and then interviews were sent to be transcribed and then analyzed for interpretation of data. Twenty-one educators completed the survey. Two were excluded for missing more than 15 values, bringing the total number of participants

for data collection to 19. Focus groups consisted of four to six people in each group of third-grade, fourth-grade, fifth-grade, EC, and curriculum educators. Focus group sessions lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. All focus groups were conducted and recorded by an external moderator and then transcribed by Scribie transcription services. They were then returned to the external moderator so all names could be redacted. After this process, the focus group transcriptions were analyzed for data interpretation.

Research Question 1

"How do teachers perceive the implementation of a PLC in a turnaround school?" Three salient themes were evident in both the qualitative and quantitative data in relation to the perceived implementation of the PLC. They were shared work, the way teams use data to make decisions; high expectations; and growth mindset. One theme that was shared across focus groups was shared work. Teams talked about "collaboration among the teachers" (Third-Grade Speakers 5 and 6, Fourth-Grade Speaker 3) and "planning, pulling together, discussing common misconceptions, discussing ways that it [the standard] is evaluated and assessed, and making sure that that's [the standard] being addressed in the instruction" (Curriculum-Team Speaker 3). "I remember when we first started having PLCs it was more of one person doing everything. So now I think the PLC is more of a team meeting, and everybody's involved in it" (EC Speaker 4). A total of 18 of 19 respondents agreed that teams work together to clarify essential outcomes for each unit of instruction (Survey Question 1). A total of 17 of 19 respondents agreed that the team works together to establish common pacing for each unit of instruction

(Survey Question 2). Only 14 of 19 respondents agreed that teams work collaboratively to clarify the criteria to judge the quality of student work (Survey Question 3); however, 16 of 19 respondents agreed that teams practice applying the criteria until they can do it consistently (Survey Question 4).

Another theme that arose was the way teams use data to make decisions and determine needs. This was mentioned throughout all groups. Teams said they used their assessments to "make sure that even our lower performing students still have the same vocabulary, and so they still get the [instruction] just at their level" and to determine "what needs to be worked on" (Third-Grade Speaker 4), to "try a different approach or try a different person [teaching]" (EC Speaker 4). Fourth and fifth grades talked about intervening with different standards as needed. This is the type of results-focused collaboration Voelkel (2014) described as a marker of more effective teams. When discussing student needs as identified from data, teams said they use data to determine whether to reteach the whole group. When discussing the evolution of the PLC, Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said, "Everything we do literally revolves around the data." When surveyed, all 19 respondents said that teams monitor the learning of each student at least four times each year on essential outcomes using common assessments (Survey Question 5). Eighteen of 19 respondents agreed that team members used the student achievement results to improve their effectiveness in making sure all students learn (Survey Question 9). A total of 17 of 19 respondents also said they work to establish and achieve SMART goals.

High expectations and growth mindset were companion themes that arose in the focus groups, but the survey responses did not show a high majority across all related

questions. Team comments ranged from “helps me to learn how to become a better teacher” (EC Speaker 4), to “So the expectations are always there that all kids can grow, and that our kids can meet the standard, and even our higher kids can go even higher” (Third-Grade Speaker 3). High expectations and growth are also influencers of the evolution of the PLC: “Yeah, growth is the biggest work here” (EC Focus Group Speaker 2). Survey Question 6 regarding student access to intervention being guaranteed had a 16 of 19 rating. Survey Question 7, “Students are required rather than invited to devote extra time and receive additional support,” was affirmed by 12 of 19 respondents. There were, however, positive ratings on several questions. Survey Question 13 about the shared vision and values across the school had a positive rating of 18 of 19. A total of 17 of 19 respondents said there were norms and protocols in place to guide the work they do (Survey Question 17). The question with the highest rating and evidence of a culture of high expectations and growth mindset was Survey Question 12, “Improved results, achievement of goals, and the work of teams are the basis for a culture of celebration within classrooms and the school,” which had a positive rating of 19 respondents in agreement.

The themes that arose congruently from the quantitative and qualitative data collection are supported by the research included in the literature review. High performing PLCs have six essential characteristics: a shared mission, vision, values, and goals; collaborative teams; collective inquiry into best practice and current reality; actionable steps or “learning by doing”; a vow to continuous improvement; and results focus (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). The themes shared work, the way teams use data to make decisions, and high expectations and growth mindset all fall within these categories and

are evidence that the educators in the studied school perceive the implementation of PLCs to be aligned with the characteristics outlined in the DuFour model.

Other themes that arose from the focus groups but were not further validated from the survey questions as related to Research Question 1 were job-embedded professional growth, time, collective efficacy, and unpacking standards. Collective efficacy arose as a theme from the focus groups, which supports the high levels of perceived PLC implementation contributing to collective efficacy. Time arose as a theme as teams differed on their opinions of the best time for PLCs, whether before or after school; the consensus being that the PLC is the only time teams can get some of the training around data-based decisions and instructional strategies.

Research Question 2

"How do teachers perceive the level of collective efficacy in a turnaround school?" The literature review revealed that of all the things schools can do to impact student achievement, collective efficacy had the highest effect size, making it the most influential on student achievement (Eells, 2011; Hattie, 2012). Three prominent themes came out of the data analysis for Research Question 2: planning differentiated learning activities in the PLC, student motivation, and shared responsibility.

Planning differentiated learning activities in the PLC as a way to ensure that all students are learning at high levels surfaced as a theme across focus groups. Respondents clearly perceived that they do the work of differentiating instruction for all students, based on need. Respondents said, "I think when we start planning our small group, we definitely think about high, medium, and low" (Third-Grade Speaker 2). "So, we try to make sure that the lesson plans are equipped for those students and the kids who are

higher [than] grade level, we make sure we don't leave them out" (Fourth-Grade Speaker ?). "We stress like the DOK [depth of knowledge] level questions and we also try ways to make sure whatever we're teaching in the class is matched to the EOG, the keywords, or what normally tells us is rigor" (Fifth-Grade Speaker ?).

Survey Question 20 was, "Teachers provide so many engaging lessons that the students here are bound to learn shows that teachers may need further support in creating lessons that they believe lead to high levels of learning." Of the 19 respondents, 12 believed that lessons are engaging and lead to student learning. This is important because teacher beliefs that they can positively impact student learning is a positive efficacy belief and perception that "regardless of the home environment, intelligence, and other factors," they can affect changes in student learning (Eun, 2018, p. 77). Instructional strategy implementation will be heavily dependent on teacher-perceived ability to carry it out. When surveyed on whether they believed they lacked the skills needed to ensure every child can master grade-level curriculum, most educators at the school (18 of 19), did believe that they collectively possess the skills needed to ensure every child can master the grade-level curriculum (Question 18).

Student motivation became a topic of discussion in focus groups when asked about some of the challenges in helping all students meet standards. Respondents said things like, "A lot of them come and they're already defeated so even though you might have something that's an exciting way of teaching it, they've spent two years in the pandemic still, and then just motivating them" (Third-Grade Speaker 3). Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said, "The reality is, even if you pull all the stops out, some children are not motivated."

When surveyed about the teacher's ability to motivate their students, 13 of 18 respondents believed teachers at this school were confident they were able to motivate students (Survey Question 15). Interestingly though, Question 21, "Students here just aren't motivated to learn," had 16 responses to the contrary. The majority of respondents (17 of 19) do not believe that teachers give up when students do not want to learn. All respondents believed that teachers have the skills to close the learning gap when they come to school prepared to learn (Question 19). Only 12 respondents believed that teachers in this school have strategies for supporting students who face home life difficulties. The key difference is that there is a belief in being able to teach motivated learners versus unmotivated learners or learners with serious barriers to education. This implies a problem of practice. What skills do teachers need to have in order to believe in their ability to motivate all of their students and create engaging lessons? Bandura identified mastery experiences as the most effective basis of efficacy. Victories build self-efficacy, while failures reduce it, and a resilient efficacy demands experiences conquering obstacles by continued effort (Bandura, 1997).

When asked how the PLC supported meeting these challenges, a theme of shared responsibility arose. This is a pillar of PLCs. A collaborative culture and collective responsibility is not optional but rather the expectation. Respondents echoed the sentiment of one teacher who said it was their team's "expectations for ourselves and for our students, and that we're willing to find resources, pull things out…create stuff, and we share it with each other…because we really don't want any student to not grow" (Third-Grade Speaker 3).

When asked what kind of work the PLC needs to do if all students are to meet

NCLB (ESSA) proficiency standards, there was no clear sense of what needed to be done. Responses varied from, “I would like looping where I get my kids, say, in the third grade and I stay with them fourth grade, fifth grade until they go out” (EC Speaker ?), to “PLCs would have to be centered around intervention and then it’s like, where does that leave new instruction if we do that”(Third-Grade Speaker 3).

The majority (15 of 19) of respondents surveyed believed that “teachers in this school work together to meet the needs of challenging students” (Question 14). Teachers in this school believe it is their responsibility to help every child master their grade level curriculum (Question 16), as evidenced by 16 of 19 respondents rating positively. Fourteen of 19 respondents agreed that teachers in this school help each other incorporate critical thinking opportunities for their students when planning lessons (Question 25). Most respondents (14 of 19) believed that the structures, practices, and procedures of the school are designed to ensure that all students learn (Question 22).

One theme that was mentioned in the focus groups was instructional leadership and modeling. When asked what opportunities they had to learn to be an effective teacher, respondents from the fifth-grade team said, “We’ve been provided with professional development, they provide opportunities here for us to develop, read face-to-face or online, they provide through leadership” (Fifth-Grade Speaker ?); and “ They’re always willing to demonstrate what it is they want you to do…I asked for help with modeling, I got it like that” (Fifth-Grade Speaker ?). Another fifth-grade team respondent added, “If there is anything, anything that you ask for, it is a matter of opening your mouth to ask. If you ask for it, you might not get it right then, but you can rest assured it’s coming” (Fifth-Grade Speaker ?).

Research Question 3

“How do teachers perceive transformational leadership in a turnaround school?” For Research Question 3, focus group data collection and a review of literature provided answers to the questions on the role of leadership, both distributed leadership within the PLC and most importantly administrator leadership. Several themes arose from the focus groups. Each one is contemplated in light of the literature review.

When asked how leadership is shared in PLCs, respondents talked about rotating roles. A review of the literature supports roles being interchangeable from session to session to build collective authority. Collaborative teams work, “interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable” (DuFour et al., 2016 p. 10). This role exchange was well documented in focus groups: “We try to rotate the roles” (EC Speaker 1). A third-grade respondent said, “and then we switch roles monthly”; and Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said, “ I can say that leadership is shared because we each take a turn being the leader for the PLC. This characteristic seems to be at full implementation amongst teams.”

When asked to share a time when teachers felt empowered in having the ability to implement their own decisions and how administration is involved when making such a decision, Fourth-Grade Speaker ? said that they felt ideas were “given to us,” and that they may “share ideas as far as how to teach it and what resources they use.” Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said that they were “trusted in the classroom to do what you think is right for the kids. It’s not a dictatorship situation here. You are free to do what you think is best for your class, unless proven otherwise.”

