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A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Teacher and Administrator Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in a Texas School District With a Predominance of Hispanic Staff and Students

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful family. To my husband, Sam, who has been my strength, my support, and motivation through this journey. To my children, Jonathan, Angelina, and Dylan for understanding and being patient when I had to read many articles, process, and write this dissertation. To my parents, Arturo and Olga, who pushed and encouraged me to go further and supported me along the way. Dad, I know you are watching from up above and have encouraged me to continue this journey. I thank all of you for making this dream a reality.

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Abstract

The purpose of conducting this qualitative descriptive study on professional learning communities in a South Texas public school district was to see if they are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of student success in the classroom as well as providing the support and steps outlined in an effective professional learning community. The study focused on the skill level implemented by the teachers, administrators, and other members of the committee to communicate, access the personal skills to collaborate with peers, and utilize the data for student achievement. This study sought to gain and understand the perceptions of department heads, administrators, and educators of how professional learning communities' elements, characteristics, and three big ideas that guide a team when collaborating in a large district. Qualitative data were from 12 staff members of a large district in South Texas comprised of Hispanic administrators, Hispanic department heads, and Hispanic core subject coordinators. Open-ended interviews composed of 19 questions assemble the data. The findings of this study confirmed the perceptions in which participants felt supported and prepared for how professional learning communities supported the improvement of student success in the classroom. It also indicated where they felt a lack of support during how professional learning communities, improvement, and discussion is needed to achieve a desirable outcome. The results of this study balance other past research on the importance of how professional learning communities improve students' scores and success.

Keywords: professional learning community, collaboration, continuous improvement, student achievement, student learning

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

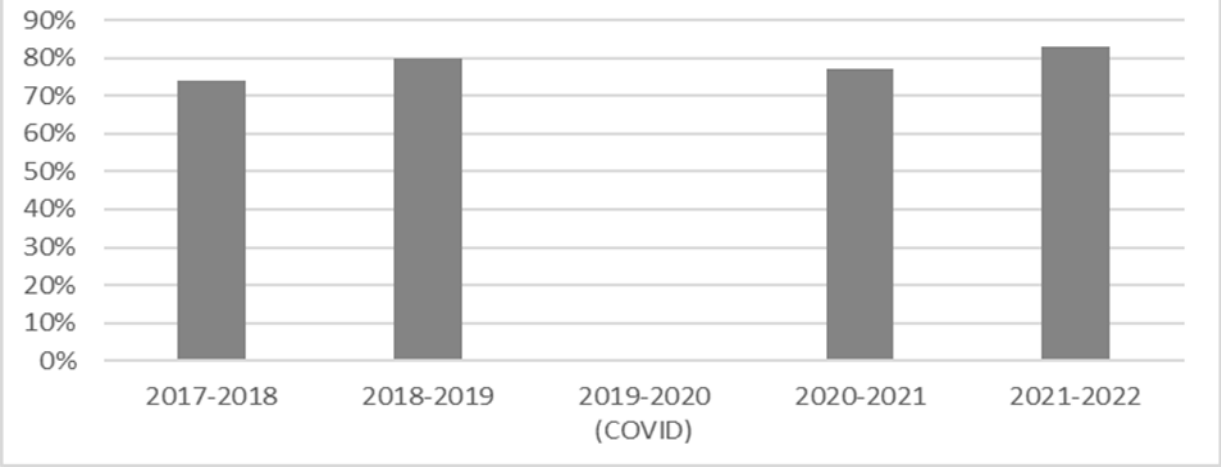
On August 9, 2017, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) sent a letter to superintendents across the State of Texas giving a brief overview of House Bill (HB) 22 from the 85th Texas Legislature. HB 22 addresses district and campus performance on student achievements, school progress, and closing the achievement gap (TEA, 2017). HB 22 was designed to ensure that each student group has an indicated target and to ensure that every student achieves, especially those in special populations such as special education, limited English proficient, economically disadvantaged, students per race, and those that are continuously enrolled (TEA, 2017). The data gathered for each demographic is used by districts to devise an academic plan for closing the achievement gap, reaching the designated targets set forth by the state, and promoting growth in each category.

According to TEA (n.d.), closing the gaps is defined as using "disaggregated data to demonstrate differentials among racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and other factors" (TEA, n.d.a, p. 3). Once the data are released from the state, the districts and campuses must come up with a plan to meet the target set for each student group and to ensure that they are closing the achievement gap. The goal is to be more effective in helping students be successful and to close the achievement gap amongst the demographics identified by the state. A plan must be implemented to evaluate the deficiency in state scores and collaborate to ensure that there are interventions in place to shape a goal for the district and the campus. According to Oakley (2021), professional learning communities (PLC) assist with determining what students should learn by accessing the data, creating specific learning goals based on the data, whether it is local or state, and focusing on the needs of the students. This study focused on the PLCs in a Texas School District with a predominance of Hispanic staff and students with data collected from the state and released to the proposed study location: District "A." The large school district in South

Texas that was the study location implements PLCs across the district and at the campus level throughout the years of the data collected for Hispanic students (see Figure 1). The PLC process of working on the strengths and collaboration of the staff working together to achieve the vision and mission of the school (DuFour & Reeves, 2016), aligns with the plan of meeting the target set for each student group and ensuring that students are reaching the measured goal of the state. If the targeted measure set by the state is not met, it causes TEA to force districts to form a plan of action on how they will reach the percentages outlined in their accountability report (TEA, 2017).

Figure 1

Hispanic Student Success STAAR



Studies have suggested that further research must be done around PLCs in order to improve the success of the students and to reach state standardized testing goals (Bouchamma et al., 2019). Student test scores are tools that manage PLCs to focus on prescribing a certain method to detail instruction and lesson and to follow up with specific intervention (Popova et al., 2022). Schools engaging in true PLCs use data that replicate what the student is learning, how it is measured, and how it aligns to the goal (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). The student data are needed to identify what instructional practices need to adjust in order to lead to greater results (DuFour

& Reeves, 2016). Many PLC are not successful due to poor structures in the workplace. Other reasons that hinder PLCs consist of low teacher buy-in, lack of time for teachers to meet, or not a practical use of the time that is given to plan and work together as a community (Easton, 2016).

Positionality Statement

As an educator and former administrator for District "A," I am aware of the increase in state standardized test scores and structures of PLCs in the district. I want to understand if there is a correlation between Hispanic staff members and the utilization of PLCs and whether PLCs are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom. A limitation of the research is that I will be conscience and careful to avoid bias when interpreting results and to encourage an honest response from the participants due to being employed as an administrator in the previous year at one of the campuses in District "A."

Statement of the Problem

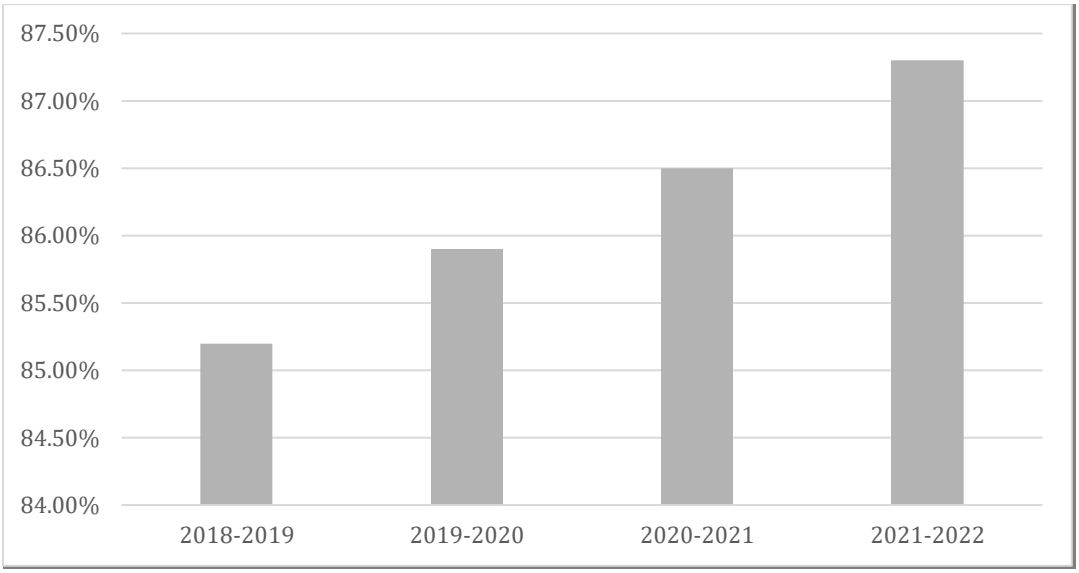
In Texas, the state's education agency is slowly increasing the percent of questions that students must answer correctly to pass the state's standardized test (Isensee, 2015). To prepare students, teachers need to make educational instructional changes for all their students to achieve the statewide goal. PLCs are implemented as a strategy to bring about instructional change and improve student achievement. A problem with PLCs is that it is not known at this time if these PLCs are meaningful and structured to be productive because no study has been conducted on the implementation on of PLCs at the site of the study: School District "A."

This study focused on the participants' perceptions of the uniform structure of PLCs School District "A" and the impact it has on the instructional practices in their meetings and in the classroom with Hispanic students taught by a high percentage of Hispanic teachers (see Figure 2). During PLCs, data are shared and used to measure progress as well as improve learning in the classroom. If PLCs are done correctly and with a strong infrastructure and

fidelity, school districts and campuses can drive the teachers and students to meet the goals defined by the district and the percentages outlined by the state (Matherson & Windle, 2017). Educators, campus administrators, and district personnel need to work towards a common goal and a vision to enhance Hispanic student performance and hold all stakeholders accountable for successful PLCs.

Figure 2

District "A" Percentage of Hispanic Teachers



Purpose of the Study

The reason for conducting this qualitative descriptive study on PLCs in a large Texas public school district was to see if the Hispanic staff at this district perceive PLCs as meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom as well as providing the support and steps outlined in a PLC. PLCs are to help school personnel focus on the implementation and development of professional development as well as interventions for the success of the students (Burns et al., 2018). This research will also help educators improve the skills and practices of PLCs to improve student success (Doğan & Adams, 2018).

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC creates a shared mission, vision, values, and goals which are all focused on student learning?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning?

RQ3: What are PLC participants' perceptions of whether the PLC is results-oriented?

RQ4: The yearly implementation of the STAAR Test scores (Figure 1) has increased except for 1 year due to COVID: In what way do you believe PLCs have affected this change?

Definition of Key Terms

Assessments. Measure the extent to which a student has learned and is able to apply the knowledge and skills at each test (TEA, 2022).

Closing the gap. Using "disaggregated data to demonstrate differentials among racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, and other factors. The indicators included in this domain, as well as the domain's construction, align the state accountability system with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)" (TEA, n.d.b, p. 3).

Collaborative culture. Members of a school that work together interdependently to impact their classroom practice (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 12).

Core subjects/teachers. Teachers who teach English, Math, Science, and History (Great Schools Partnership, 2013).

Curriculum. Lessons and academic content taught for a specific course or program (Great Schools Partnership, 2015a).

Data-driven instruction. The process and tools that educators use to assess data that identify students' strengths and deficiencies and utilize the finding to enhance their practice (TopHat, n.d.).

Disaggregated data. Numerical or nonnumerical information that has been collected from multiple sources and/or on multiple measures, variables, or individuals (Great Schools Partnership, 2015b).

Intervention. An approach to identifying a student's needs and giving them the support, they need and the additional help to be successful students in their targeted area (DuFour et al., 2016).

Professional learning community. An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve (DuFour et al., 2016).

Supportive leadership. Creating structures and implementing processes to help stakeholders' function as a collaborative team with the support of the leadership team (DuFour et al., 2016).

Texas Education Agency. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is the state agency that oversees public education in Texas (TEA, n.d.a).

Values. Making commitments to act in a positive and impactful ways on the improvement initiative for the school, staff, students, and other stakeholders (DuFour et al., 2016).

Visions. Provides a sense of direction and a basis for assessing both the current reality of the school and potential strategies, programs, and procedures to improve on the reality (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 39).

Summary

Chapter 1 provides an overview of PLCs that create a collaborative culture that focuses on the values and visions of the district (Burns et al., 2018). It explains how the Texas Education Agency is setting goals for districts to close the achievement gaps and promotes PLCs to assist

with achieving those goals. By utilizing student data, the educator can plan for interventions that improve the achievement and success of the student (Burns et al., 2018). This chapter also defines the keywords that are used in this research.