A lack of clarity of vision was noticed during the focus groups as teams did not necessarily restate any particular vision. When asked what the principal's vision for PLCs is at this school, growth, using data, and unpacking the standards were all mentioned. Responses varied from, "I'm assuming that her vision is to have us work together so that we can have the students make growth. I feel like it is communicated often, growth, growth, growth and collaboration" (Third-Grade Speaker 2), to "It aligns with the school improvement plan" (Third-Grade Speaker 1), to "I think her vision is that we're all, that the students are growing…and she definitely tells that to the staff. I mean I think the staff agrees, so that's, I mean, that's why we're here" (Fourth-Grade Speaker ?).

A PLC, as defined by DuFour (2010), again, is a group of educators with shared beliefs, vision, or values who meet regularly and often, discuss best practice, share knowledge, and work collaboratively in recurring cycles to improve student outcomes. It is imperative then that the vision be clear to all engaged in the work, whether they have been at the school for years or are new to the school.

When asked about the role the principal plays in the collaborative process, monitoring and a gradual release of responsibility with distributed leadership were revealed. Respondents shared, "She expects it to happen consistently" (EC Speaker ?); "I know that she facilitates the curriculum team…and she does attend our PLCCs and is not hesitant to chime in and share strategies" (Fifth-Grade Speaker 3);

> She gives the expectations to the math curriculum person and the ELA one and then they tell us, So I think she uses the chain of command well, and then she walks through the PLC, through each one. And when we're working, she'll walk

> through and see what we're doing and make sure we're sticking with where we need to be (Grade Speaker 5); and
>
> It's rare when we had a PLC where she was not present for some part of that time. And so I feel like that has shown to me and to the teachers, how much it matters to her that we have successful PLCs" (Curriculum Speaker 2).

In this way, the principal takes on the role of coach or guide as leadership is distributed but monitored and feedback is given in "alliance-building or relationship-building strategies" (Pierce, 2015, p. 27) that result in conjunction with the practices of observation, modeling, and feedback. The administrator who is part of the PLC process will be better able to evaluate instruction and support teachers. Teachers with a positive perception of the coaching relationship are more likely to implement with fidelity because they feel supported (Pierce, 2015).

Principal support and listening were also themes that arose from the focus groups. Focus group speakers gave multiple instances of feeling supported or heard by their principal. "And she's just supportive overall, anyway, she's never not supportive, she's never hiding down in her office, she's always out, she's visible, she's coming in. she's coming by…and she'll also provide some input based on what she's hearing." (Curriculum Team Speaker 3).

> Fifth-Grade Speaker ? said,
>
> We had a 3-hour planning time and I sent _____ an email telling her how I thought it was great, and everybody I spoke to thought it was great. If it's something she could consider doing again, and she actually thought about it and made the decision that we can have it once a month

Third-Grade Speaker 2 said,

> I felt supported in my pre-observation, just walking through what I wanted to do in my lesson and she gave me suggestions on what think might add to the overall lesson, …just her hearing my thoughts about what I wanted to be done in my room and her giving me feedback on what she felt could be added or could be useful.

The literature review supports the notion that school leaders can provide individualized support by listening, being attentive to individual needs and opinions, mentoring, and coaching staff members with individualization and supporting their professional development (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Furthermore, a competent principal will integrate the role of instructional leader into their transformational leadership. Marks and Printy (2003) found, "Transformational leadership builds organizational capacity whereas instructional leadership builds individual and collective competence…the efficacious principal works simultaneously at transformational and instructional tasks" (p. 377).

When asked what structure would ensure more positive experiences during collaboration time, teams said providing more time was a structure that will ensure this. Third-Grade Speaker 4 said, "It's still the time." Third-Grade Speaker 5 said, "I think where it's always gonna be just a factor, it is time and scheduling, and there's just some things that are beyond people's control." Fourth-Grade Speaker ? stated, "The more time, which I mean, she's working on so, Yeah, I think just more time.

Limitations

The main limitation of this study was that it happened at one school. I am the

principal of the school. There is a limitation that a proxy was used to conduct research. She was not intimately involved in the study, but she conducted the focus groups. Had there been a question from one of the participants about a question she may not have been able to answer the question. The COVID-19 pandemic was a limitation as well.

Implications for Practice

The work of continuously improving PLCs to be a place where educators learn and grow should continue at the school and within the district. Implementing PLCs as efficacy-building structures supports distributive leadership and influences student achievement. Building administrators should be an active part of the PLC process in the school. They are responsible for developing the vision of the school and monitoring it for fidelity because research supports that teacher efficacy increases as a result of the structures and systems the principal puts into place (Mayo-Brown, 2018). Focus group data and survey data from this study show that teachers at this turnaround school agreed that PLCs were an established part of the school culture.

PLCs should include shared work or collective actions. The collaboration between all members supports understanding of instructional strategies for addressing the standard. Arroyo (2011) found that by developing learning communities, administrators saw their member learning increase. Questions 1 and 2 of the PLC survey found that teams believe they "work together" to clarify essential outcomes for each unit of instruction using state and local standards, resources, and student achievement data (18 of 19 respondents); they also work together to establish common pacing for each unit (17 of 19 respondents). Third-Grade Speaker 6 said, "The collaboration piece of our team is, Oh, I think that's what makes us most effective."

Essential PLC characteristics of collaboration and continuous improvement should be present on all teams. Reimer (2010) found that in schools that were "beating the odds" (p. 43), these were present. All teams should exhibit PLC characteristics, as Voelkel (2014) found that more effective teams embraced these practices. This type of work was observed by curriculum team members during PLCs. "What I would see is collaboration and teachers working together" (Curriculum Team Speaker 3); "And then going through planning, pulling together, discussing common misconceptions, discussing ways that it [the standard] is evaluated and assessed, and making sure that that's being addressed in the instruction" (Curriculum Team Speaker 2).

Teams should be trained in the use of data in order to make changes to instruction and to meet the needs of all students. Data should drive the work of the PLC with a focus on results. Results are measured by student learning. The majority of survey respondents believe that their team uses data to make decisions and monitor student progress. Survey Questions 5, 8, 9, and 11 all centered around the use of data; and all had favorable responses between 17 and 19 of 19 possible responses. Speaker 2 from the third-grade group contributed, "We look at it as a grade level, what needs to be worked on, area of reinforcement and refinement, and then we take a look at our own individual class to see what we need individually." Fifth-Grade Speaker 3 contributed,

> We all focus on the lowest standards, and we talk about ways that we can improve the lowest standard. We also look to see what the highest standard was to see what we have been doing as far as teaching the best.

Educator input on the implementation of the PLC can be used to determine what structures and protocols each PLC needs to implement at individual schools.

This supports teachers having input and autonomy to choose. At the school in this study, teachers voiced that they needed more extended sessions of time in order to go over all that needs to be covered. Still, time was the main thing that was mentioned when asked how the principal could support PLC team learning. Third-Grade Speaker 4 said, “It’s still the time.” Third-Grade Speaker 5 said, “I think where it’s always gonna be just a factor, it is time and scheduling, and there’s just some things that are beyond people’s control.” Fourth-Grade Speaker ? stated, “The more time, which I mean, she’s working on so, Yeah, I think just more time.”

Teachers must be empowered with the training and skills necessary to impact student achievement for all students. Professional development should equip teachers with proven practices but must also clear obstacles to implementation. Implementing in-school instead of external-based professional development is one strategy for achieving concentrated development (Eun, 2018). Teachers need professional development to be relevant to their needs; in this case, the ability to ensure that all students learn, even those with perceived barriers. Eleven of 19 respondents believe that if students come to school unprepared to learn, teachers need to have the skills to close the learning gap. Third-Grade Speaker 3 shared, “A lot of them come and they’re already defeated so even though you might have something that’s an exciting way of teaching it, they’ve spent two years in the pandemic still, and then just motivating them.” Teachers should also be empowered to investigate and implement new strategies. For example, EC Speaker ? suggested, “I would like looping where I get my kids, say, in the third grade and I stay with them fourth grade, fifth grade until they go out.”

Collective efficacy can be influenced within the school and lead to greater student

success, greater commitment to learning, and a more engaging place for students to come and learn (Donohoo et al., 2018). Johnson (2020) conducted a study of strictly urban schools and the collective efficacy of teachers and found that teacher efficacy beliefs had positive implications for student achievement. This study concurred:

> What the PLC has turned into now, I actually walk away feeling like I'm going to be a better teacher next week. And I really think that that's really important that we have our commonality, but we also have our differentiation. (EC Focus Group Speaker 6)

Districts should hire proven competent principals or develop principals to become competent leaders. Dilliplane (2016) found a positive relationship between principal leadership behaviors and teacher efficacy in low-performing middle schools. Garland (2018) found that instructional leadership proved to be more important to improving school performance than the school improvement model that was to be employed. Supovitz et al. (2009) found, "empirical evidence that principal leadership influences student learning indirectly through teachers' instructional practices" (p. 46). A lack of principal leadership can be reflected in teacher ratings of professional learning as well (Sawchuk, 2014), further giving credibility to the idea that an effective principal supports effective teachers. Fifth-Grade Speaker 1 said,

> The one thing that I know she is big on is that each teacher when they leave, they have a clear understanding on how the standard is supposed to be taught, what the child is supposed to learn. How you as the teacher, plan to reach and teach each child that's in that classroom. So that you, yourself will feel more confident in what it is you're doing when you stand before your classroom.

Recommendations for Further Research

- Further research is needed to determine what skills educators feel are most lacking when faced with students they perceive to be unmotivated. Do the motivation strategies at schools of high poverty differ from all other schools? Further research at schools throughout the studied district and in other districts with similar and different demographics may yield a more robust data collection and show similarities and differences in motivational strategies. This will strengthen the understanding of what schools, all schools, can do to impact student learning through PLCs, collective efficacy, and leadership.
- As stated in the literature, mastery experiences are what build efficacy, and this may be an area of further investigation into the ways leadership supports teacher instructional mastery experiences. This may be a continuation of job-embedded professional growth within the PLC where best practice is being discussed and effectiveness analyzed.
- Further research is needed to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher efficacy beliefs.
- Further research is needed to understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student motivation.
- The COVID-19 pandemic may or may not affect educator and student beliefs and motivations. It will be interesting to compare data from past and concurrent studies to determine if collective efficacy trends differed as a result of the COVID-19 experience.

Conclusion

It is evident through this research study of one school that teachers at this turnaround school have positive perceptions of PLC implementation, collective efficacy, and transformational leadership. One can conclude that the success of the school in turnaround status can be attributed to these high perceptions and shared beliefs of research-based practices. This is not to say that in every instance of questioning there were high perceived levels of PLC characteristics, collective efficacy, or leadership. Indeed, there are areas of concern that, if made, points of focus may lead to further improvements.

Teams did not agree that the principal's vision for the PLC was clearly articulated. This needs to be clearly stated and restated in the PLC for relevance, as it is one of the tenets of effective PLCs. Teams did not agree on the time PLCs take place or whether PLCs necessarily have enough time to accomplish their tasks. Although it appears in conversations that the principal has begun to address this, this is an area where school leadership has to decide if teachers should be given the autonomy to decide on time and within what parameters.

Some teachers lack belief in their ability to motivate and teach all students at high levels. This is evidence of a need to further support teachers in mastery experiences with all types of learners in an effort to build instructional capacity and efficacy.

This study does contribute to the body of research regarding strategies for use by schools designated as turnaround and/or low-performing. Educators at this school described structured PLCs where collaboration and data-based decisions are

taking place. This work around PLCs contributes to a culture of high expectations and growth mindset. If turnaround can (and it did) happen here, it can happen elsewhere.

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Appendix A

Survey and Focus Group Questions

This section of the survey is designed to determine the degree of professional learningcommunity characteristics demonstrated within your school.

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below by markingone of the five responses from (1) “Not at all” to (5) “A Great Deal”.

1. My team works together to clarify the essential outcomes for each unit of instruction using state and local standards and resources as well as studentachievement data.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
2. My team works together to establish common pacing for each unit of instruction.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
3. My team works collaboratively to clarify the criteria used to judge the quality ofstudent work.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
4. We practice applying the above-mentioned criteria until we can do soconsistently.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
5. My team monitors the learning of each student at least four times each year onessential outcomes through a series of team-developed (common) formative assessments that are aligned with district and state standards.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
6. Students who experience academic difficulty are guaranteed access to a system ofinterventions that provide more time and support for learning.

1 Not at all
2 Very Little
3 Some Degree
4 Quite A Bit
5 A Great Deal

7. Students are required rather than invited to devote extra time and receiveadditional support until they are successful.
   1 Not at all
   2 Very Little
   3 Some Degree
   4 Quite A Bit
   5 A Great Deal
8. My team members use student achievement results from a variety of assessmentsto identify strengths and weaknesses in our individual and collective practice.
   1 Not at all
   2 Very Little
   3 Some Degree
   4 Quite A Bit
   5 A Great Deal
9. My team members use the above-mentioned student achievement results toimprove our effectiveness in helping all students learn.
   1 Not at all
   2 Very Little
   3 Some Degree
   4 Quite A Bit
   5 A Great Deal
10. My team has adopted specific and explicit norms and protocols that guide us inworking together.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
11. My team works interdependently to establish and achieve SMART goals (SMART Goals are Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, andTime-Bound).
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
12. Improved results, achievement of goals, and the work of teams are the basis for aculture of celebration within classrooms and the school.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little

3 Some Degree
4 Quite A Bit
5 A Great Deal

13. The shared vision and values among my school's staff influence policies, procedures, daily practices, and day-to-day decisions of all staff members.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal

This section of the survey is designed to help gain a better understanding of the levels ofcollective efficacy within your professional learning community team. Collective efficacy is the teachers' shared beliefs that the team as a whole has the ability to performin such a way as to ensure a positive effect on student outcomes/achievement. Please respond to each of the statements below by considering the combination of the team's current ability, resources, and opportunities to do each of the following in your present professional learning community team.

Directions: Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below by markingone of the five responses from (1) "Not at all" to (5) "A Great Deal".

14. Teachers in this schoolwork together to meet the needs of challenging students.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
15. Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
16. Teachers in this school believe it is their responsibility to help every child masterthe grade-level curriculum.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
17. If a child doesn't want to learn, teachers here give up.
    1 Not at all

2 Very Little
3 Some Degree
4 Quite A Bit
5 A Great Deal

18. Some teachers at my site lack the skills needed to ensure every child can masterthe grade-level curriculum.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
19. If these students come to school unprepared to learn, teachers have the skills toclose the learning gap.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
20. Teachers provide so many engaging lessons that the students here are bound tolearn.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
21. Students here just aren't motivated to learn.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
22. The structures, practices, and procedures of this school are designed to helpensure all students learn.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
23. Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about theirsafety.
    1 Not at all
    2 Very Little
    3 Some Degree
    4 Quite A Bit
    5 A Great Deal
24. Teachers at this school have strategies for supporting students who face

home lifedifficulties.
1 Not at all
2 Very Little
3 Some Degree
4 Quite A Bit
5 A Great Deal

25. Teachers in this school help each other incorporate critical thinking opportunitiesfor their students when planning lessons.
1 Not at all
2 Very Little
3 Some Degree
4 Quite A Bit
5 A Great Deal

(Voelkel, 2011, pp. 217-223)

Researcher will introduce self and make sure all consent forms are signed.

Professional Learning

Communities School Name_____ Date _____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project to explore professional learning communities as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998) in your school. The purpose of this interview is to allow you to provide feedback on your thoughts about theprofessional learning community model used at your site. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. The interview is to gain your perceptions and feedback, not to evaluate anything that you say. In fact, your identity will be kept confidential as the results are analyzed.

I find it helpful to audiotape our conversation. Taping ensures that I have an accurate record of your responses. Are you okay with me taping our conversation? The tape recording will not reveal your name and will only be reviewed by the researcher and the University committee members. These people are not related to any of your employers, nor will they recognize your voice. All tapes will be kept in a locked safe with no recognizable identification. Again, I want to stress that there is no right or wrong response, and in fact, the depth of your answers will be most informative as I analyze thedata.

Are there any questions so far?

We have about 4 areas for discussion. I may need to seek clarification from you prior toproceeding to the next question. I may also need to go back later in the discussion to clarify something you might have said earlier.

Are you ready to begin?

Question 1: I am really interested in learning about how your PLC works and thetypes of work you do together during your meetings.

a. What is the team you consider to be your primary PLC and how long have you been a member of that team? How many years have you been teaching?

b. If I was to drop in on a typical meeting, can you describe in some detail what Iwould see?

    a. Probe if necessary for roles and leadership on the team
    b. Probe for meeting structure
    c. Probe for topics discussed (examining test data, student work and how they guide instruction)
    d. Probe for joint work (lesson planning, developing commonassessments)

c. What does the team do in rethinking lessons when a student is performing below expectations? Performing above expectations? (or is this an individualteacher's responsibility).

d. In what ways has the PLC contributed to your professional growth?

e. Can you describe a time since the beginning of this year, when you felt thePLC worked together exceptionally well? What did you do? How did it benefit you as a teacher and your students? Why was it such a positive experience?

Question 2: Your district has been engaged with PLCs for several years now.

a. Can you tell me how the PLC has evolved or changed during that time?

b. In what ways do you feel the PLC's work is improving student outcomes?

c. What factors seem to be sustaining the PLC work in your school?

d. What might be getting in the way of sustaining PLCs in your school anddistrict?

Question 3: Working with diverse students is a challenge (efficacy)

a. Can you share a time in which your PLC worked together to ensure that allstudents were learning at high levels?

b. What are some of the challenges you face in helping all students meet standards? How has your PLC supported you in meeting these challenges?

c. What work does the PLC need to do if all students are to meet NCLBproficiency standards?

d. What opportunities have you had to learn how to be an effective PLC?

Question 4: The next topic I would like to explore is leadership.

a. How is leadership shared in your PLC? Does each leader of the PLC teammeet together? Please explain.

b. Share a time when teachers within your team felt empowered in having theability to implement their own decisions. How is administration involved when you make such a decision?

c. Share an example of teachers overall feeling empowered and accepting sharedresponsibility for ensuring all students will meet grade level standards. How has the principal supported you in these efforts?

d. What is your principal's vision for PLCs at this school? Is this vision sharedby the staff?

e. What role does your principal play in the collaborative process?

f. Tell me about a time when you felt well supported by your principal. (Whatdid he or she do? How did it help you? Your team?)

g. In what ways does the principal help PLCs to be at their best? Are theirpractices that diminish the work of the PLC?

h. How does the principal support teacher and PLC team learning?

i. If your principal wanted to ensure that you had more positive experiences during collaboration time, what support structure would benefit making thishappen?

Question 5: Closure

a. If you had three wishes for making your PLCs more effective, what wouldthey be?

b. Do you have any final comments or anything else you want to add?

(Voelkel, 2011, pp. 225-227)

Appendix B

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study
Re-culturing for Turnaround Success. A Case Study of One Low Performing School in a Rural District in Eastern North Carolina.

Researcher *(name and role/department)*
Winter Goodson, EDLS, Ed D candidate

Purpose
This research study will contribute to the body of work on the things schools do to impact low performing schools. Findings from this study will be shared with other schools in the district to support school improvement in schools.

Procedure

What you will do in the study: As a participant in this study, you will complete a survey that has a five-option rating. You will also be a part of a focus group for interviews. The survey and interviews will be conducted by an external proxy. The survey will be administered via a secure link sent during the fall of 2021 with a completion window of one week. The survey should be done in one sitting and takes about 30 minutes to complete. The focus group interviews will be conducted on one day during the fall of 2021 and will be in person at the site of the research or virtually, as chosen by participants. The interview will be audio and possibly video recorded if a virtual interview is requested. An external proxy will be used for interviews and I will never hear the interviews. All interviews will be transcribed and pseudonyms used.

Time Required
It is anticipated that the study will require about 1 hour and fifteen minutes of your time. It will take about 30 minutes to complete the survey and 45 minutes for the interview to be conducted.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a *code number (or pseudonym*.). When the study has been completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. All audio/video recordings will be destroyed after the study has been completed and approved.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand the phenomenon of school turnaround. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw From the Study

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your audio (or video) tape will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw From the Study

- If you want to withdraw from the study, tell the researcher and leave the room. There is no penalty for withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Winter Goodson.

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Researcher's name: Winter Goodson
Student Role: EdD Candidate
School/Department, Gardner-Webb University
Researcher telephone XXXX
Researcher email address: XXX

Faculty Research Advisor: Stephen Laws
School/Department, Gardner-Webb University
Faculty Advisor telephone number:XXX
Faculty Advisor email address:slaws@gardner-webb.edu

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have

questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Dr. Sydney K. Brown
IRB Institutional Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me. I agree to participate in this study.

_____ Date: _____
Participant Printed Name

_____ Date: _____
Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C

Permission to Use Survey and Focus Group Instrument

From: **Voelkel, Robert**
Robert.Voelkel@unt.edu
Subject: Re: [EXT] Permission for Use
Date: May 26, 2021 at 1:21 PM
To: Goodson, Winter
wintergoodson@wcps.org

RV

Good Afternoon, Winter. Thank you for reaching out to me. I give you permission touse my survey and interview instruments in your study. I only ask that you send mea copy of your dissertation chapters 4 and 5 when completed. I wish you all my best.

Warm regards.

Robert H. Voelkel, Jr., Ed.D., NBCT
Assistant Professor,
Educational Leadership
Teacher Education &
Administration
College of Education | **University of North Texas**
1155 Union Circle, #310740
Denton, Texas 76203-5017 | 1-940-565-4800
Plenum Rep, University Council for Educational Administration

Recent Publications:

Voelkel, R. H., Fiori, C., & van Tassell, F. (2021). District leadership in redefining roles ofinstructional coaches to guide professional learning communities through systemic change. *Leadership and Policy inSchools*. DOI: 10.1080/15700763.2021.1917622

Voelkel, R. H. (2019). Causal relationship among transformational leadership, teacher collectiveefficacy, and professional learning communities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*.doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2019.1690699

Johnson, C. W., & Voelkel, R. H. (2019). Developing increased leader capacity to supporteffective professional learning community teams. *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 24*(3). DOI:10.1080/13603124.2019.1600039

Gilbert, K. A., Voelkel, R. H., Johnson, C. W. (2018). Increasing self-efficacy through immersivesimulations:

Leading professional learning communities. *Journal of Leadership Education*, *17*(3), 154-174. DOI:10.12806

Voelkel, R. H., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2017). Understanding the link between professional learningcommunities and teacher collective efficacy. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *28*(4) 505-526. DOI:10.1080/09243453.2017.1299015

Voelkel, R. H., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2017). Within school differences in professional learningcommunity effectiveness: Implications for leadership. *Journal of School Leadership, 27*(3), 421-451.