The problem with PLC is that the teachers are not properly trained, nor are they utilizing the time and resources for ensuring a productive PLC (Easton, 2016). The following chapters focused on the literature review of PLCs, the theory, methodology, and findings. It also further discusses how if members move from interest to commitment of PLC, there should be a success to student achievement which institutes a productive and effective PLC (DuFour, 2004). It is when PLCs are done incorrectly, such as without collaboration, insufficient planning time, and support (Easton, 2016), that they become ineffective PLCs resulting in lack of student achievement.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review focuses on the history behind the development of PLCs, the essential elements that need to be in place for an effective PLC, the leadership skills to support PLC, and the ramifications of an ineffective PLC. The articles researched for the literature review support the effectiveness of a professional learning community that prompts student success. Additional articles that were researched discussed ineffective PLCs in schools and districts that lack the structure to affect student success. The review also explores how the support of leadership from either the district level or campus level contributes to or hinders a PLC.

A problem with PLCs is that it is not known at this time if these PLCs are effective. A need for deeper understanding on how teachers learn and the relation of teaching practices to student learning in PLCs is a contributor to the educational reforms' progress and the capacity of learning and success based on their student's needs (Johannesson, 2022). According to Jones (2021), the investment of time in conducting their own research of student data and developing a plan, such as done in a PLC is essential for a successful PLC. Many times, teachers and campus leaders use the label without doing the hard work that goes with the PLC process (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

There are many factors that need to be implemented for an effective PLC to be productive and occur on campus and within the district, such as teachers needing to attend and learn from professional development. As per Jones (2021), effective collaboration of PLC members is not just about bringing the staff together, it is about the amount of engagement and support they have during the PLC. This is the key to gaining the knowledge needed to strengthen PLCs and improve student outcomes, have greater expectations, and be able to collaborate with their team for student success (Gore & Rosser, 2020). The literature research on PLCs also

supports that teachers have to collaborate with all stakeholders, and that teachers and the team are open to change from the traditional ways of teaching to collaborating with their peers and coming up with the best practices for student learning and healthy development (Bouchamma et al., 2021).

The literature review shared how a PLC is effective when it is done correctly and follows the elements outlined and with a commitment from all parties and their commitment in engaging fully in the collaboration of PLCs (DuFour et al., 2016). It also discloses how a PLC can become ineffective if there is no commitment from the stakeholders, when time is not scheduled for meetings, or if they are done halfway and not as a full PLC (DuFour et al., 2016). For an effective practice, it is engaging the community to refine the practice, support learning, and doing things together for the success and needs of the students (Jones, 2021). Easton (2016) also revealed different ways that teachers' and or leaders' lack of participation, change, and support have hindered an effective PLC, which is not effective in student learning and student improvement. According to Johannesson (2022), if there is no alignment between the practice and the group's qualities it may hinder an effective PLC.

The practice for most of the last century is of teachers doing their own independent planning to meet the needs of their own students, whereas PLC implies that individuals should come together as a group to grow exponentially and contribute to school improvement and student learning (Jones & Thessin, 2015). In this chapter, the literature research methods used to obtain the articles, the theoretical framework for the research, and the literature review for PLCs are discussed. The study focused on the study participants' perceptions of the uniform structure in PLCs in their schools/districts and the impact it has on the instructional practices in their meetings and in the classroom. The research questions guiding this study follow:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC creates a

shared mission, vision, values, and goals which are all focused on student learning?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning?

RQ3: What are PLC participants' perceptions of whether the PLC is results-oriented?

RQ4: The yearly implementation of the STAAR Test scores has increased except for 1 year due to COVID: In what way do you believe PLCs have affected this change?

Literature Search Methods

Two online databases were used to collect sources on PLCs. One of the literature search methods used to research literary articles on PLCs was the online database of Margaret and Herman Brown Library at Abilene Christian University (ACU) Online, which allowed for research of full text, quality peer-reviewed articles. The other literature search engine that assisted with the literature research was Google Scholar which reviewed articles since the year 2017. The search keywords used on both online databases for ACU Online Library and Google Search were *PLC, professional development, data, interventions, collaboration, leadership, commitment,* and *change*. The keyword concepts consisted of *the effectiveness of PLCs, the ineffectiveness of PLCs, collaboration in PLCs, communication in PLCs, PLCs and public schools,* and *the success of students*. The articles researched on both online databases were expanded to search within the full text of the articles, the limiters of scholarly – peer-reviewed journals, academic journals, and within 5 years of date. Those that had dates past the 5 years were those researched and focused on the history of PLC. Textbooks by Richard DuFour: *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap,* and *Learning by Doing*, were utilized to support the literature review and gain a better understanding of the topic. Another book used for this literature review is *Driven by Data 2.0* by Paul Bambrick-Santoya on data collection and how that assists with understanding, reading, and

analyzing how students perform on what they have learned or what they have not learned and data disaggregation.

Research Alignment

Table 1

Research Alignment

Purpose statement	Research questions	Framework	Research tradition	Paradigm
The reason for conducting this qualitative descriptive study on PLCs in a large Texas public school district is to see if the Hispanic staff at this district perceive if PLCs are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom as well as provide support and steps outlined in a PLC.	RQ1: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC creates a shared mission, vision, values, and goals which are all focused on student learning? RQ2: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning? RQ3: What are the perceptions of PLC participants' perceptions of whether the PLC is results-oriented? RQ4: The yearly implementation of the STAAR Test scores (Figure 1) has increased except for one year due to COVID: In what way do you believe PLCs have affected this change?	Learning organizations follow five disciplines to be successful (Senge, 2006). Professional learning communities at work (DuFour et al., 2016).	The actual experience of the practice is captured in a qualitative study, a lived experience, which enhances the knowledge-building experience (Hesse-Biber, 2010).	This study used the Interpretive Paradigm. According to Leavy (2017), the interpretive paradigm is drawn from the patterns of interaction and the interpretive process of how people's patterns are given meaning.

Theoretical Framework Discussion

The goals of PLCs are developed with the thought of improving the failed reform in education and trying to reach the goals set by the state in regard to aligning and coming up with a plan to develop the academic curriculum to decrease the academic gap. The study is based on the concepts of PLC, the six elements that make PCLs, collaboration in PLCs, commitment, and collection of data. The study also focused on the effectiveness of PLCs and what makes a PLC ineffective on campuses and across the district.

The current study used the work of DuFour and his framework on PLCs, along with other authors who conducted research using DuFour's framework of PLCs as a foundation for their study. DuFour's framework emphasized the need for (a) collaboration among the community members, (b) open and respectful communication, (c) data disaggregation to improve teaching lessons and student performance, and (d) redesign of the lessons through teacher collective inquiry. According to Kruse and Johnson (2017), PLC is a model of organizational learning distinguished by the incessant search for student-centered school improvement. Each concept is part of the framework for understanding and conducting a productive PLC.

Another study that occurred before DuFour is that of Senge, who wrote *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*. Senge's (2006) framework focused that learning organizations being successful by nurturing individuals on thinking to create the results that they outline. Senge offers five important disciplines to create a learning organization similar to that of a PLC, personal mastery, building shared vision, mental models, systems thinking, and team learning (Senge, 2006).

Literature Review

To better understand the effectiveness of PLCs and the elements that affect PLCs, existing research was reviewed to help explain the context of the study. Articles on the

effectiveness of PLCs and those regarding accountability of PLCs were reviewed including what a PLC is, how to establish an effective PLC, as well as a variety of other areas in the study of PLCs. PLCs are a way for leadership, teachers, staff, and communities to come together to find ways to improve instruction and student learning (DuFour et al., 2016). The effort and focus on improvement and the success of the students start with the committee coming together to analyze data that is collected from measurable assessments. For PLCs to be productive, there are a variety of key factors such as accountability of parties, commitment, collaboration, and change that contribute to the success of the students as well as professional growth (Easton, 2016). According to Senge (2020) as individuals, learning is developed in collaboration of larger teams when there is a contribution of thoughts that incorporate a positive change.

PLCs allow educators to improve on teaching, collaborate with their peers, explore new educational methodologies, and prepare for the student's academic success (Banasik & Dean, 2016). A PLC should consist of a team of educators who (a) collaborate and enhance each other's ideas, learning, development, (b) design a prescription for the students who need assistance, and (c) use the collective data from assessments to assist with their planning. Educators should keep the student's best interest at heart when planning (Van Themaat, 2019). A key component for a PLC is for time to be set aside to meet regularly to improve the district's goals and to improve academically with the use of valid data (Brown et al., 2018).

For PLCs to be effective, educational leadership, such as campus administrators, central office personnel, and subject-specific coordinators need to work together as a team alongside the teachers to reach the goals and visions set by the state, the district, and the campus. Many individuals who are stakeholders lack the guidance and the focus on the real problems of teaching. When operating correctly, PLCs are effective. Many times, they can become

ineffective due to a lack of proper planning, misuse of the time that is given for planning the proper data is not collected, or they lack constructive collaboration (Easton, 2016).

Easton (2016) found teachers are not taught how to conduct and participate in a PLC, nor are they given the time and tools needed for having a productive PLC, such as planning time, financial support for training, or preparation days. Teachers have stated that PLCs are useless. During the meeting, they have an endless discussion on what needs to be done. When they create plans, they are never executed in the classroom and that does not help much with meeting the students' needs (Easton, 2016). According to Schmitz (2019), other issues included that when given time to conduct a PLC, teachers do not communicate with each other and when they do, they contribute to endless planning and not to what needs to be done in a PLC, thus creating tension.

History

In the history of the United States, education has attempted numerous ways to reform education and raise awareness of public concern (DuFour & Eaker, 1999). Due to the pressure to improve educational outcomes for student success, reforms have taken a new direction (LeChasseur et al., 2016). Educational reform is asking for a change in how teachers execute their teaching, how they interact, and how they exchange information with students and with their peers (Carpenter, 2018). According to Kruse et al. (1994), "While these reforms may be critical, researchers and education reformers shouldn't focus solely on strategies for the development of individual professionals" (p. 159). In the 1960s and 1970s, research presumed that there was a connection between the quality of certified teachers and that of student learning, which was not necessarily for the best (Cohen et al., 2018). DuFour and Eaker (1999) stated there is a need for a new organizational model in schools to meet the requirements of education. The current reform for school and in education is a movement that includes a huge emphasis on

the “professionalization” of teachers’ work (Kruse et al., 1994). The administration, and principals, have a major role in the reform of education because of the firsthand knowledge, training, and access to initiatives or changes to the educational reform that they have (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016, as cited in Brown et al., 2018). In 1994, Kruse et al. (1994) came up with five critical elements that enhance professional communities: (a) professionalization of reflective dialogue, (b) deprivatization of practice, (c) collective focus on student learning, (d) collaboration, and (e) shared norms and values that when put together teachers find themselves working together as a professional community (Kruse et al., 1994). The start of school-based professional communities was to offer support and motivation to teachers to set standards for learning and instruction (Kruse et al., 1994). Little (1993) wrote that with educational reform, teacher learning and the way schools were functioning were all tailored to the demands of the reform. Senge (2006) wrote that the disciplines of a learning organization are that of systems thinking, mental models, shared vision, personal mastery, and team learning. For those that want to see change are those individuals willing to learn and work towards a group shared vision (Senge, 2006). Senge’s (2006) learning organization model as described above can be utilized in schools to encourage an adaptable behavior, have obtainable goals, gather information to better serve the purpose collaborates and share knowledge to create new ideas, exchange information with those in the group, get feedback and refine the developed process all while receiving support from leaders. From Senge’s learning organizations, then evolved PLCs. Doğan and Adams (2018) defined PLCs as “a group of professionals working collaboratively towards a shared purpose of improvement in instruction and student learning through dialogue” (p. 639). PLC is a term that is used in the educational world when a group of individuals come together and collaborate and work toward the school’s accountability goals (Voelkel, 2022). Some of the first research on PLCs focused on creating a workplace that was conducive to teachers and led to

student success, while more recent research focused on student learning through data (Burns et al., 2018). As teachers are being pressured to improve students' educational outcomes, it is largely inferred that schools should participate in PLCs where teachers collaborate together to come up with the best practices within the organization (LeChasseur et al, 2016).

PLCs have had many contributors to this concept of reshaping the way educational settings provided services and learning to the students. PLCs, through research, have strong sustenance in improving school success, as a result of DuFour and Eaker being pioneers in implementing structured committees that have outlined the elements of change to the practice of improvement (Cherkowski, 2016). It is the contribution of DuFour, an author, former educator, and educational administrator, that has defined and fathered the concept of PLCs (Brown et al., 2018). DuFour was a public-school educator, principal, and superintendent who was a leading authority in helping schools and educators implement PLCs (Brown et al., 2018).

The professional learning community focuses on student learning rather than on teaching skills, for all stakeholders to work collaboratively, and focus on the results and student success (DuFour et al., 2016). Understanding each stakeholder's role is crucial for the effectiveness of PLCs and student learning (DuFour et al., 2016). In order to understand and implement communities in a learning environment, one must ask four questions such as:

- What is expected of students to learn?
- How will the student be measured and assured that they have learned what is taught?
- How will the lesson and learning be adjusted when the students experience difficulty in learning?
- How will the lesson be extended and be enriching for students who do not pass the assessment? (DuFour et al., 2016).

Answering and applying those four questions can help develop an effective and true PLC (DuFour et al., 2016). Teachers can develop strategies to ensure that students who struggle receive the additional support needed to become successful, such as interventions (DuFour et al., 2016). Teachers need to learn to change their ways of traditional practice, to embrace data, to make adjustments, to implement full PLCs, and to embark on student success (DuFour et al., 2016). Teachers need to develop "teacher efficacy," where they believe that they can teach students to learn no matter how difficult or challenging the student may be (Thornton et al., 2020).

Having teacher efficacy can be beneficial in PLCs. Collective teacher efficacy is a belief that educators have the capacity to influence student achievement through their teaching and relationships with students (Thornton et al., 2020). According to Voelkel (2022), teacher efficacy and collective efficacy influence student achievement in which the community members hold each other to a high standard and follow through with a plan to reach the desired goals of student learning and performance in the classroom. PLCs, when implemented effectively and guided by the characteristics, ideas, and questions, supported by the leadership, and embraced by the teachers, have been shown to improve teacher perception and student achievement and success (Brown et al., 2018).

Truly a PLC

The PLCs are built on three big ideas that ensure high levels of learning for all students, five essential characteristics, five elements that are key for improvement and an effective PLC, and for the committee to also follow up with four essential guiding questions that guide instructional decisions. The three big ideas of PLC are to focus on learning, build a collaborative culture, and focus on the results (Beddoes et al., 2020). DuFour and Reeves (2016) believed that when educators are working together in their school there are five elements that can make a PLC

genuine. The five elements are: (a) working together in a collaborative team and taking responsibility for student learning; (b) coming up with a viable curriculum so students acquire knowledge, skills, and dispositions; (c) utilizing an assessment process; (d) using the results of common formative assessments; and (e) coming up with a plan for intervention based on the data (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Schaap and de Bruijn (2016) identified their own five elements for productive PLCs. They are: (a) reflective dialogues, (b) collaborative activities, (c) shared vision, (d) the role of the school principal, and (e) ownership. They are very similar to DuFour's five elements but slightly adjusted with emphasis on the role that the leader, the principal, plays in PLC.

If one of the five identified elements is not successful, this affects the development of the PLC (Schaap & de Bruijn, 2016). In further research into PLCs, DuFour and Eaker (1999) came up with another element of PLCs and reworded the newer six characteristics of PLCs (a) shared mission, vision, and values; (b) collective inquiry; (c) collaborative teams; (d) action orientation and experimentation; (e) continuous improvement; and (f) results orientation (DuFour & Eaker, 1999). The DuFour and Eaker's (1999) six characteristics are similar to the five elements of PLCs as mentioned by DuFour and Schaaps but are worded differently and better explain and give perspective to what a professional learning community is and how it functions when all individuals involved following the steps to transform the campus into a learning community. The six characteristics of PLCs lay the foundation for a successful PLC (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

Note. Information from "Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement," by DuFour & Eaker, 1999, National Educational Service.

As DuFour et al. (2016) stated, the best practice for enhancing student achievement and making PLCs true and functional is by utilizing the six characteristics of a professional learning community.

Shared Mission, Vision, and Values. The elements of a shared mission and vision are essential in PLCs to help strengthen the school's collaborative spirit and capacity for success (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). Creating and implementing a shared mission, vision, and values

serves as a blueprint for the committee to collaborate and have the outline to clarify the criteria that a PLC team needs to establish the quality student learning (Voelkel, 2022). The shared vision can direct the campus team back to the primary questions that they developed as a committee and are instrumental for their student's success (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). Having a shared vision for learning in schools is essential in building the foundation for school improvement and student success (Cherkowski, 2016). Collaborative practices can align their diverse perspectives and constructive dialogues to produce a shared value and vision (Tallman, 2019). According to Cherkowski (2016), "Developing a shared vision for learning is echoed in the research literature as one of the characteristics of effective learning communities" (p. 530).

Cherkowski (2016) mentioned that a principal took the approach of committing to the shared vision by modeling his own positive professional educational learning and in turn started a shift within the PLC climate amongst the staff and saw improvement in student success. As the keeper of the vision, the leader helps keep the school focused on the shared purpose and sets the tone for the school (Kruse et al., 1994). As for the school's mission statement, the staff needs to take ownership and pledge to make sure that the success of the students is measured and connected with the mission statement (DuFour, 2004). Once they understand the shared mission, vision, and goals, they can then move forward to developing students to be lifelong learners and movers (Beddoes et al., 2020).

Collective Inquiry. According to DuFour and Eaker (1999), the definition of collective inquiry in PLCs is "the engine of improvement, growth, and renewal in a professional learning community" (p. 20). When teachers work together and learn from one another it gives opportunities for collaborative inquiry, and it contributes to sharing personal experiences and pieces of knowledge that allow the members to engage in reflective dialogue (Voelkel, 2022). According to Senge et al. (2019), ignorance can be a virtue for opening one's growth and

learning, it can allow for a collective inquiry into change and contributions. Inquiry is a way that teachers collaborate with each other to bring new levels of energy and revisit and develop a different approach to student learning (Cherkowski, 2016).

In PLCs, the critical groups along with other inquiry groups offer collective, collaborative work, this is what occurs when collaborative communities share knowledge with each other (Dobbs et al., 2017). The collaborative teams of teachers utilize the data and evidence of student learning to discuss and learn from each other during a collective inquiry in their PLCs (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). When teachers of the collaborative teams use reflective teaching and share it with their peers it becomes a powerful PLC and that becomes collective inquiry (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

Collaboration Teams in PLCs. Helen Keller has been credited with saying "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." As defined by Harmon (2017), collaboration occurs when individuals within an organization are in deep and complex communication to achieve the vision and values of the common goals. Collaboration can be a very powerful tool during professional development and in PLCs. It helps educators open up to their peers and learn from one another (Tallman, 2019). Collaboration involves communication, team involvement, and a great investment of time (Harmon, 2017). The collaboration in PLCs should include people with diverse experiences and knowledge of the subject (Ricketts et al., 2021). The trust and collaboration that is developed in PLCs have a positive impact on student outcomes (Tallman, 2019).

Collaboration is an important tool for PLCs and professional development. The trust and collaboration that is developed and openly discussed in PLCs are known to have a positive impact on student outcomes (Tallman, 2019). There must be structured support based on respect, caring, and trust among all those on the committee when discussing what is best for the students'

education and success (Bouchamma et al., 2021). According to Ning et al. (2015), there are two main areas of collaboration: collective learning and shared personal practice. The team develops the best strategies for effective learning and shares the best personal practice that has been collected for student success. These PLCs not only benefit the student learning but that of the teacher. Through collaboration, they become continuous learners by seeking and acquiring knowledge to improve their skills and classroom instruction (Kruse & Johnson, 2017).

Teachers who openly and actively participate and practice collaboration with other peers from either their schools or across different schools, share great ideas, discuss what works and what does not, learn from one another, and collaborate to develop solutions to promote student success as well as their own growth (Matherson & Windle, 2017). There must be a dialogue where teachers engage in professional communication during PLCs (Prenger et al., 2019). For PLCs to be effective, the team needs to meet on a regular basis to collaborate on how to reach the common goal by using strategies that have been successful such as: observing the one that has the best results, preparing to change and copy the lessons, look for experts in the area, and be able to review and critique the team (Wasta, 2017). Once collaboration amongst all stakeholders occurs, teachers need to focus on the needs of the students, as well as the goal and vision of the school (Sperandio & Peggy, 2018). According to DuFour and Reeves (2016), by working together as collaborative teams and not in isolation, the stakeholders can be responsible collectively for student learning and the effectiveness of PLCs.

Action Orientation and Experimentation. Action orientation is when the PLC members are willing to experiment with what benefits the student; they take aspirations and turn them into action (DuFour & Eaker, 1999). They believe that learning occurs when they take action, and those individuals refuse to take no action and have no tolerance for inaction (DuFour & Eaker, 1999). According to Johnson and Voelkel (2021), the benefit of developing or

improving skills is to understand the data in supporting effective PLCs and develop a plan for success and implementation. Experimentation is a result of those that apply action orientation; they develop and test hypotheses on student learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1999). Experimentation is an ongoing effect that starts with reflecting on "what happened and why, developing new theories, trying new tests, evaluating the results" (DuFour & Eaker, 1999, p. 28), without action and experimentation they do not become an effective PLC (DuFour & Eaker, 1999).

Continuous Improvement. PLCs are used to sustain a context for continuous improvement by working together and functioning as a learning organization, where they conduct professional development and facilitate learning, create, and approve student assessments, and analyze data for improving instructional practice and obtaining student achievement (Jones & Thessin, 2017). Courtney (2020) described continuous improvement coaching as a theory of action that is divided into four branches: needs assessment, continuous improvement planning, professional learning and coaching, and building lasting systems for improvement. Not only does continuous improvement occur by working together, but it is in conjunction with the support of the principal's leadership skills of driving the vision for student improvement (Johnson & Voelkel, 2021).

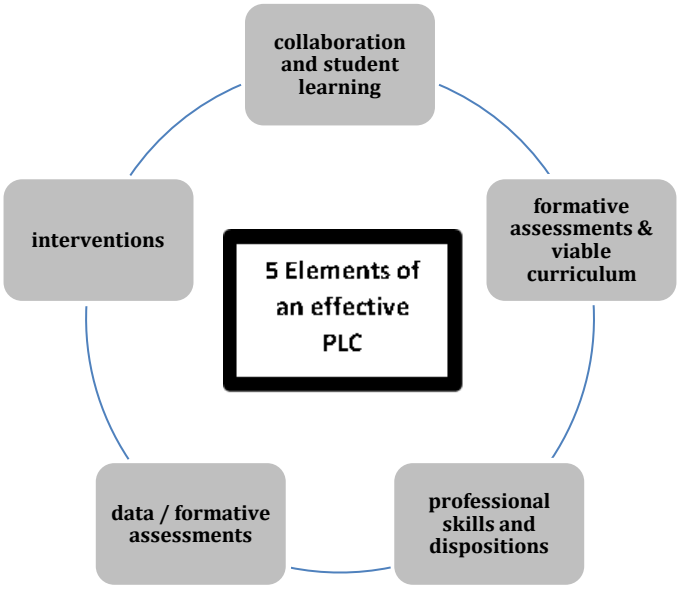
According to Courtney (2020), during continuous improvement planning the committee of teachers is encouraged to utilize specific and measurable improvement objectives that transform instruction improvements and objectives that take place on campus. The goal of continuous improvement is not only to develop an environment of learning for students but also for teachers, administrators, and all those that are involved in the PLC (Carpenter, 2018). To carry a greater impact on the positive outcome of continuous improvement, the principal should focus in this area on having more effective professional development to have a greater impact on student outcomes (Courtney, 2020).

Results Orientation. In order to make a prescriptive instructional educational decision, the committee of educators must rely on relevant data (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). The PLC members need to focus on getting the results and improving the results that focus on student learning (DuFour et al., 2016). Focusing on the results helps align school and district goals to further improvement in student learning with the proof of measurable improvement, by allowing for higher levels of learning (DuFour et al, 2016). Schools not only use other methods to screen and monitor student learning, but they must also use the data results to create a concise systematic plan of intervention to meet the students' needs (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). By analytical examination of the results, the PLC can pinpoint the weaknesses and the strengths of one's individual teaching in collaboration to learn from one another (DuFour et al., 2016).

As the committee works together to develop a true PLC, they need to evaluate the effectiveness of their PLC. The committee must recognize the five elements of a true PLC and answer these questions: (a) is there collaboration and student learning, (b) have they established a guaranteed and viable curriculum, (c) does the committee demonstrate professional skills and dispositions with aligned assessments, (d) is the collection of data gathered as a result of common formative assessment, and (e) what is the intervention plan (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Five Elements of a PLC



Collaboration and Student Learning. Through collaboration, teachers build positive morale and receive dialog, socialization structures, and norms, which help build a PLC (Tallman, 2019). While many teachers teach in isolation, collaboration in educational practices is often confused or marks a shift in their educational practice (Tallman, 2019). As educators collaborate, professional learning can occur through their colleagues which can lead to productive lessons and can also lead to improved student achievements (Fred et al., 2020). The individuals who make up the PLC framework help to create a learning environment where the focus is not on student learning, but on teacher learning during the collaboration. They can develop productive working practices, but also personal and collaborative skills as well (Tucker & Quintero-Ares, 2021).