Book Review

Voelkel, R. H. (2021). *Facing the challenges: How principals can survive and thrive intoday's schools.* Rowman & Littlefield. Book reviewed for Teacher College Record.

From: Goodson, Winter <wintergoodson[redacted]>
Sent: Monday, May 24, 2021 3:14 PM
To: Voelkel, Robert <Robert.Voelkel@unt.edu>
Subject: [EXT] Permission for Use

Good evening Dr. Voelkel,

My name is Winter Goodson and I am the principal of [redacted]. I am also a doctoral candidate atGardner-webb University with a research interest in school turnaround. I am writing to you to request permission to use your survey and interview instruments for my study. [redacted] is a Restart school in its second year of implementation. My study is considered action research with the intent of informing school improvement decisions at [redacted] and other low performing schools within [redacted]. I have enjoyed reading your work and find your framework to be essential to a sound education for all students. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Winter Goodson, Principal
[redacted]
919-731-7222

All email correspondence to and from this address is subject to the North Carolina Public Records Law, which may result in monitoring and disclosure to third parties, including law enforcement.

Appendix D

Request and Approval From Superintendent

Winter Goodson
Principal
XXXXXXX

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

RE-CULTURING FOR TURNAOROUND. A CASE STUDY OF ONE LOW PERFORMING SCHOOL IN A RURAL DISTRICT IN EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA

Dear [redacted]

I Winter Goodson, am a doctoral candidate at Gardner-Webb University in Boiling Springs North Carolina. The research I wish to conduct for my Dissertation is a case study of "re-culturing" a school for turnaround success. The study will involve surveying and interviewing teachers, instructional coaches, and the assistant principal to determine their perceptions of PLC characteristics, leadership, and collective efficacy at [redacted]. The interview and survey will be conducted by an outside evaluator that is a doctoral student. Dr. Stephen Laws is my dissertation chair.

I am hereby seeking initial consent to conduct interviews and surveys of staff members at [redacted].

If you require any further information, please let me know. Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Winter Goodson, Doctoral Candidate
Gardner-Webb University

D [redacted] > Nov 3, 2021, 2:45 PM

to me

Ms. Goodson, your request to conduct research is approved as presented.

[redacted]
Superintendent
[redacted] County Public Schools
P.O. Drawer 1797
[redacted]
[redacted]
[redacted]

All email correspondence to and from this address is subject to the North Carolina Public Records Law, which may result in monitoring and disclosure to third parties, including law enforcement.

All email correspondence to and from this address is subject to the North Carolina Public Records Law, which may result in monitoring and disclosure to third parties, including law enforcement.

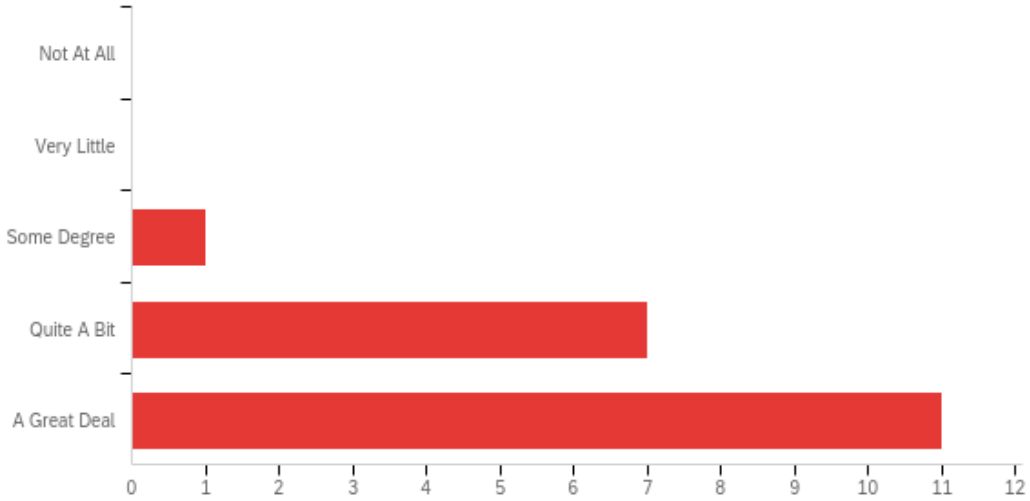
Appendix E

Qualtrics Survey With Responses

Default Report

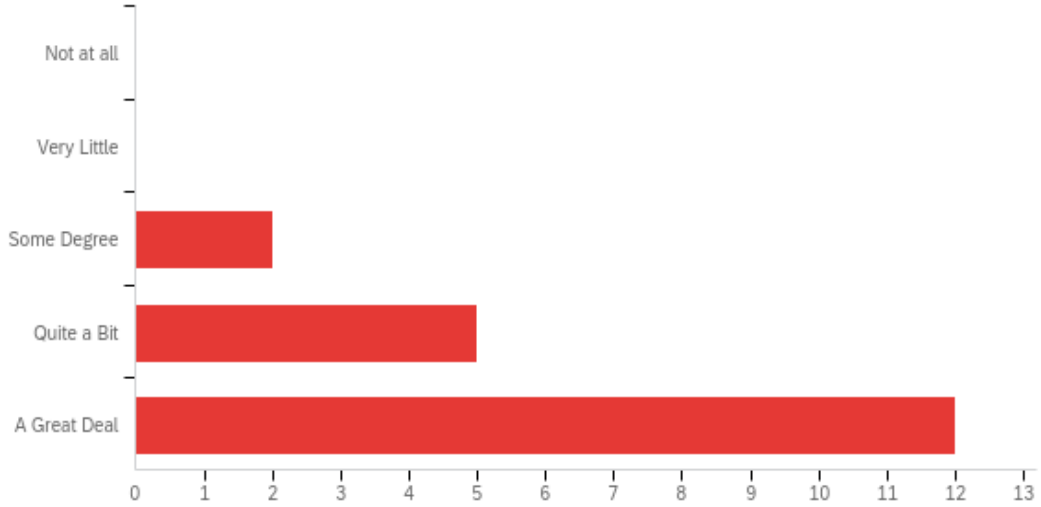
Perceptions of Leadership, Efficacy and PLCs Survey - Copy - Copy
February 18th 2022, 10:51 am MST

Q1 - 1. My team works together to clarify the essential outcomes for each unit of instruction using state and local standards and resources as well as student achievement data.



#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not At All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	5.26%	1
4	Quite A Bit	36.84%	7
5	A Great Deal	57.89%	11
	Total	100%	19

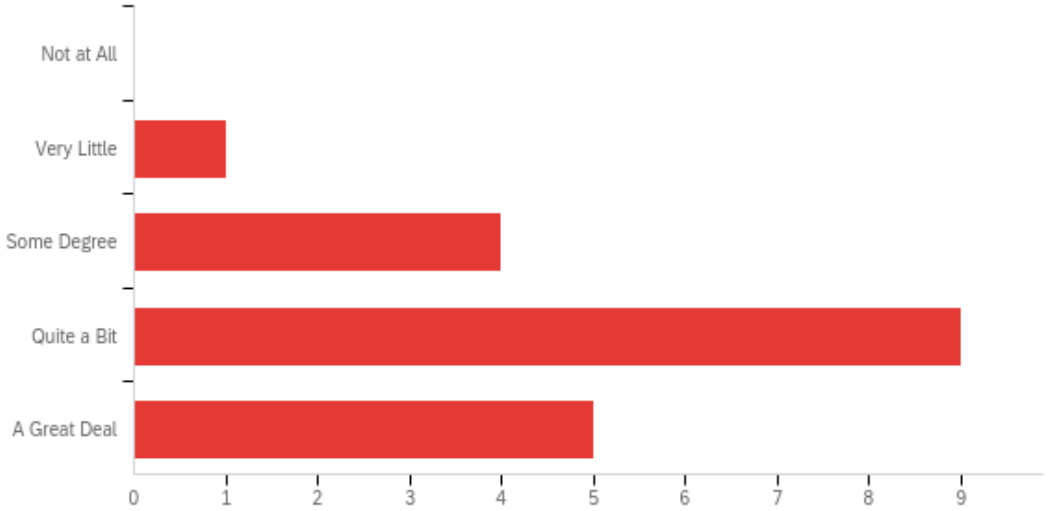
Q2 - 2. My team works together to establish common pacing for each unit of instruction.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	2. My team works together to establish common pacing for each unit of instruction.	3.00	5.00	4.53	0.68	0.46	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at all	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	10.53%	2
4	Quite a Bit	26.32%	5
5	A Great Deal	63.16%	12
	Total	100%	19

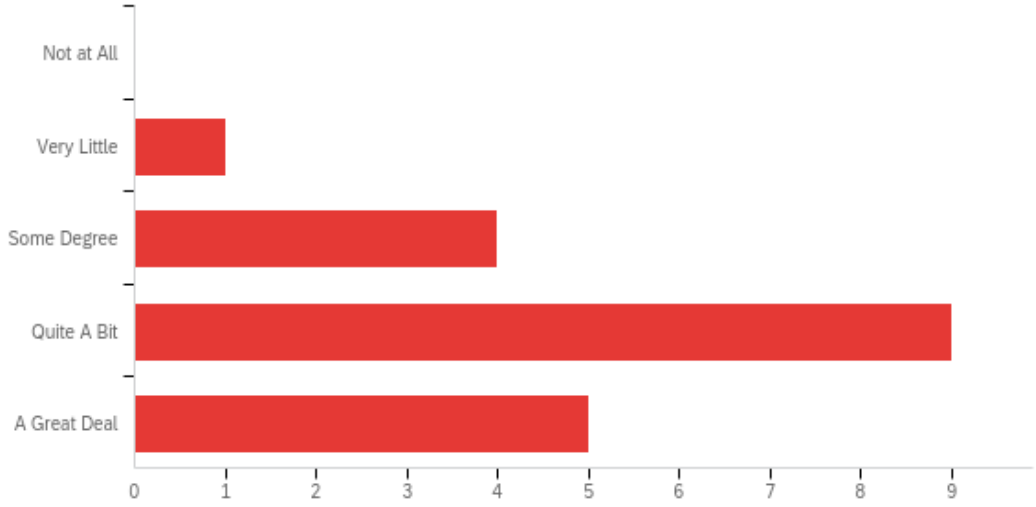
Q3 - 3. My team works collaboratively to clarify the criteria used to judge the quality of student work.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	3. My team works collaboratively to clarify the criteria used to judge the quality of student work.	2.00	5.00	3.95	0.83	0.68	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	21.05%	4
4	Quite a Bit	47.37%	9
5	A Great Deal	26.32%	5
	Total	100%	19

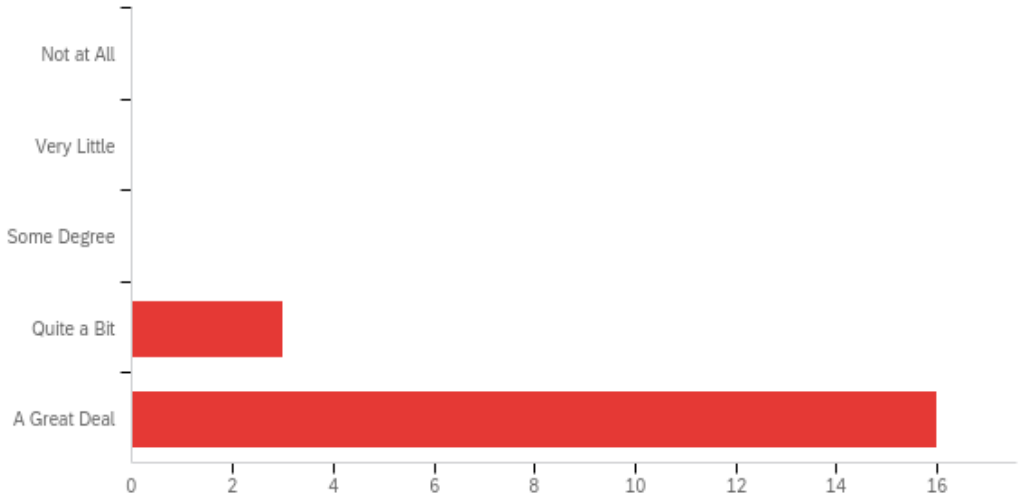
Q4 - 4. We practice applying the above-mentioned criteria until we can do so consistently.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	4. We practice applying the above-mentioned criteria until we can do so consistently.	2.00	5.00	3.95	0.83	0.68	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	21.05%	4
4	Quite A Bit	47.37%	9
5	A Great Deal	26.32%	5
	Total	100%	19

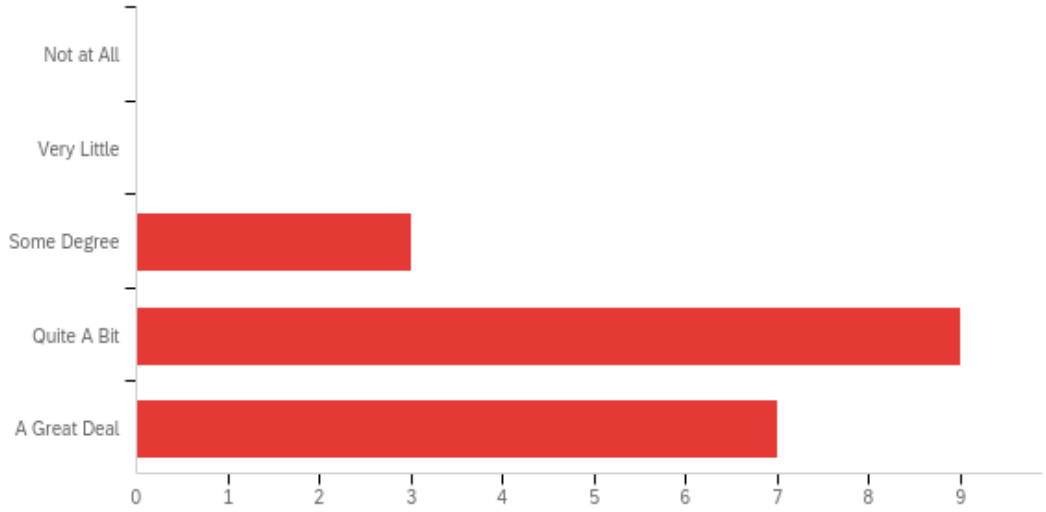
Q5 - 5.My team monitors the learning of each student at least four times each year on essential outcomes through a series of team-developed (common) formative assessments that are aligned with district and state standards.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	5.My team monitors the learning of each student at least four times each year on essential outcomes through a series of team-developed (common) formative assessments that are aligned with district and state standards.	4.00	5.00	4.84	0.36	0.13	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	0.00%	0
4	Quite a Bit	15.79%	3
5	A Great Deal	84.21%	16
	Total	100%	19

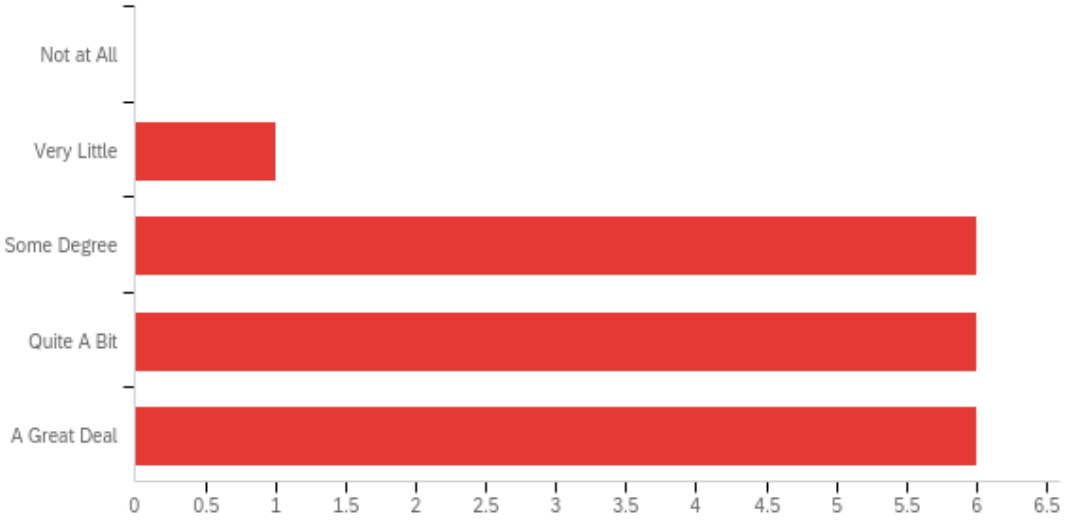
Q6 - 6.Students who experience academic difficulty are guaranteed access to a system of interventions that provide more time and support for learning.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	6.Students who experience academic difficulty are guaranteed access to a system of interventions that provide more time and support for learning.	3.00	5.00	4.21	0.69	0.48	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	15.79%	3
4	Quite A Bit	47.37%	9
5	A Great Deal	36.84%	7
	Total	100%	19

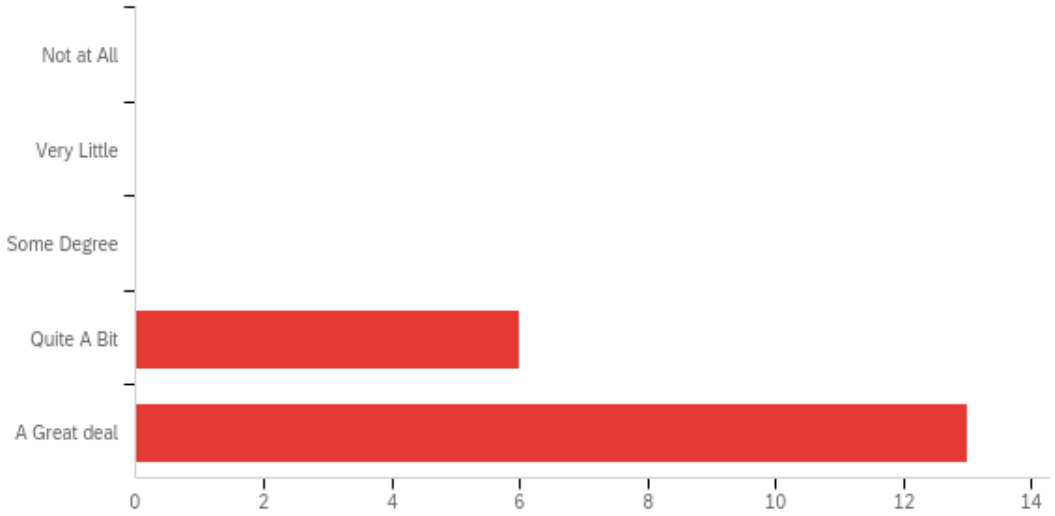
Q7 - 7. Students are required rather than invited to devote extra time and receive additional support until they are successful.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	7. Students are required rather than invited to devote extra time and receive additional support until they are successful.	2.00	5.00	3.89	0.91	0.83	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	31.58%	6
4	Quite A Bit	31.58%	6
5	A Great Deal	31.58%	6
	Total	100%	19

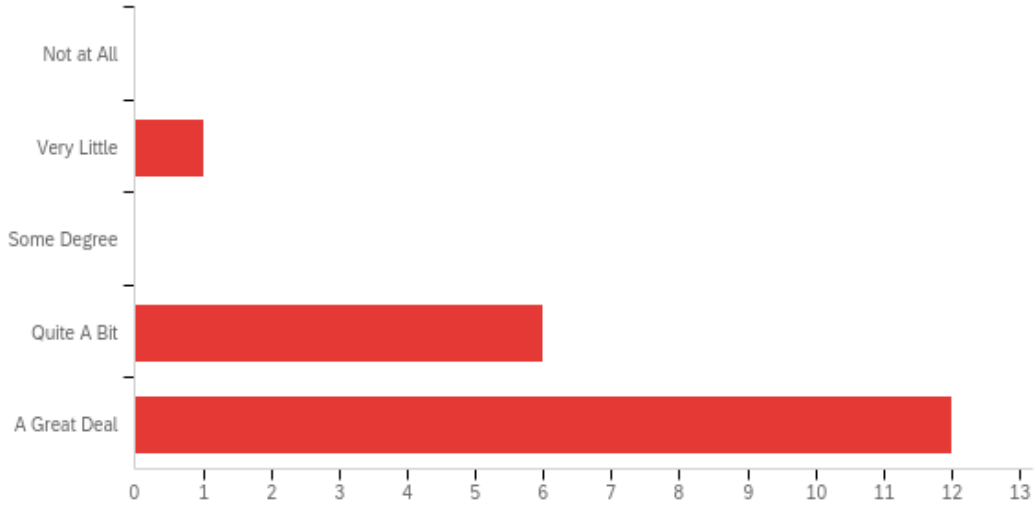
Q8 - 8. My team members use student achievement results from a variety of assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses in our individual and collective practice.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	8. My team members use student achievement results from a variety of assessments to identify strengths and weaknesses in our individual and collective practice.	4.00	5.00	4.68	0.46	0.22	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	0.00%	0
4	Quite A Bit	31.58%	6
5	A Great deal	68.42%	13
	Total	100%	19