Student learning is defined as the measurable skills, attitudes, and knowledge of the learner as a result of participation in an educational activity (IGI Global, 2022). PLCs are being incorporated in many schools since they integrate and focus on student data, creating a culture of

collaboration, and mainly enhancing student learning (Burns et al., 2018). Most of the essentials, such as collaborative discussion, collective inquiry on research-based approaches, and data collection all reflect and focus on student learning (Gwinn & Watts-Taffe, 2017). According to Doğan and Adams (2018), the essentials for PLC such as teacher collaboration focus on student learning and the instruction needed to improve student achievement and student success.

The collaboration within PLCs needs to focus on student learning based on student improvement that is from professional development where collaboration occurs and that increases teacher capacity and efficacy (Gwinn & Watts-Taffe, 2017). When focusing on student learning, the committee of teachers and leaders agree upon a commitment to ensure that all students learn with rigor (Gwinn & Watts-Taffe, 2017). According to Burns et al. (2018), research claimed there is a link between having an effective PLC and student learning.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum. A guaranteed and viable curriculum is one that defines and is a blueprint of how students receive a comprehensive, equitable, rigorous, and standard-based education (Portland Public Schools, 2019). Guaranteed is when all teachers are aware of the content they are teaching (Portland Public Schools, 2019). Viable means that the content that is being taught is teachable in the time utilized for instruction (Portland Public Schools, 2019). The guaranteed and viable curriculum that is established focuses on the knowledge, skills, and required rigorous material that students are expected to learn (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). According to Parker et al. (2022), a school-level curriculum needs to be transformed from shared knowledge and collaborative sharing to curriculum implementation as per their own school setting.

Professional Skills and Dispositions. Teachers who feel valued and trust the individuals for whom they work can enjoy working with others and feel that their contributions are of value and make a difference in their student's life and academic learning (Fountas & Pinnell, 2020).

The team comes together and develops an assessment process that has common formative assessments based on the guaranteed and viable curriculum (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

Collection of Data/Result of Common Formative Assessments. The use of data is a game changer in the education world and is a tool that many decision-makers at different levels within a district utilize for many purposes, especially for improving student achievement (Supovitz & Sirinides, 2018). Data collection and analysis can be defined as data that are collected from various forms or instruments that incorporate multiple pieces of evidence (Jimerson, 2016). Having a good assessment can help teachers gather the data to identify weak areas in the lesson and curriculum, diagnose students who struggle with learning, set goals, and reevaluate how the lesson is being taught (Marshall, 2018). The data collected and reviewed are important tools for analyzing what is learned and for measuring if the students understand what is being taught. The collected data helps improve the professional practice of the teacher in assisting and achieving the success of the student and student learning (DuFour, 2015). The data that are collected and examined are useful for analyzing teacher data on what they are teaching and whether it is effective or ineffective and also for student data to identify what are they learning or the knowledge that they are lacking. Both need to connect to see what leads to the best student outcome (Supovitz & Sirinides, 2018).

When using data, teachers must diagnose, interpret, and integrate information from data when utilizing it for their lesson (Wardrip & Herman, 2018). Teachers need to interpret data that are needed, important, and changes that need to be made for their students with the use of data based on what they infer (Wardrip & Herman, 2018). An important factor according to Marshall (2018) is that teacher teams should be using data to make amendments and adjustments for students who are having problems learning and for teachers to reflect on their teaching methods as well as come up with an intervention plan. Teachers benefit from expanding the use of data in

their classroom from student instructional practice data and of student work products (Supovitz & Sirinides, 2018). For students to be successful, it must be outlined and understood what they need to learn by setting clear points and signs of whether they are successful or need to be redirected, which makes data-driven instruction the guide to rigor (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2019).

The first step that PLC members prepare for their meeting is the collection of data, to utilize it as a baseline to see where students appear to have struggled with learning, and use it to outline their goals (Wasta, 2017). When collecting data in PLCs, data such as classroom assessments, standardized test data, interest inventories, and observations can be utilized in prescribing the right lessons, curriculum, and instruction for the students' best learning. The effects of analyzing data, not just student data, but teaching data as well, can lead to greater student outcomes (Supovitz & Sirinides, 2018). As members of the PLC analyze the data from an assessment, they utilize this information as evidence of student learning (DuFour, 2015). Once data are collected (Jimerson, 2016), the next question should be asked, how do teachers utilize this data? Each data collecting tool can be used to identify obstacles that either affect or promote student achievement (Jimerson, 2016). DuFour and Richard (2019) took it a bit further and utilized four questions when using data:

- Which students were unable to demonstrate proficiency on this assessment?
- Which students are highly proficient and would benefit from extended or accelerated learning?
- Did one or more colleagues have excellent results in an area where my students struggled? What can I learn from my colleagues to improve my individual practice?
- Is there an area in which none of us achieved the results we expected? What do we need to learn as a team to teach this skill or concept more effectively?

Data literacy can be overwhelming to those that have no knowledge of how to use and analyze the reports. Data disaggregation is not often taught or explained in teacher preparation programs, they learn as they go (Jimerson, 2016). Once educators are taught how to analyze data and given the right tools, it will make the PLC more complete and valid.

Interventions. According to Mattos (2016), the definition of intervention is when a school goes above and beyond to offers additional assistance to students to become a success in school based on data. Interventions play a key role in redirecting and assisting students to learn in small groups, individually, or other methods that reteach what has been missed or not understood to make it clear, intense, and successful (Brown et al., 2018). According to DuFour and Reeves (2016), the most effective intervention is to move away from unsuccessful teaching but develop a system to reteach or use a different intensive data-focused, peer collaboration that is immediate to the individual or for the small-group instruction. Once data are collected and analyzed to identify a student who is at-risk or in need of additional help, the teachers develop a plan of interventions that target the student's needs (DuFour et al., 2016).

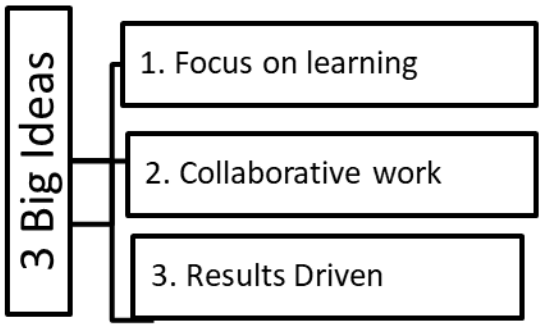
There needs to be scheduled time designated to help prepare for data-driven interventions (Henderson, 2018). The intervention needs to be a data-focused response to the student's lack of the lesson learned and the teacher should prepare a detailed reteach of the areas in need of clarity (Henderson, 2018). The response to students who need additional support is the plan of intervention and not remediation, the student needs immediate support instead of waiting for summer school or remediation (DuFour, 2004). Blending PLCs with the models of response to intervention (RTI) has been recommended to build sustainability of the educational change (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). RTI is multi-tiered instruction that is often implemented in collaboration with PLCs that help structure a school's environment (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). In educational development, having the teachers reevaluate their teaching practices and

self-efficacy is needed to assist with the needs of the students where data shows that they are not grasping the lesson taught, therefore interventions are needed for student success (Wheeler & Bach, 2021).

There are three big ideas that guide the daily work of educators in a professional learning community: focus on learning, collaborative work, and results-driven (see Figure 5). These three big ideas are what steer the process of an effective and productive PLC. Effectiveness and productivity also depend largely on the extent that these ideas are executed (DuFour et al., 2016).

Figure 5

Three Big Ideas



Focus on Learning. The ultimate purpose of the school is to ensure that all students are learning. With that in mind, the focus is on learning. The fundamental purpose of a PLC is to ensure that the focus of the school or district is on making the commitment to student learning, not just for some students, but for all students (DuFour, 2016). According to Voelkel (2022), the primary purpose of PLCs is to improve student learning by improving teacher practices through collaborative inquiry. There needs to be a shift from teaching to student learning which changes the dynamics of formal education to an impact on the achievement and improvement of the

school (DuFour, 2004). The focus on intense learning is based on the data gathered and having a systematic evaluation and analysis of the valid data (Beddoes et al., 2020).

Collaborative Work. According to DuFour et al. (2016), every member of the organization is expected to work together as part of a collaborative team to achieve a common outcome and student success. A commitment to working together to achieve a collective purpose. To cultivate a collaborative culture through the development of collaborative teams it gives the team a connected relationship that allows for them to express and share what lessons or plans they have used that have been successful (Battersby & Verdi, 2015). Teachers need to be sincere with one another and willingly participate by sharing great ideas as well as failures and mistakes (Battersby & Verdi, 2015).

Results Driven. The effectiveness of the lesson is based on: (a) the assessment and the results, (b) how the team and the schools utilize the relevant data to promote student achievement and campus improvement, and (c) to confirm if the lesson is working or not through data (DuFour et al., 2016).

Four Critical Questions

According to DuFour and Reeves (2016), when the four critical questions are addressed by the school's PLC, this drives the work of the collaborative teams of the PLC.

- **What do we want our students to learn**? This is done by determining the standards needed to learn the goals set forth by the community and what needs to be taught. This is done by prioritizing what must be learned from standards and targets.
- **How will we know if they have learned it?** This is done by having teachers and administrators working together, checking for understanding, and evaluating the goals and learning targets. The team needs to work together to disaggregate the data, to analyze if the students are learning, and whether the team is reaching the results that have been

targeted. Answering the second question can also be done by teacher-developed common formative assessments.

- **What will we do when they don't learn it?** The team provides timely, directive, systematic interventions in small groups, individually, or purposefully.
- **What will we do when they have learned it?** The team provides timely enrichment and extension of the lesson.

Culture Support for PLC

Leadership Support. Site leadership is a key component in the support and development of the collaborative process of PLCs (Voelkel, 2022). Looking at the role of the school principal and reflecting on their leadership style will have an influence on the school's climate and embracement of culture in a professional learning community (Cherkowski, 2016). Leaders within learning communities function as critical committee members that assist in building capital amongst the teachers that have the content knowledge and contribute to the school's vision and goals (Adams, 2016). As mentioned in Jones and Thessin's (2017) research, principals of the schools that have knowledge of the definition of PLCs, will have the ability and responsibility of influencing and encouraging the relationships that support the practices and elements needed for an effective PLC. School leaders can contribute to improving student achievement through supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collaboration, focus on learning, and supportive relationships (Adams, 2016). Leaders also need to build relationships with staff and get to know them as individuals in order to promote a positive school climate and develop personal growth (Cherkowski, 2016). The leader or principal must also share in the experiences by leading by example and modeling in the learning process to experience what occurs in the classroom and be one with the staff to better understand the collaboration and dialogue in a PLC (Cherkowski, 2016).

Educational leaders need to be strongly focused leaders who ensure the right work of collaboration, the team is on task, data is utilized, and student achievement is occurring within the PLC (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). They must have a strong voice to persuade the nay-sayers to step up to the change that is important for the campus (Henderson, 2018). According to Želvys et al. (2019), the principal should behave in a professional manner with an inclination to accept and evolve change. Educational leaders should practice the appropriate leadership skills and style of leadership to inspire and allow for a collective and motivational change (Nelson & Squires, 2017). There needs to be a space for change especially when there is a "learning curve" when coming together and collaborating to make an impact (Senge et al., 2019).

Leaders need to provide mutual adaptation, which is defined as participants making changes to attitude, skills, and behavior, thus requiring leaders to be flexible when modeling to the PLC (Oakley, 2021). Ensuring time is set aside during the work week for the PLC process allows for collaboration on essential skills, common assessments, and interventions to occur on a weekly basis (Farmer, 2019). Leadership not only creates time but provides clarity and direction during the PLC that aligns with the school's mission, vision, and goals (Farmer, 2019). The leaders, not only at the campus but at the district level, need to be committed to the PLC process and build leadership capacity to support teachers for a true implementation of PLC (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). Sperandio and Kong (2018) noted that once a PLC is effectively developed, it is up to the leadership to sustain the learning community, where the principal becomes the leader and takes over many roles, such as communicator, collaborator, coach, change agent, and provider of ongoing support. According to Cansoy (2019), administrators' leadership behaviors and styles were reported to positively affect employees' motivation and performance, organizational justice, school culture and climate, student achievement, and job satisfaction.

Commitment. In a recent literature review on the effectiveness of PLCs, Brown et al. (2018) concluded that the perspective of the stakeholders and their commitment to the shared vision is key to the productive and successful achievement of student success. PLCs need to have a fundamental and clear structured purpose that is in alignment with the success of the students (Prenger et al., 2021). All members of the campus and district need to make a commitment to the idea of a PLC and make that a priority (Farmer, 2019). How the school and educators view the PLC determines the support and buy-in to the shared vision. The PLC must be viewed as part of school culture, and not as a program matter, because it determines if educators work together to achieve desired goals (Kruse & Gates, 2016).

Leaders need to make sure that all stakeholders are aware, and part of the shared vision and that clarity is provided. According to the research from Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017), teachers wanted more clarity on the shared vision for their PLC. One of the shared visions that a true PLC implement is that all students can learn (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). With the vision of all students can learn, they must also believe that the focus on the PLC is that all students can learn and not so much on what can be taught and that all teachers can teach (Riggins & Knowles, 2020).

Change. Not only does the PLC need to make a commitment to the vision of the campus and district, but also must commit to change. For change to occur it requires individuals to learn new concepts, content, and ideas, how to collaborate with a team or committee, and to participate in critical and inquiry dialogue (Dobbs et al., 2017). The change theory is that once a new program, reform, or innovation is introduced it results in uncertainty and resistance from those involved or have the community to resist and not comply with the change (Sperandio & Kong, 2018). As a result of multiple new ideas that do not function or programs that start and are not followed through, it is hard for teachers to accept change in a school (DuFour & Eaker, 1999).

The mentality of "this too shall pass" is an experience that staff members experience when new proposals have failed (DuFour & Eaker, 1999).

Any initiative means change and most teachers and school leaders resist change until they see results (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2019). According to Cherkowski (2016), those individuals who are not chosen to be part of the committee find it harder to implement the change, they will be hurt, upset, and feel that their opinion does not matter. They may feel that the trust is broken (Cherkowski, 2016). That is where leadership has to embrace and support the level of trust needed for the teachers to feel valued and included to accept change (Cherkowski, 2016).

Sometimes a change may seem like trying to implement an unproven idea or that wanting them to buy in is a waste of energy. However, showing the results and making the committee want to try the new initiative helps them believe in the process (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2019). Focusing on the change needed can influence participants to learn within a PLC. Acquiring new knowledge contributes to the changes in their attitude and changes behavior and mindset of PLC participation (Prenger et al., 2019). Leaders can provide successful support for change by providing a positive and moral purpose for the change by building relationships and sharing knowledge until they gain the knowledge and understanding of the process (Sperandio & Kong, 2018). Supportive leadership at the campus can assist and initiate change from their staff by listening, taking advice, and including them in decision making when it comes to impacting student success, thus allowing for the staff to initiate their own change (Adams, 2016).

As reported by Tallman (2019), educators and staff who collaborate by working and planning together initiate change, and by them collaborating, it becomes a powerful professional development, one that administrators and principals want to occur for student success. When PLCs are first introduced it is a new change for the committee and staff of the campus and there will need to be a level of support, understanding, and innovation to support the education context

of the processes and concepts of PLCs to ensure the effectiveness of PLC (Sperandio & Kong, 2018). According to DuFour and Eaker (1999, p. 55), "change is difficult but not impossible."

Characteristics of Effective and Ineffective PLCs

Effective PLCs. For districts and campuses to improve teachers' practices, autonomy, commitment, and professional growth, PLC is known to be an effective work method (Bouchamma et al., 2021). PLCs that are implemented with integrity and fidelity will lead to effective teamwork, better relationships amongst the team, and an effective PLC that will result in student success (Preast & Burns, 2019). Making PLCs effective is accomplished by following the five key elements of a PLC: (a) shared values and vision, (b) collective responsibility, (c) reflective professional inquiry, (d) collaboration, as well as (e) individual learning (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). According to Easton (2016), "Strategic accountability is key to making PLCs effective" (p. 43). For PLCs to be effective and for strategic accountability to occur, leaders from the campus and district level need to communicate with other members and stakeholders in the PLC to have an active level and overlapping level of accountability (Easton, 2016). The principal is the primary leader to ensure that PLCs are effective and implemented for improvement in professional learning (Cherkowski, 2016).

An influence for effective PLCs is teacher collective efficacy and collaborative inquiry (Voelkel, 2022). A study done in a K-6th grade school showed that teacher collective efficacy, used in collaboration within the committee, proved to be effective and it showed an increase in student achievement by implementing PLCs as a primary strategy (Voelkel, 2022). Utilizing several critical PLC practices, shared vision and values, a strong collaborative culture, the utilization of data, joint work, and the focus on student learning become the foundation of an effective PLC for students and teachers (Voelkel, 2022). During planning time, effective PLCs utilize data as the main source for meeting their students' needs, improving their practice, and

improving the student learning outcome (DuFour, 2015). It also requires school leaders to encourage collaboration with teachers to utilize data for the improvement of lessons and instruction (Wardrip & Herman, 2018).

For collaboration to be effective and to contribute to an effective PLC, both teachers and administration need to work together towards the shared mission and vision of the campus (Carpenter, 2018). It is also important for the peers in a PLC to develop bonds with one another to increase instructional effectiveness and avoid and eliminate any isolation or the feeling of not being included (Dougherty Stahl, 2015). To fully embrace a PLC, data will reveal what the students are learning and teachers will shift their ways to improve the professional practice of the team (DuFour, 2015). Accountability is seen in the student data which show gains and educators in PLCs must strive for accountability for themselves, their students, their team, and other stakeholders to produce an effective PLC (Easton, 2016). In Jones and Thessin's (2015) review of literature, they described PLC work as fluid, dynamic and complex. The systems of a PLC are to have different phases, such as processing as well as a change process that results in a finish line for an effective PLC.

Ineffective PLCs. The term PLC has been weakened by utilizing the term for any type of meeting held for educators and for any purpose or not having the support needed to produce a strong and true PLC (Doğan & Adams, 2018). Districts and campuses can get caught in the trap of a PLC lite due to ineffective leadership, teachers working in isolation, and not working on the right work (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). As per DuFour and Reeves (2016), there are schools and districts that create PLCs, but do not utilize the strategies, nor put them into practice, thus becoming a PLC lite. The idea of having PLCs in many schools around the world is a result of renaming traditional faculty or department meetings and evolving them into PLCs as well as having educators read books but this results in no action nor collaboration on student

achievement is known as a PLC lite (DuFour & Reeves, 2016).

Many schools and districts have labeled themselves as implementing PLCs but are not implementing the work and actual process of a PLC, thus becoming a PLC lite, not being effective for the student or the educational system. They must put in the hard work to become a real PLC (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). The study conducted by Schaap and de Bruijn (2016), found that in certain groups their dialogue was different and concluded that the feedback was reflective while in another group the dialogue had decreased causing an ineffective PLC.

Another aspect of an ineffective PLC is the tension that occurs with the teachers, especially with the lack of personal commitment (Schaap & de Bruijn, 2016). This tension combined with the lack of teacher personal commitment is a result of unclear communication with school leaders (Schaap & de Bruijn, 2016). Not utilizing data correctly can cause an ineffective PLC. This is done when data are observed, but there is no adjustment to improve instruction (DuFour, 2015). If the data are not analyzed in a way to help teachers find out what is not working either with the student or in the classroom, it leaves teachers with wasted time and uninformed judgments (Wasta, 2017). The challenges of a PLC are that teachers are not involved in developing the curriculum, nor contributing to the development process, which is an essential part of meeting the needs of the campus (Alsubaie, 2016).

In the study by Jones and Thessin (2017), as a learning organization focused on sustaining a context of continuous improvement, not all PLCs operated in a continuous improvement mode, and not full PLCs. Some PLCs only participated in a certain phase. Another factor that affected continuous improvement was the resistance from the teachers, which stalled the process and caused an ineffective PLC (Jones & Thessin, 2017). Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017) found PLCs may not have positive outcomes in the eyes of the school or teachers; nor will the outcome be effective even if there are strong assumptions of teacher collaboration in the

PLCs with teacher learning; and group collaboration may not produce the intended outcomes desired by the leadership of the campus (Horn et al., 2017). Having a dysfunctional school environment can jeopardize a functional PLC, by not meeting the learning gap and providing a toxic work environment (Henderson, 2018). The lack of elements in a PLC, such as collaboration, the effective use of student data, and leadership support lead to an ineffective PLC and a poor PLC team (Sims & Penny, 2015).

Ineffective Leadership. According to Easton (2016), it has been said by more than one administrator that PLCs take away from teaching, are a waste of time, and refer to them as "gripe and gossip" sessions. Ineffective leadership can contribute to an ineffective PLC. The lack of a strong leader can affect meetings where the team discussions are taking place, but the lack of action and improvement in students' learning does not occur (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). If the leadership addresses the PLC as just another meeting and does not have the substance to affect the teacher contribution or student learning, this exemplifies a critical leadership practice where behaviors and elements are missing causing an ineffective PLC (Voelkel, 2022). The principal's or leaders' actions and behavior can impact PLCs and result in the educator's lack of job satisfaction, which is a key factor in student achievement (Adams, 2016).

The leadership role is another element that affects the PLC, how the principal plays the role of the leader, such as, supporting and leading the communities, affects how the committee will participate in the PLC (Park et al., 2019). According to Park et al. (2019), their studies showed that the effect of principal leadership on student achievement is impacted by the teacher characteristics, which are the characteristics of the PLC, such as teacher collaboration and efficacy. The leaders need to protect the time for planning and the collaboration can lead to intentional planning for student learning (Morgan et al., 2019). Principals need to expect resistance from teachers in establishing PLCs. They are more than likely going to see it as more

responsibility added to their plate (Bouchamma et al., 2019).

As principals lead PLCs, they need to consider the support they need to provide, the teacher buy-in, and the culture of collaboration to exchange knowledge and ideas (Bouchamma et al., 2019). The leader must also be aware of the values and underline behavior of the committee for change to occur (Oakley, 2021). Another attribute of an ineffective PLC is a change in leadership or teacher turnover; a struggling team and struggling leader can affect obtaining the goals of producing successful students (Farmer, 2019).

In the PLC process, it is important for principals to adopt a leadership style that supports, looks at the teacher's needs, praises the committee to be the best that they can be, and gives the teachers the confidence they need to share their best teaching practices (Bouchamma et al., 2019). If there is loose and ineffective leadership, the true PLC will become a PLC lite (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). It is key for the leaders of schools to become aware of the underlying behavior of the committee in order to implement change and thus turn the awareness back to the stakeholders to reflect on what is not occurring and work towards change to produce an effective and working PLC that contributes to student success (Oakley, 2021).

Summary

In summary, Chapter 2 provides a literature review on the history and the evolution of the term professional communities to PLCs. It cites those who have contributed to the reform set forth by the United States in regard to the educational needs of the students and that support student success and student improvement. The chapter also provides an overview of the literature on PLCs and the different aspects that make them effective as well as what hinders and causes them to be ineffective. It also discusses the involvement of all stakeholders and members of the PLC as well as the needs and contributions of being successful. The purpose of PLCs is for the campus or district to improve student success by having the school and district develop an

organization where teachers gather student data, analyze the needs of the students who have difficulty gaining the knowledge taught, come up with a plan, share their knowledge, and question their professional practices from a critical inquiry process (Voelkel, 2022). The PLC needs to utilize the characteristics, the elements, and the three big ideas for an effective and empowering PLC. This qualitative methods study of PLCs provides research on the understanding and participating in a productive and effective PLC. In this study, the elements that contribute to an effective PLC will provide data for those districts that want to improve on school collaboration, communication, teacher improvement, student learning, and student success.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Method

The purpose of conducting this qualitative descriptive study on PLCs in a South Texas public school district was to see if they are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of student success in the classroom as well as providing the support and steps outlined in an effective PLC. The study focused on the skill level implemented by the teachers, administrators, and other members of the committee to communicate, access the personal skills to collaborate with peers, and utilize the data for student achievement. A pilot study was conducted with two trial interviews of nonparticipants and Dedoose (2022) was used to practice coding the two trial interviews. After reviewing the two trial interviews, then the surveys were given to the participants and measure their perceptions, whether negative or positive, regarding the process of PLC, the purpose of gathering in committees, utilizing the tools needed, and revamping the instruction with the needed intervention. The outline of the study was based on the research questions on PLCs and it was also used to guide the study, the research methodology, and the research design.

Chapter 3 highlights the research design and methodological procedures of the research of PLCs. It describes the population that was chosen, which was the selected district's secondary staff members from District "A" in South Texas, and the study samples that included core teachers, department heads, district core coordinators, and possibly principals. The chapter discusses in detail the materials and instruments used to conduct the research, the data collection, and the data analysis of the selected population and study samples. It also includes the ethical considerations to make this a true study as well as the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations of the study. All information gathered was used to assist in data collection and data analysis procedures, refer to, and connect to the research questions guiding the study of PLCs. The research questions that guided the qualitative descriptive study on PLCs are:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC creates a shared mission, vision, values, and goals which are all focused on student learning?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning?

RQ3: What are PLC participants' perceptions of whether the PLC is results-oriented?

RQ4: The yearly implementation of the STAAR Test scores has increased except for 1 year due to COVID: In what way do you believe PLCs have affected this change?