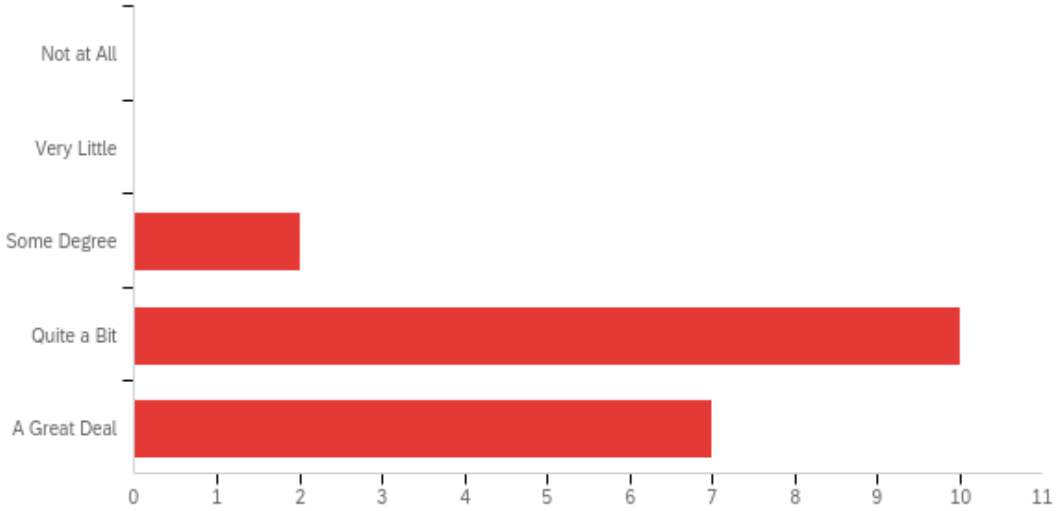
Q9 - 9. My team members use the above-mentioned student achievement results to improve our effectiveness in helping all students learn.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	9. My team members use the above-mentioned student achievement results to improve our effectiveness in helping all students learn.	2.00	5.00	4.53	0.75	0.57	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	0.00%	0
4	Quite A Bit	31.58%	6
5	A Great Deal	63.16%	12
	Total	100%	19

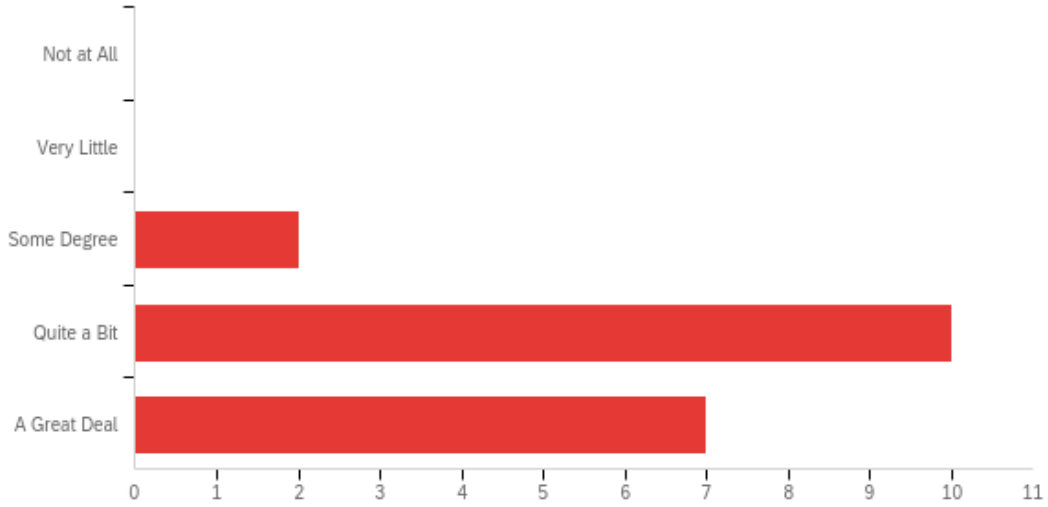
Q10 - 10. My team has adopted specific and explicit norms and protocols that guide us in working together.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	10. My team has adopted specific and explicit norms and protocols that guide us in working together.	3.00	5.00	4.26	0.64	0.40	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	10.53%	2
4	Quite a Bit	52.63%	10
5	A Great Deal	36.84%	7
	Total	100%	19

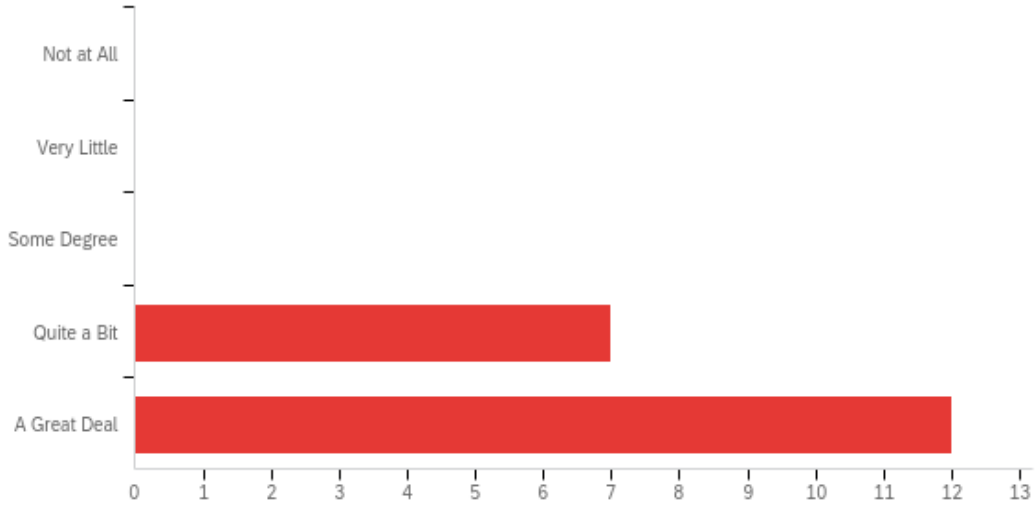
Q11 - 11. My team works interdependently to establish and achieve SMART goals (SMART Goals are Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, and Time-Bound).



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	11. My team works interdependently to establish and achieve SMART goals (SMART Goals are Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented, and Time-Bound).	3.00	5.00	4.26	0.64	0.40	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	10.53%	2
4	Quite a Bit	52.63%	10
5	A Great Deal	36.84%	7
	Total	100%	19

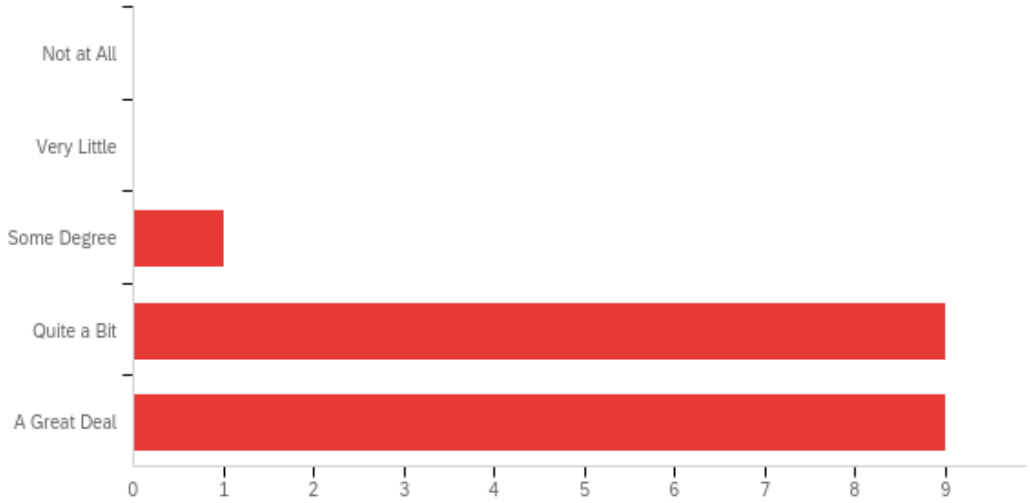
Q12 - 12. Improved results, achievement of goals, and the work of teams are the basis for a culture of celebration within classrooms and the school.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	12. Improved results, achievement of goals, and the work of teams are the basis for a culture of celebration within classrooms and the school.	4.00	5.00	4.63	0.48	0.23	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	0.00%	0
4	Quite a Bit	36.84%	7
5	A Great Deal	63.16%	12
	Total	100%	19

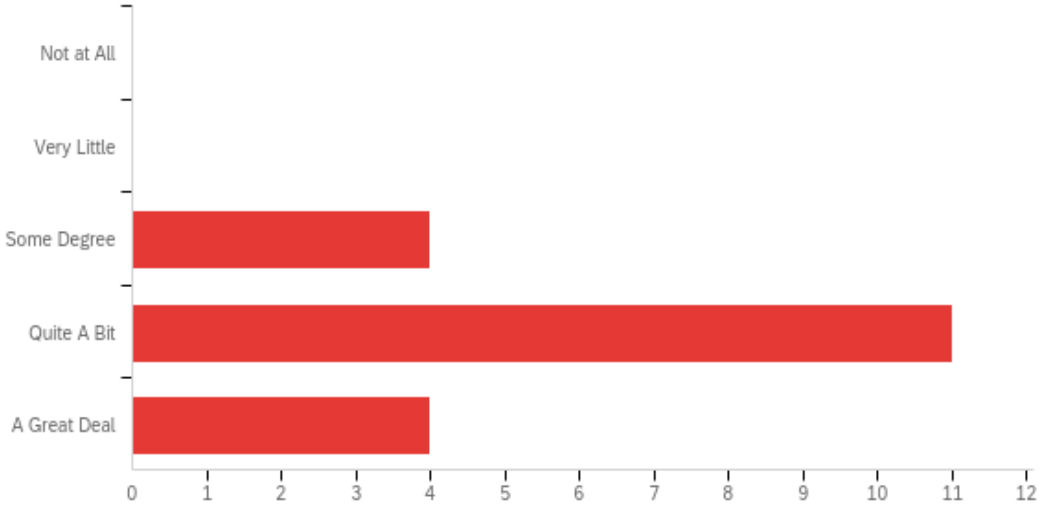
Q13 - 13. The shared vision and values among my school's staff influence policies, procedures, daily practices, and day-to-day decisions of all staff members.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	13. The shared vision and values among my school's staff influence policies, procedures, daily practices, and day-to-day decisions of all staff members.	3.00	5.00	4.42	0.59	0.35	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	5.26%	1
4	Quite a Bit	47.37%	9
5	A Great Deal	47.37%	9
	Total	100%	19

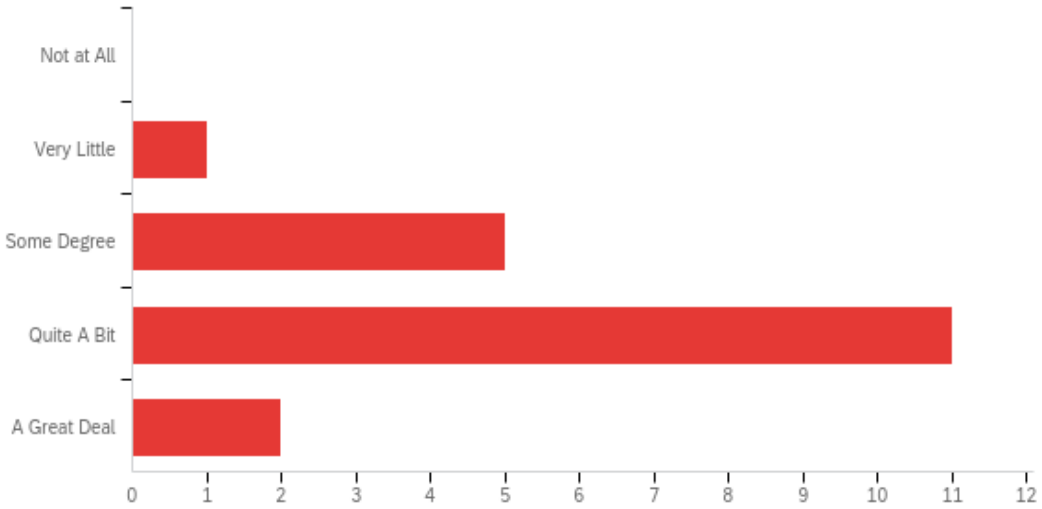
Q14 - 14. Teachers in this schoolwork together to meet the needs of challenging students.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	14. Teachers in this schoolwork together to meet the needs of challenging students.	3.00	5.00	4.00	0.65	0.42	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	21.05%	4
4	Quite A Bit	57.89%	11
5	A Great Deal	21.05%	4
	Total	100%	19

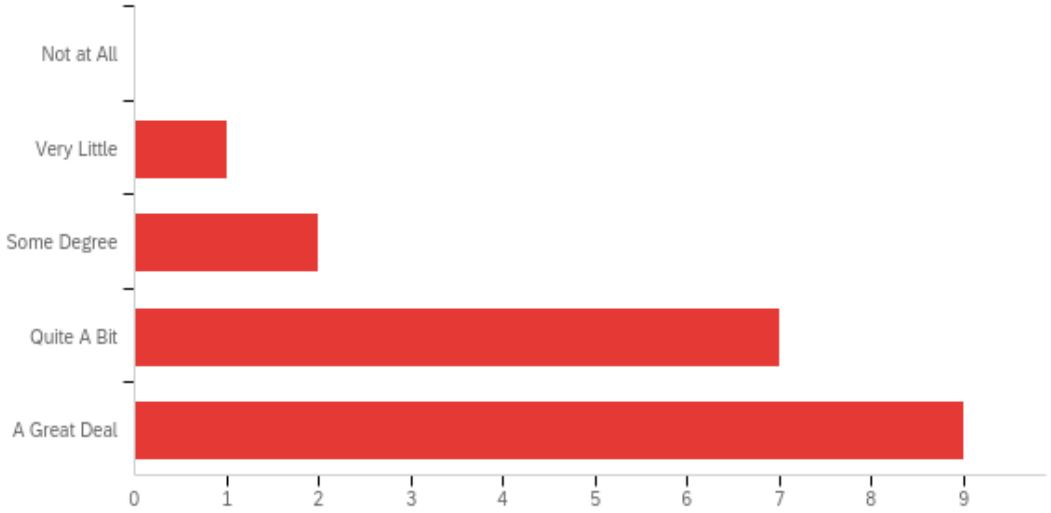
Q15 - 15. Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	15. Teachers here are confident they will be able to motivate their students.	2.00	5.00	3.74	0.71	0.51	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	26.32%	5
4	Quite A Bit	57.89%	11
5	A Great Deal	10.53%	2
	Total	100%	19

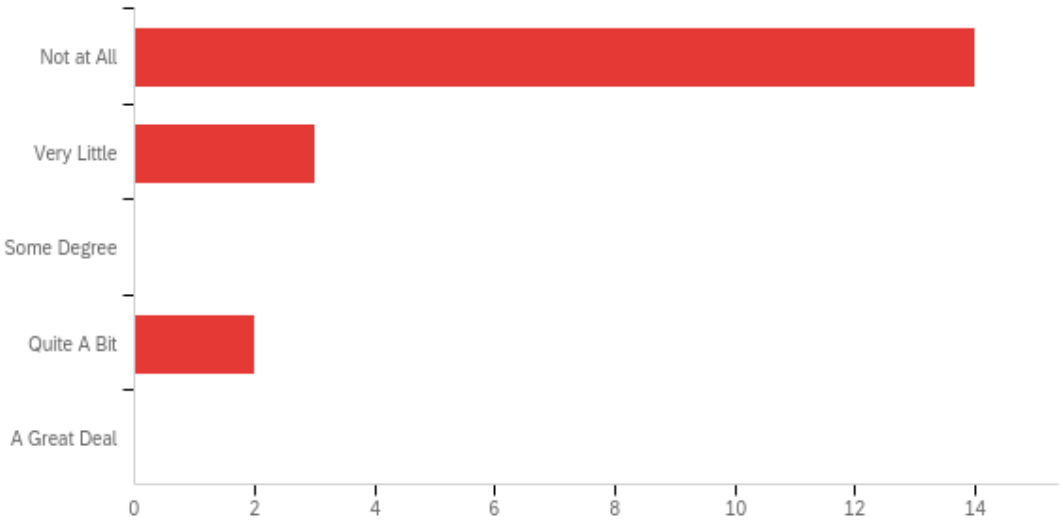
Q16 - 16. Teachers in this school believe it is their responsibility to help every child master the grade-level curriculum.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	16. Teachers in this school believe it is their responsibility to help every child master the grade-level curriculum.	2.00	5.00	4.26	0.85	0.72	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	10.53%	2
4	Quite A Bit	36.84%	7
5	A Great Deal	47.37%	9
	Total	100%	19

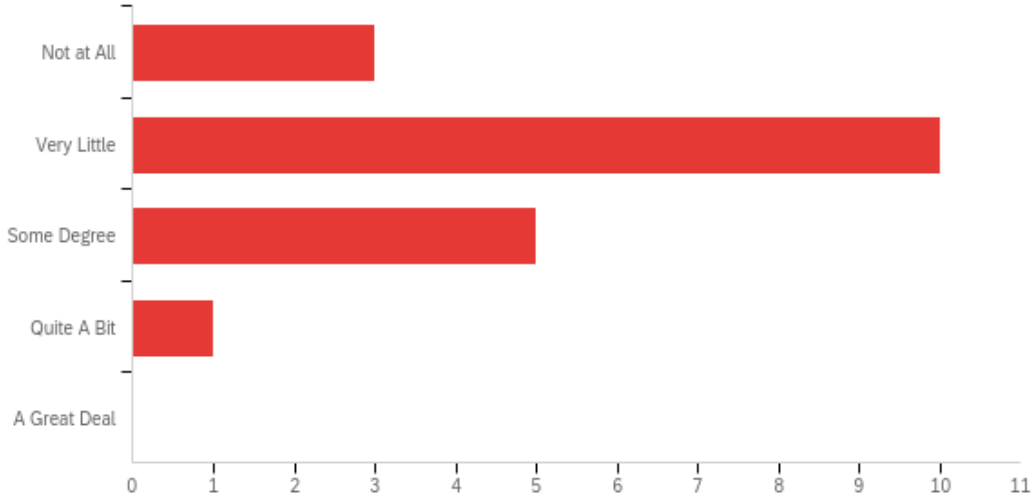
Q17 - 17. If a child doesn't want to learn, teachers here give up.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	17. If a child doesn't want to learn, teachers here give up.	1.00	4.00	1.47	0.94	0.88	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	73.68%	14
2	Very Little	15.79%	3
3	Some Degree	0.00%	0
4	Quite A Bit	10.53%	2
5	A Great Deal	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	19

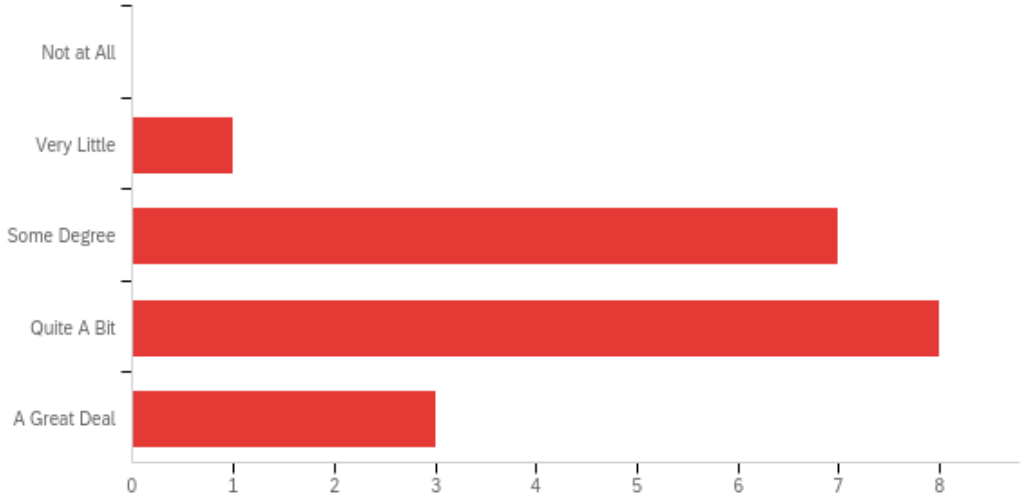
Q18 - 18. Some teachers at my site lack the skills needed to ensure every child can master the grade-level curriculum.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	18. Some teachers at my site lack the skills needed to ensure every child can master the grade-level curriculum.	1.00	4.00	2.21	0.77	0.59	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	15.79%	3
2	Very Little	52.63%	10
3	Some Degree	26.32%	5
4	Quite A Bit	5.26%	1
5	A Great Deal	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	19

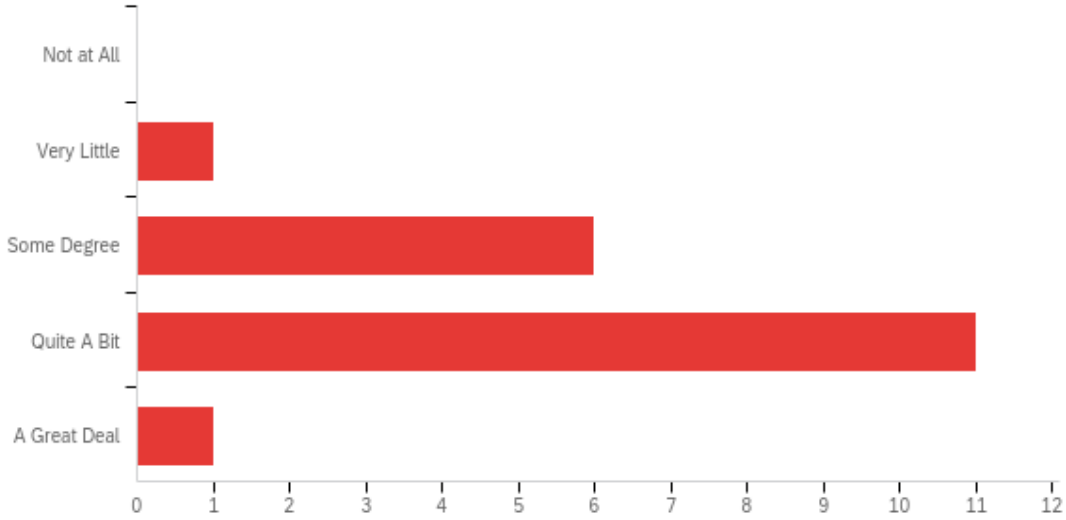
Q19 - 19. If these students come to school unprepared to learn, teachers have the skills to close the learning gap.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	19. If these students come to school unprepared to learn, teachers have the skills to close the learning gap.	2.00	5.00	3.68	0.80	0.64	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	36.84%	7
4	Quite A Bit	42.11%	8
5	A Great Deal	15.79%	3
	Total	100%	19