Research Design and Method

The research methods are the tools and plan that design the research process of data collection, data analysis, and report findings (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). In research practice, it is the methods and theory that create the methodology on how the research will outline the plan that carries out the research process (Leavy, 2017). One of the most used methods for qualitative study is the interview (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). Using the qualitative methodological approach utilizes the important multiple subjective knowledge that builds on the source of knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2010). According to Saldaña and Omasta (2016), there are five analytic skills that are utilized by qualitative researchers and data analysts:

- condensing large amounts of data,
- noticing patterns in textual and visual materials,
- unifying seemingly different things,
- understanding social processes of human action, reaction, and interaction, and
- interpreting the routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships of social life.

Each of these skills helps find patterns in data and the ability to reconfigure them into new meanings (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). Qualitative interpretive research is a vast collection of

"detailed records, concerning context, people's actions and the perceptions of people" (Locke et al., 2010, p. 184). Interviews were used to collect data on the educators' perception of PLCs, through personal skill level, team level, and student level. The actual experience of the practice is captured in a qualitative study, a lived experience, which enhances the knowledge-building experience (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

The qualitative descriptive research has a vignette of the interviews conducted with the participants. A vignette analyzes and describes the important interactions of the participants in the research (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). This gave the committee and readers a vivid analytic reflection, the observation of the participant's reaction, and a better understanding of the investigation (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). The qualitative data allowed for an open-ended guided discussion asking key questions if PLCs are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of student success (Leavy, 2017). The semistructured interviews allow for the researcher to adjust the direction as needed (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). Qualitative research allows for the collection that places the participant's language, lingo, and concerns as the bases of the questions (Leavy, 2017). This type of research is beneficial because it gives a better understanding of the perspectives of the district leaders as well as the department heads and staff members on the needs for improvement or the success of PLC.

Population

The District "A," a Title I district, selected to participate in the qualitative study is a district in South Texas. District "A" had an enrollment of 21,000 students in the 2021–2022 school year and housed six middle schools, three traditional high schools, and two campuses with programs within small high schools. The district's population is comprised of 19,100 (93%) Hispanic students and 15,100 (74%) are economically disadvantaged. District "A," a pseudonym for a large-sized district in South Texas. See Table 2, for more demographics for District "A,"

retrieved from On Data Suite (2022).

Table 2

Enrollment at District "A," 2021–22

Demographics	*n* of students	%
Hispanic	19,000	93
Emergent Bilingual	7,100	35
Gifted and Talented	2200	11
Special Education (SPED)	2600	13
Title 1 participation	20,000	96
Economic Disadvantage	15,100	74
Student Total	20,400	100%

The two program high schools are "L" Academy which implements the International Baccalaureate program and "C" High School which is an early college program that is in partnership with the local college to enroll students in dual credit courses, take courses at the college, and assist students in receiving their associate degree by the time that they graduate from high school. To limit the study to a more manageable size, the district's core coordinators, the campus's department heads from the six middle schools and the three traditional high schools, and coaches who work closely with the individuals involved with PLCs were selected for interviews. Those selected were core teachers from the middle school or high school campuses. All schools in the school district participate in PLCs within their campus and at the district level. They all have a day where they meet with their core departments during a designated planning period. The district designates PLCs once a month for department heads where they go over necessary information, such as curriculum, upcoming district test and state updates.

At District "A," the middle school and high school teachers are given a planning period in addition to their conference period, and as for elementary, the campus has developed a master schedule that allows for additional time for teachers to meet with their grade level planning. See Table 3 for numbers of high school, middle school, and elementary teachers employed by each level in District "A," retrieved from On Data Suite (2022).

Table 3

Teacher Enrollment at District "A" in 2022

School level	Teachers
High School	610
Middle School	378
Elementary	702
Total	1690

Note. Data retrieved from On Data Suite (2022).

During the time utilized for PLCs, the teachers, staff, administration, and central office are to utilize their planning period as a PLC. The planning period for middle school and high school is 52 minutes. The master schedule was designed so that common content teachers are off during the same period making it possible for them to meet as a team. For example, the English Language Arts-Reading teachers are off one period, this is about 8-15 teachers who teach a grade level or two who are to use this time to plan with each other and across grade levels. The planning period is provided to work with their content-level teachers and to come up with a plan to improve student instruction by utilizing data gathered through weekly campus-based assessments, understanding the data, and preparing for student success. According to C. Saenz, (personal communication, January 4, 2022), "teachers have utilized that time as a conference period where they make copies, socialize with other teachers, not for academic purposes, or do

their lesson plans, not as the planning period it was intended to be." The planning time is to be utilized by core teachers to improve student success for those that did not pass the state standardized test STAAR (Insensee, 2015). See Table 4 for the STAAR data from District "A" for those students who did not meet the level "approaches," which is those students who did not pass the STAAR test for their grade level and state standards.

Table 4

District "A" STAAR Data

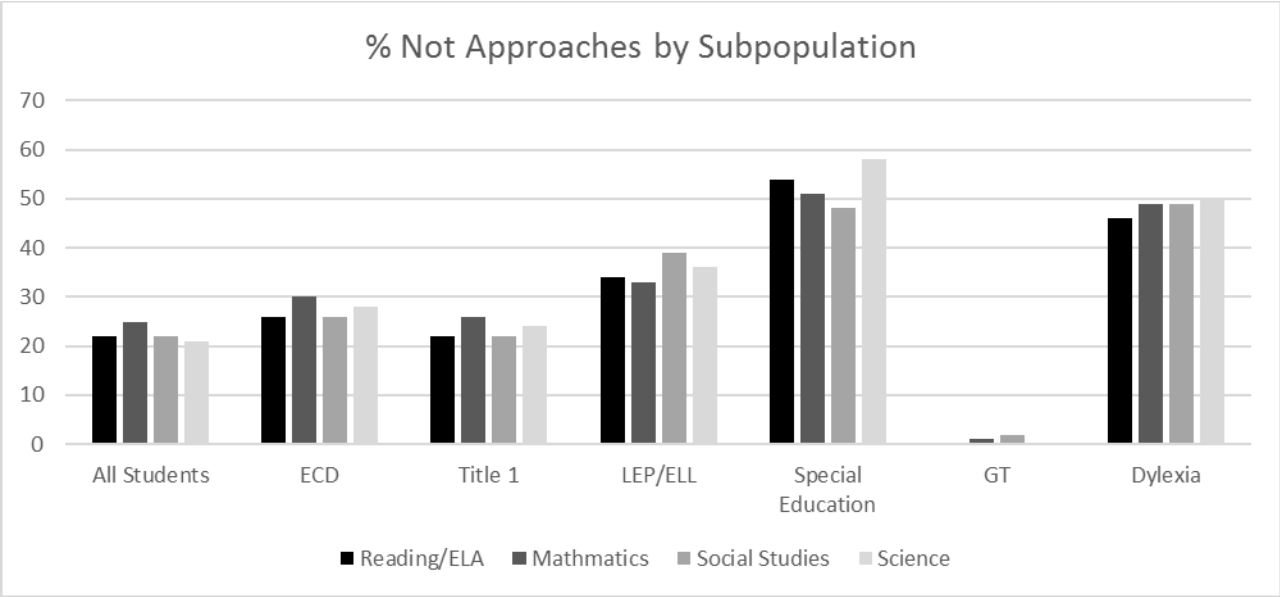
	Reading ELA			Mathematics			Social Studies			Science		
SubPopulation	Tested	Not Appr	Not Appr%	Tested	Not Appr	Not Appr%	Tested	Not Appr	Not Appr%	Tested	Not Appr	Not Appr%
All Students	12954	2809	22	10207	2554	25	3105	685	22	4900	1144	23
ECO	9442	2482	26	7523	2220	30	2154	563	26	3536	989	28
Title I	12550	2780	22	9804	2514	26	3102	683	22	4764	1127	24
LEP/ELL	4915	1680	34	4128	1368	33	911	356	39	1805	658	36
Special Ed.	1786	970	54	1492	761	51	355	170	48	612	354	58
GT	1540	5	0	1182	10	1	361	6	2	613	1	0
Dyslexia	1304	602	46	1175	574	49	178	87	49	441	222	50

Note. Information on the graph was retrieved from DMAC Solutions (2022).

Figure 6 shows STAAR Data of those students from sub-population that did not meet the passing score of approaches.

Figure 6

Did Not Meet Passing Score by Subpopulation



Study Sample

This study utilized a purposive sampling of 12 individuals to participate in a semistructured interviews. According to Terrell (2016), purposive sampling is just what the words say, gathering a group of participants that meet specific criteria. The criteria that were considered for this study are the teachers and/or administrators who teach or oversee tested subjects and are more involved in PLCs at the campus as well as the district level. The sample of individuals considered for this study were department heads, administrators, and coaches from two middle schools, one high school, and possibly District Coordinators for English, Math, Social Studies, and Science. A list of core department heads were obtained by reaching out to the coordinator and the principals of the campus who works with those individuals for PLCs and they were interviewed for the qualitative portion of the study. Core teachers are those educators who teach the primary subjects of English, Math, History, and Science.

Materials/Instruments

The qualitative study included one measure of data, a semistructured interview of 12 individual voluntary participants. For the 12 individual participants, there was a set of 19 questions for the interview section of the study, and some had follow-up questions depending on the responses of the participants prompting them to explain or expand their answers (see Appendix A). The 19 questions were piloted with a mock interview with a member of the district who was not part of the interview pool. The individual interviews were recorded to ensure that the transcription of the response to the questions is very close to accurate to the responses of the volunteers. The analysis application that was utilized for retrieving the qualitative research is the application, Dedoose.

Other materials used were the letters that went out to the participants before the interviews and a reminder email that was sent out to the administrator of the campus. The email had detailed information on the day and time the interviews were scheduled, specifically for each participant. This served as a reminder to the staff of the meeting for interviews or the other staff members of their upcoming interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Once interviews were completed, they were collected and analyzed. The data collected were reviewed and the relevant data were selected to get insights on the variables of interest. The analyzation of the data collected looked for patterns and themes. The patterns and themes were categorized and generated to analyze the responses collected and were tied with the research questions.

Data Collection

Before interviews were conducted, there was a letter written to the superintendent of District “A” asking for permission, see Appendix B to conduct the qualitative interviews. Once

permission was obtained, the interviews began by setting up scheduled times on when interviews could occur with the selected members of the campuses and district personnel. Principals of the campuses were notified of the purpose of the research and when interviews were occurring with their staff members. In the qualitative descriptive case study, the district's campus department heads of the selected campuses were scheduled for an interview time, where 19 open-ended questions were asked to those individuals to answer honestly and express their concerns, perceptions of effectiveness, and knowledge of PLCs that are implemented within the district. The campus department heads, as well as administration, and central office personnel were part of the semistructured qualitative study. The leadership group consisted of district personnel, principals, administrators, or any leader who organizes and works with teachers. Their viewpoint was vital in understanding the climate during collaboration, and how they come together for the success of the students. Those leadership members selected for the study were from the middle schools in the district as well as all high schools.

The data collection of the interviews was all on a voluntary basis. At any time if any of the invited participants did not want to participate, they were told that they did not have to respond to the interview.

Data Analysis

According to Leavy (2017), data analysis is gathering data in an organizational manner in a process of collecting and analyzing the data. The data collected to address the research questions for the interview were analyzed by the individual response, category, and for or by its effectiveness in the study. The research questions are aligned with the literature review as well as the methodology selected for the study (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). As the qualitative data were collected and analyzed, patterns, themes and categories were generated to analyze with the responses collected and tied with the research. The application, Dedoose, was used to assist with

the data analysis of qualitative research. It assisted with importing the information collected, the excerpt and code sections of text. Microsoft Word converted the recorded interviews that were uploaded to Dedoose. The interview data were transcribed verbatim to preserve losing any important data (Leavy, 2017). As per Saldaña and Omasta (2016), the interviews are utilized to obtain the participant's outlook on the study as well as to gather enough data for the study. The individuals involved in the interviews are their own experts in the educational field. The results are presented in a narrative form followed by a table that correlate with the information collected.

Ethical Considerations

Once approval was granted by the Abilene Christian University Instructional Review Board, the participants were provided with a letter of consent to be signed before having the survey to be completed. The participants participating in the qualitative research study that involved an interview were also given a consent form to be signed and it was attached to a letter with specific instructions and the purpose of the interview. All data collected was kept confidential where names of individuals partaking in the survey were not revealed, and the data and information collected were saved on an external hard drive that was evaluated and transcribed. For the qualitative data collected, the app, Microsoft Word, was used to transcribe the data. Dedoose (2022) was used to import data such as audio and transcripts. Dedoose (2002) has many security measures to ensure the privacy and security of the gathered data, and the data security controls that are recommended by the IRB are similar to the data security features of Dedoose. Each participant was notified of the purpose and utilization of the information gained, autonomy, and confidentiality of this research. To avoid any conflict of interest, I did not use anyone from the district I currently work for, nor did I use staff that I appraised or had direct contact with. They did not participate in the interview or study that I am conducting.