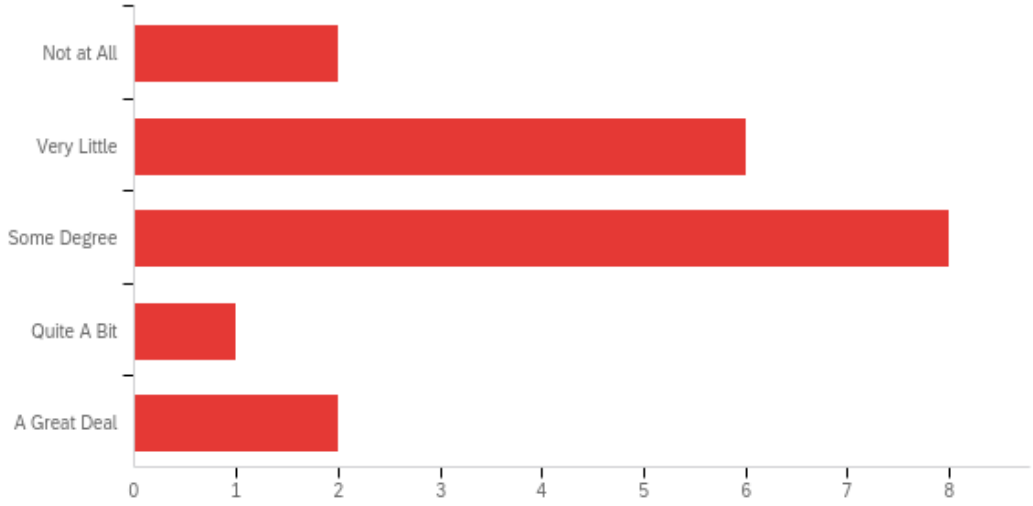
Q20 - 20. Teachers provide so many engaging lessons that the students here are bound to learn.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	20. Teachers provide so many engaging lessons that the students here are bound to learn.	2.00	5.00	3.63	0.67	0.44	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	31.58%	6
4	Quite A Bit	57.89%	11
5	A Great Deal	5.26%	1
	Total	100%	19

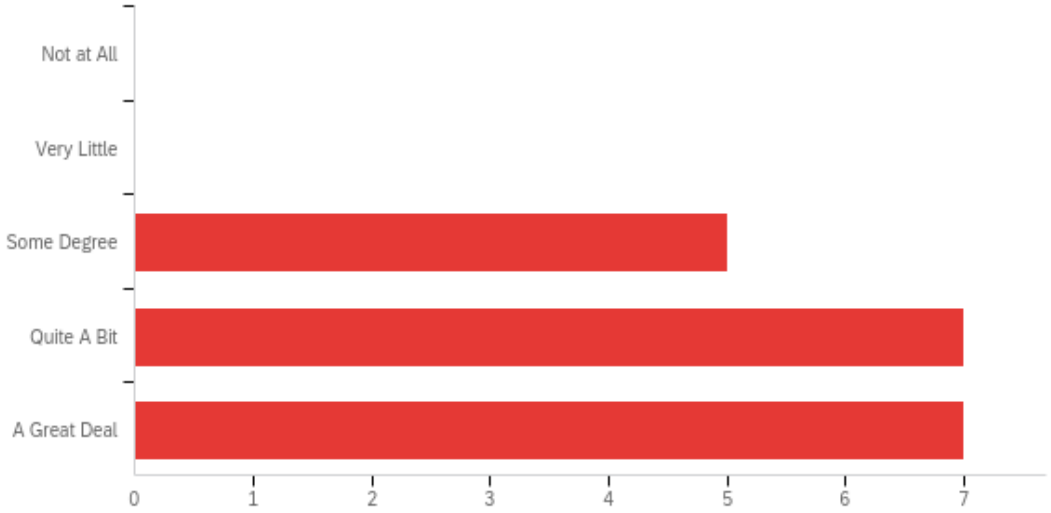
Q21 - 21. Students here just aren't motivated to learn.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	21. Students here just aren't motivated to learn.	1.00	5.00	2.74	1.07	1.14	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	10.53%	2
2	Very Little	31.58%	6
3	Some Degree	42.11%	8
4	Quite A Bit	5.26%	1
5	A Great Deal	10.53%	2
	Total	100%	19

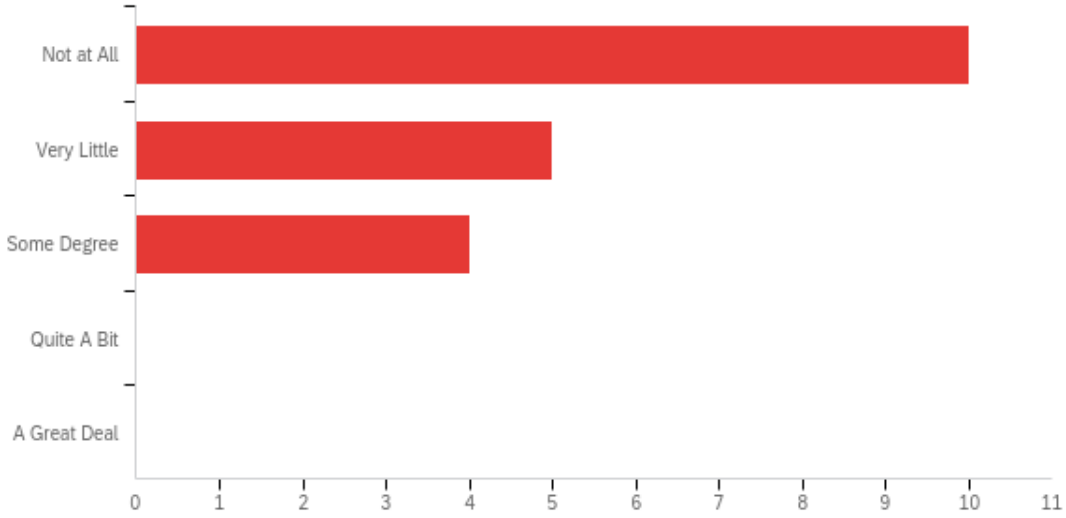
Q22 - 22. The structures, practices, and procedures of this school are designed to help ensure all students learn.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	22. The structures, practices, and procedures of this school are designed to help ensure all students learn.	3.00	5.00	4.11	0.79	0.62	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	0.00%	0
3	Some Degree	26.32%	5
4	Quite A Bit	36.84%	7
5	A Great Deal	36.84%	7
	Total	100%	19

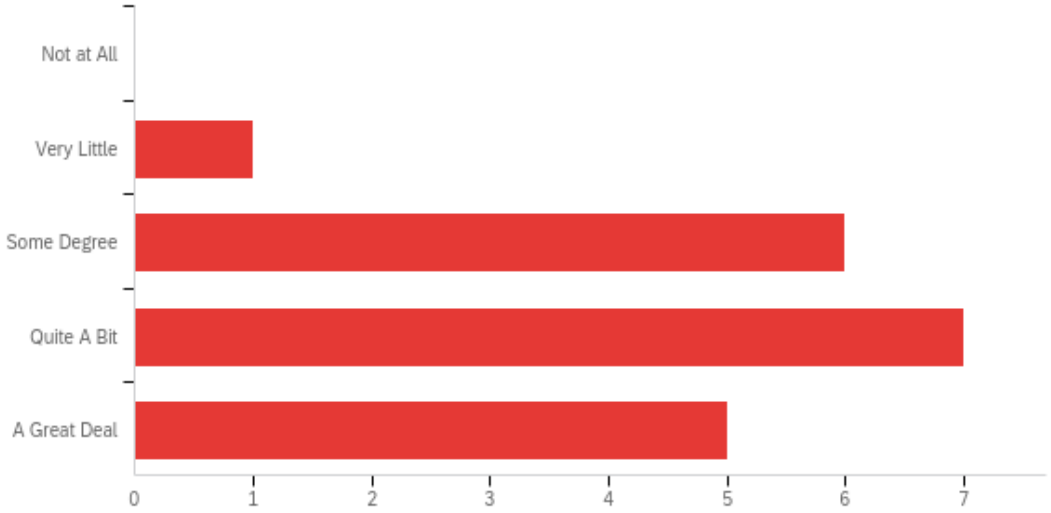
Q23 - 23. Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	23. Learning is more difficult at this school because students are worried about their safety.	1.00	3.00	1.68	0.80	0.64	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	52.63%	10
2	Very Little	26.32%	5
3	Some Degree	21.05%	4
4	Quite A Bit	0.00%	0
5	A Great Deal	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	19

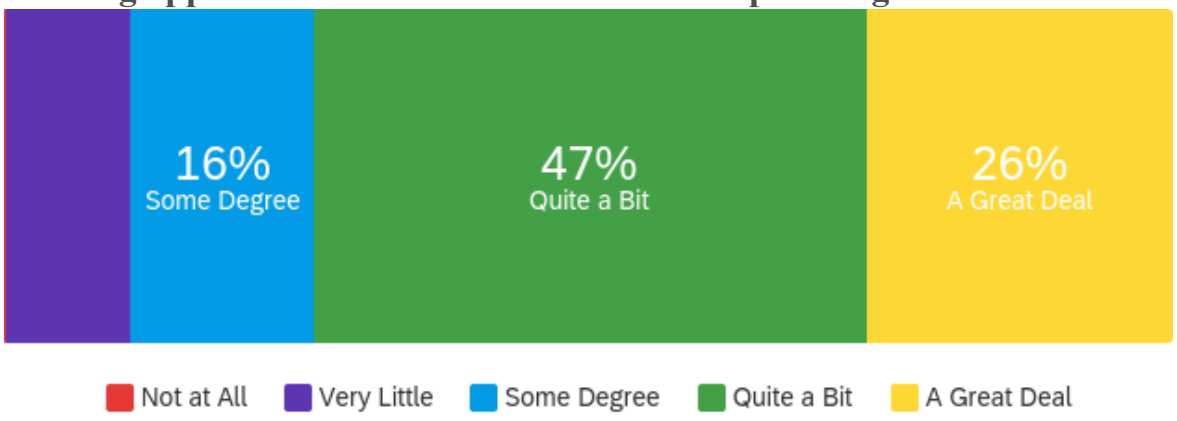
Q24 - 24. Teachers at this school have strategies for supporting students who face home life difficulties.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	24. Teachers at this school have strategies for supporting students who face home life difficulties.	2.00	5.00	3.84	0.87	0.76	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	5.26%	1
3	Some Degree	31.58%	6
4	Quite A Bit	36.84%	7
5	A Great Deal	26.32%	5
	Total	100%	19

Q25 - 25. Teachers in this school help each other incorporate critical thinking opportunities for their students when planning lessons.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	25. Teachers in this school help each other incorporate critical thinking opportunities for their students when planning lessons.	2.00	5.00	3.89	0.91	0.83	19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Not at All	0.00%	0
2	Very Little	10.53%	2
3	Some Degree	15.79%	3
4	Quite a Bit	47.37%	9
5	A Great Deal	26.32%	5
	Total	100%	19