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study are that some of the potential participants from the selected campuses who have received the email to participate in the interview will decline to participate, but there was enough volunteers to obtain a valued collection of data. The individuals selected to participate in the study were honest and forthcoming with their answers to the interview. Another is that the term PLC is used in the district but is not conducted as thoroughly as described by the literature review, instead, it can be compared to a PLC lite or a meeting. The term PLC is used throughout the district, and many may know the meaning, but proper implementation and support of administration due to time and resources are lacking.

Limitations

The number of individuals selected throughout the district gave a more controlled and greater participation in in-depth interviews. A limitation was not supporting teacher responses with their actual campus or district data. In the previous year, I was employed as an administrator at one of the campuses in District "A," I was conscientious and careful to avoid bias when interpreting results and to encourage an honest response from the participants.

Delimitations

The delimitations of the study were that the population was restricted to one district in South Texas. The district selected served a high percentage of low social-economic students, Hispanics, and not a diverse social-economical population. Only a selected few campuses and a selected few district personnel were invited to participate in the study to gain focused participation and great depth from the information gathered, thus not obtaining interviews from a larger sample. The interviews were delimited to 12 participants, which included administrators and department heads.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to develop an understanding and expectation of PLCs in a large district in South Texas. It also ensured that the study, research, and surveys reflect a true measure of PLCs. The qualitative descriptive study of the recorded and transcribed interviews outline the patterns and by analyzing, the data collected through codes (Saldaña & Omasta, 2016). The qualitative data reflected the four research questions proposed in the earlier chapter that guided the research and study. The interviews conducted with the staff members of District "A" reflected their thoughts and opinions on personal skills, team skills, as well as student development, and success. The design of this study focused on selecting those individuals involved in PLCs at their campus and at the district level who desire to have an impact on student success and the acceptance of change in their academic venue to ensure that there is student success.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study on PLC's in a large Texas public school district was to examine if the Hispanic staff at this district perceive if PLCs are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom as well as providing the support and steps outlined in a PLC. Additionally, this study sought to gain and understand the perceptions of department heads, administrators and educators' perception of how PLC elements, characteristics, and three big ideas that guide a team when collaborating in a large district. Qualitative data were from a large district in South Texas of Hispanic administrators, department heads and core subject coordinators. Open-ended interviews composed of 19 questions assemble the data. The individuals that I interviewed were done on a one-on-one interview.

This chapter is divided into three sections: sources of data collection, participant information, and thematic analyses. The first section provides demographic details and information collected about the participants. Data points gathered from the interviews are presented in the second section. The third section is an analysis of the themes that surfaced during the interviews and observations.

Data collection and analysis protocols presented in the previous chapter was conducted adhering to ACU IRB standards (Appendix E). Twelve Hispanic department heads, administrators and coordinators were invited to participate in the study. Each individual was given a time to meet and consent to participate in a 19-question interview. Each participant provided their demographics for the study (see Table 5).

Table 5

Participants Demographics

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Years in education
P1	30	Female	Hispanic	8
P2	47	Female	Hispanic	17
P3	55	Male	Hispanic	30
P4	54	Female	Hispanic	26
P5	54	Female	Hispanic	29
P6	50	Female	Hispanic	29
P7	32	Female	Hispanic	4
P8	46	Male	Hispanic	12
P9	49	Female	Hispanic	20
P10	34	Female	Hispanic	7
P11	34	Male	Hispanic	11
P12	61	Female	Hispanic	30

Twelve individuals out of 3,297 district staff members that were interviewed, all were of Hispanic descent. Nine were female and three were male. The range of educational experience was from 4 years of teaching all the way to 30 years of teaching and administrative experience.

A qualitative descriptive study was used in this research. The first phase of data collection consisted of receiving the school superintendent's consent to conduct the study (see Appendix C). Each participant was provided via email with the informed consent (see Appendix E) to conduct the research and obtain his or her written permission to participate in the study.

Once consent was obtained, each participant was given a day and time that interviews would be conducted. The interviews with the 12 individuals were conducted individually and in person at an agreed meeting location. Consent to participate was received from all 12 of the invited interviewers. The audio for each interview was recorded to ensure the accuracy of the transcript. Detailed notes were taken during each interview, which allowed for follow-up questions when needed. Each of the interviews lasted approximately 40–60 minutes. Each participant was assigned a letter and number to protect his or her confidentiality. The data collected was coded and analyzed using Dedoose. Dedoose identified the most common keywords or phrases directly from the participant's dialogue. I notated the most commonly used words. Dedoose was used for coding to help identify patterns within all the interviews.

The interview questions that all participants completed were aligned to the four research questions guiding the study they are as follows:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC creates a shared mission, vision, values, and goals which are all focused on student learning?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of PLC participants' perceptions of whether the PLC is results-oriented?

RQ4: The yearly implementation of the STAAR Test scores has increased except for one year due to COVID: In what way do you believe PLCs have affected this change?

Presentation of Data and Findings

Sixteen out of the 19 interview questions asked to the participants aligned to coincide with one of the four research questions presented above. The other three were more of demographics and knowledge of PLCs.

Research Question 1

Interview questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 gathered information on the knowledge of the shared mission, vision and goals of the campus or district. The questions used were to see if the shared mission, vision, and goals of the campus supports PLCs and supports student success.

3. What are the shared mission, vision, and goals of your school/district?

4. When developing goals for students based on data, are the shared mission, vision, and goals focused on student learning?

5. During PLCs, do you align the goals mission and vision with the curriculum outlined and created by the collaboration of the members of the PLC?

6. Do you see the relationships between the mission, vision, and goals of the district that implement student success?

Research Question 2

For RQ2, interview questions 7, 12, and 18 focused on the perceptions of the individuals interviewed on whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning.

7. Who is part of your professional learning community?

8. During a PLC, has there been a time that your instruction was influenced by a colleague?

9. Does the PLC agree to disagree on the effectiveness of the PLC and collaborative inquiry?

12. How do you contribute to the development of PLCs and what do you contribute to continuous improvement?

18. How have PLCs shaped your classroom instruction and helped improve student success?

Research Question 3

Interview Questions for RQ3 were to help answer if the PLCs are results-oriented, data driven and target specific.

10. How has your PLC helped students become successful and is it action oriented?

13. What type of data do you collect for the team and how is it utilized?

16. Does the data drive instruction? If so, how? (RQ 3)

17. How are PLCs different from a grade level, content, or faculty meeting?

Research Question 4

Interview questions that supported RQ4 were 11, 14, and 15. The questions gathered information on how it helps increase test scores and the results of implementation of PLCs.

11. Do you feel that the PLCs conducted has reflected on the STAAR scores? If so, how?

14. How are data utilized when meeting with your team? How often is it used and is it different for every demographic?

15. What are the processes you use to create, develop, or sustain PLCs focusing on Hispanics?

Emerging Themes

After conducting an analysis of the interview transcripts, coding, and the assistance of Dedoose, three main themes appeared among all of the interviews of the perception of PLCs. The common themes that emerged were collaborative culture, data driven instruction, and implementation factors.

Theme 1: Collaborative Culture

One common thread among the participants' responses was collaborative culture. Collaboration is when members of a school that work together interdependently to impact their classroom practice (DuFour et al., 2016). Collaborative culture was one of the most common

attributes given about the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning. The theme of collaborative culture corresponds to RQ2, if PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning. Overall, administrators and teachers indicated the importance of collaboration for effective PLCs. Words and phrases such as "working together," "common goals," "sharing ideas," "professional growth," "helping each other to improve," "willing to change," "engaging in collaboration," "relationships," and "do what's best for students" were repeatedly stated throughout the interview process (see Table 6).

Table 6

Collaborative Culture

Collaborative culture	*n* of codes
Collaboration	17
Trust amongst team	4
Willing to Change	5
Sharing of ideas/lessons	8

When asked about the collaborative culture of the members in PLCs, P1, a department head at one of the campuses, alluded to collaboration of colleagues sharing ideas, experiences, lessons and the information and knowledge shared at professional trainings of their own colleagues. PLCs are also a time that the communities share lessons that work along with their experience and impact it has with our demographic. P1 stated:

> When certain teachers are given the opportunity to attend a content level professional development, they often share in PLCs what they or we learn at the trainings. This allows our peers to see if it is something that they want to use with their students.

P6, an ELA department chair, shared their view on PLCs and how the collaborative culture contributes and is part of the key values in an effective PLC as well as the student success at their campus. All those contributions assist with the collaboration amongst their peers and the success of the students. By sharing as a group and as a department, it helps the group work together to come up with a viable plan. The PLC often share what they would like to implement with their students and if change is what is needed, we support one another. P6 stated that:

> PLC helps students become successful because as a department we are able to discuss what works with our demographic and what has not worked. Since we have been working together for a long time, we can have those conversations where we can agree to disagree.

P7, a social studies department head who is new to the education field with 4 years' experience, felt that collaborating with her department and colleagues helped guide her lessons and allowed for her educational experience to grow as a teacher. P7 felt that there was a sense of trust that they can rely on one another's experiences and expertise and collaborate within the team, which was the core subject group to come up with what is best for the students. When planning for the groups subject area, P7 was often influenced and awed by her colleagues. When the discussion starts, it gets the group to communicate and collaborate and for her to get ideas from them. P7 went on to share that:

> We all come together in agreement and we like to be open minded in our PLC's. There is a sense of trust that we can rely on one another experiences and expertise and collaborate within our team our, our core group to come up with what is best for the kids.

Participant P8, an administrator, shared their experience with trust within their PLC. Their colleagues learned to work together throughout the years as educators, to develop a bond that turned into trust, and to accept change even when they did not agree as long as it was for the

better of the students. Learning to trust is a process that does not occur overnight. It happens over time. Once this trust within a PLC was developed an understanding and the building of a strong relationship, that was when trust happens and the group learns to agree to disagree, communicate and continue to learn from one another. The individuals in the group need to learn each other's personalities, learning styles, and be~~ing~~ patient with one another in order to work cohesively. P8 stated that:

> In our PLC, there is a level of trust within our group. But then again that trust does not happen overnight. It starts with learning to work with each other, of course, with us it starts from day one when you are building your rapport with your team, and your colleagues.

Participant P11, a school improvement facilitator at one of the campuses, expressed the collaborative culture of sharing lesson during a PLC. PLCs at her campus are held weekly and it is designated as time to plan, evaluate data, come up with interventions as needed. During this time, they take any productive ideas that any of the teachers and or their colleagues are willing to share and tweak them to accommodate their students and their classes. According to P11, collaboration, especially at the campus level, does occur at the campus quite frequently. For collaboration, P11 stated:

> We come together as a team once or twice a week to plan on what our students need, tweak lessons, and even look for ways to improve our lessons. That only works when we work together and collaborate as a team and as a unit.

As a core team and core grade level at P11's campus, they always find ways on how to make it a collaborative learning and focusing on how to offer more to the students either by tutoring those that do not understand or those who did not have gains in the day's lesson. Participant P11 continued to say:

> When we have the whole core team at our school, it becomes a collaborative learning space, our team is trusted with changes and vice versa, the team is open to changes especially with the new STAAR test that came out. With the new revised state test, we have to lean on each other to come up with new lessons.

Participant P12, an administrator at one of the high schools, shared a story of when they went to observe one of their more productive PLCs. As an administrator, running the PLC and guiding the members, there was a lot of trust, sharing of ideas, and lessons. Because he was receptive of this, PLC influenced his view of the effectiveness of collaboration in a productive PLC. P12 and shared:

> I was in a PLC and just observed how one of the teachers was sharing how she was implementing a new resource that helped her students understand and comprehend the lesson and concept. Her explanation was so selling that it persuaded some of the other teachers to go and try the new concept.

Participant P3, a campus core teacher, felt there was no collaboration in the PLCs. The PLCs were more micromanaged from administrators than from the teachers and committee. The perception of PLCs was more of dictating how to teach, to follow a timeline set by central office with no regards to teacher input P3 stated that:

> There is no collaboration of the members of their PLC. It is all basically instructed for us to do what the administrators and coordinators want us to do. It is top down, micromanaged, and mandated instead of working together for what we think will work.

The interviewee's comments on collaborative culture was one of the most common attributes given about the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning. It also supported the perceptions of PLC that their needs to be open communication, professional development ideas shared and

support for a collaborative culture. They also shared that needs to be trust, collaboration sharing and be open to change to ensure that there is a collaborative culture.

Theme 2: Data-Driven Instruction

The administrators, district coordinators, department heads and teachers who are participants in this study indicated that PLCs generated from data driven instruction. Data-driven instruction is the process and tools that educators use to assess data that identify students' strengths and deficiencies and utilize the finding to enhance their practice (TopHat, n.d.). The theme of data-driven instruction corresponds to RQ3, the PLC participants' perceptions of whether the PLC was results-oriented. The participants used words and phrases, such as "data drives instruction," "goals are based on data," "engagement of students by response," "looking for growth in data," "areas to improve," "disaggregation of data," and "specific target areas." These were descriptors given on data-driven instruction and were repetitively stated throughout the interview process (see Table 7). This also supports how data drives the lesson and decisions that are best for students.

Table 7

Data Driven Instruction

Data	*n* of codes
Result oriented	6
Disaggregation of data	13
Target areas	4
Data driven	3
Areas to improve	4

According to P1, the data collected are a vital piece for PLC. They are what drives instruction, and the district uses a program called DMAC to gather and analyze data at this large South Texas district. P1 stated:

> We use a program called DMAC to collect our data. This allows us to see the different levels of our students and it narrows it down to the Texas Essential Knowledge of Skills, (TEKS) and it is so specific that it even shows what questions that the kids are struggling with on the designated assessment we are looking at during our PLC.

P1 continued to share that the information they gather is used to go back and understand what the kids are struggling with and how the data allows for them to see where certain lessons have to be changed or revised to reach the students so that they can understand the lesson therefore enhancing success.

P2's perspective showed how data drives instruction and guides the lesson; the PLC allows for collaboration and the development of intervention to get the student to achieve success in the targeted area. When the PLC members get together, they look at the data, they listen to their colleagues' strategies that are successful, and they take that information and knowledge to adapt the lesson. They also step back to reflect on what could be done differently to have the student master the lesson. Once major disaggregation of the data is completed, P2 and the team look at all of that information and formulate interventions to develop the students on specific target areas. P2 said:

> We look at the student's data and we use it to drive our instruction and our lessons. If a colleague's scores show that their students are performing well, then we take the planning time to have them teach us what they did for that lesson.

It is not only areas in need of improvement that major disaggregation of data is utilized, but the areas of strength are also analyzed and sparked conversations for improvement. The team

is looking at strengths and weaknesses and as well as looking at how they need to fill the gaps for those students who need help in the targeted area and to analyze the data to see what level the students are performing. As P3 stated:

> The data are used to guide my team and me on what we need to teach our students. The data are what drives us to improve our student's knowledge and how to teach in different ways to improve our students' scores. Then we come up with a plan, an intervention.

P3 also commented on how data are collected and how it is analyzed to address areas that students struggle and areas where they did very well:

> Using the data that are given to us, we look for the areas and lesson where the students lacked understanding. In our department, we discuss what we can do and go back and include a mini lesson or strategically place them in groups for them to learn from their peers.

Change not only occurs with collaborative culture in PLC, but it also extends and influences the teachers planning and for the curriculum to change according to the results of test scores and data disaggregation. The way instruction is taught contributes to dissecting the data to measure what the students learn, and it also informs the teachers if there were gains as a result of change. Data influences how they teach, and it also gives them insight on how to improve the way students learn, gains in their scores and for them to be successful, especially with the state test, STAAR. P5 stated:

> If there are some changes in the scores or the data has varied, we come together and make changes to our curriculum and our lessons. We have seen an improvement in STAAR scores this year due to meeting in PLCs, data disaggregation and revamping our lessons.

Collection of data is what drives instruction and allows for change in lessons. The data collected from the state mandated test provide a comparison of campuses with similar

demographics and size; they compare districts to the state percentage for every test and demographics. P7 shared that it looks at all students to ensure that there is progress and improvement in all students as a whole, but also through the different demographics. Once data are analyzed and areas of improvement are identified, a plan is formulated; this is where mini lessons can be inputted into the lesson for the needed additional instruction that was missed. The campus uses DMAC continuously throughout the school year to collect the data and in the PLCs the team looks at what the state is asking for, not only just to get the kids to pass, but that those who passed get to a mastery level. The data are compared to the states' passing percentage rate using the tools and data of the TEKs in the district's assessment to see if the students can meet or pass the states' passing percentage. P7 shared "The data will also tell us what the students are having trouble with or what is needed to reach a mastery rating."

Additionally, it is not only diving in and data or changing lessons, but also sometimes targeting a specific TEKS or making sure that the student is mastering the concept. When the group meets in PLCs, the concept of data is a part of the specific targeted area, and in collaboration with colleagues, that is when the educator takes the lesson gather input from the group and utilize the data to address missing concepts. The data drive all instructions because it is needed to know specifically where the limitations are, where the growths are, and how to make changes. In the PLCs P8's group targets specific TEKS, they always want to make sure that the TEKS will be addressed correctly, and then of course when looking at data the result will show that the students are mastering the concepts, or the lessons need to be adjusted. P8 said:

> I contribute to PLC's in giving a firsthand account on us working together as a team. This time allows us to see what areas that need to be addressed; it is not what I feel that needs to be addressed, but what the data tells me that I need to address.

In having a target specific area such as the STAAR test, P10 shared how benchmarks are

aligned with the concepts of the state test. During PLCs the analyzation of data, making changes are ways to improve student-passing percentage. The STAAR scores mostly influence the changes in curriculum and lessons; it tells the teachers what the student has learned and where they are missing some concepts. It also tells what areas the students scored the lowest. It also tells us where improvements need to be made. Data are what drives instruction and guides the teachers to adjust their lessons as needed. Therefore, the team sees and utilizes the PLCs and comments that the PLCs are used to drive instruction through the assessments given and the data. P10 states:

> If you have areas that are in need of growth, you need to address those areas so that the students show success. If you have areas of success, you need embrace those areas of success and incorporate rigor to show for additional growth and a level of mastery.

According to P11, PLCs are result oriented and focused on what is lacking help to drive the collaboration. Being result oriented keeps the educators focused on the students understanding of what is taught, and it helps to figure out what the students are not learning and what they are lacking. The PLC is where the group creates their plan and then implements the plan. It can always be modified depending on how good or bad the results are and then it can be repeated again by coming back to the PLC and adjusted as needed. P11 explains that:

> Focusing PLCs on being result oriented helps make my students a lot more successful in influencing me and helping me adjust the lessons in my classroom. Looking at the data can help pinpoint what we need to focus on in the classroom and the needs of our student's.

P12, the school improvement facilitator at one of the high schools, had a similar response to P11, where they make decision based on results and then focus on revamping the lesson. As the educators look at the results and the data that measure the knowledge of the student, it shows

that some students are not doing very well while others are borderline, they look at the results of the data so that they can focus on what the students are lacking or missed during instruction. This helps outline how each student scored and how to reteach the lesson not learned. To dig a bit deeper into the data, color bands are used to measure growth, regression, and measurement of the student's knowledge. When using color bands, certain colors represent percentages of where a student stands; did they not do well, did they not pass but have the potential to pass, or did they pass but missed mastery of the measured assignment. The data are also utilized with other data that is collected, such as common assessments, and research information. P12 states:

> Once data is collected, we ask ourselves, are the students getting it or not? I collect informational data from past STAAR test – the state test, and then I compare it to mini assessments that target the same TEKS and adjust the lesson. I put all the data I collect into color banded information and then give it to the teacher, so they are ready to go during PLCs.

The interviewees' comments and analyzed key terms on data disaggregation was one of the three most common attributes given on what drives a PLC. Information gathered facilitates the establishment of data disaggregation that is focused on learning. It also supports the perceptions of those interviewed that data plays a key role in conjunction with collaboration, change and sharing during PLCs. The PLC facilitates and drives its collaboration through data driven instruction. The use of data determines what students need to learn and that teachers need to work on revamping the lesson. Data plays a key role in formulating a plan for improvement or for sharing what works in the classroom.

Theme 3: Implementation Factors

In their interviews the participants described the implementation factors that hinder or make a PLC successful. Implementation factors correspond to RQ2, if PLC facilitates the

establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning. It relates to RQ2 in that there needs to be collaboration as well as support, and goals and data that create a collaborative culture focused on learning. If PLCs are done incorrectly, the meeting will not be productive. While having collaboration, goal setting, structure, and data evaluation can have a positive impact on the campus as well as the success of the students resulting in a positive and successful PLC. If there is not administrative support or guidelines that reflect a PLC, then it will result in a negative, unproductive PLC. The interviewed participants expressed their thoughts about implementation factors emphasizing on the following key words and phrases: "implementation," "perceptions," "establishment," "inconsistency," "change," and "having a plan." (see Table 8).

Table 8

Implementation Factors

Implementation factors	*n* of codes
Perceptions, establishments	5
Implementation	5
Inconsistency	2
Change	5

P1 shared how the implementation factors of a PLC can either be positive or negative depending on the support from administration. When there is structure, administrative support, data ready, and everyone is on the right page, PLCs can be very successful and help with our instruction, which in turn helps with student success. Sometimes PLCs are not successful due to change, no structure, or support from administration. A PLC at P1's campus is scheduled on certain days, and then all of a sudden it is canceled for no particular reason causing the team not

to plan or collaborate on the goals set by the campus and the team. P1 stated in their interview that:

> The change, not of an opinion or lesson - is not what I am talking about, but change in time or change in the itinerary, frustrates the group or hinders the PLC. Another issue and/or concern is people running late, which tends to slow down our time to discuss what we need to discuss.

As mentioned by P1 on the subject of time, P7 had a similar negative implementation factor on the use of time and time management for PLCs. Administrative support is key to keeping the structure and alignment of the PLC and the team needs to abide by the time set for these meaningful PLCs. When staff or administration does not attend on time, that is time wasted. P7 stated:

> I feel that there is not good usage of the time that we have together. Either people are showing up late to our PLC, or it starts as a general meeting and then switches over to a PLC. Time is set assigned to plan, collaborate, and look at data, but often it is used for giving us messages or trainings that come from central office.

P6 feels that if there is a positive relationship and open and honest communication with administration and with the team, it has a positive impact on the implementation of PLCs. The feeling that PLCs help students become successful is due to the trust and collaborative culture within the team. As a department, they are able to discuss what they would like to implement with their students, they feel they have the support and the time to execute a proper PLC. P6 continued to say that:

> When we see that something is not working, we do express that to our administrators, counselors, or district personnel. I feel that with the trust that we have with our team, it

> allows us to work together and to make changes that we need, with the help with administration.

P8 shared the frustrations resulting from the lack of support from administrators, the coordinators, and those who come in late. Administration needs to ensure that educators are held accountable for the time allotted and when it comes to the structure in a PLC. According to P8, teachers in their PLC are coming in late, which in turn makes the PLC short on time. To P8, PLCs are unstructured, no leadership from administration, and it becomes a waste of time. P8 stated:

> When we go to our weekly PLCs with our core department, there is nothing ready, we sit waiting for administration to show up, the data is not targeted, and it becomes a makeshift meeting. It becomes time that is wasted and a few of get frustrated.

P8 also stated that the term PLC is used very loosely and is used to describe regular meetings that share general announcements, such as, for discipline, to discuss events occurring within the upcoming week, or any information that needs to be channeled down from central office. P8 shared that:

> PLCs, in my opinion, are labeled incorrectly in the school setting, especially in my campus. Just because we give it that name of PLCs does not mean we are talking about students. Sometimes they are used as regular meetings; times to discuss student behavior or what needs to be done.

According to P12, PLCs can be successful, but they need to be properly conducted and there needs to be a leader who can monitor and guide the teachers. If the administrator is not present or has no vested interest, it will result in a negative or an unsuccessful PLC. P12 stated:

> If PLCs lack proper monitoring, the PLC will not be successful. If there is not an administrator present to monitor attendance of the committee, teachers will tend to not

participate, nor show up. Many of the staff will take advantage and head back to their room.

P12 also noticed in the PLCs that if the lead teacher or a strong individual is not allowing other teachers to participate in the discussion and share their input, the trust is lost and the others do not want to listen. P12 said:

I think norms need to be set at the beginning of the year to have consistency. Meetings need to start on time, and everyone should be given an allotted time to share their knowledge on the subject, if not it becomes one-sided, and no one wants to participate.

The participant's perception on the implementation factors that hinder or make a PLC successful are the lack of support from administration, reflecting on the time set for meetings, and ensuring that they stay on task and do not include other topics. If PLCs are done incorrectly, the end goal of a PLC will be unsuccessful. If PLCs are done with validity, having a collaborative, goal setting, and data evaluation, it will have a positive impact on the campus as well as the success of the students, thus becoming a productive PLC.

Hispanics

Hispanic students make up 93.46% of this large district in south Texas, question 15 was asked to get the feedback on the processes used to create, develop, or sustain PLCs focusing on Hispanic students. The following responses were noted by the participants on their productive planning and how they address the Hispanic population is learning style and ensure that they are successful. All individuals interviewed were of Hispanic ethnicity and shared that they have over 90% Hispanic students either in their classroom or in the district.

According to P4, the majority of the students at the campus are Hispanic so tweaking the lesson to accommodate those students is not for a few, but for the majority of the students in the class. The campus uses different ways to reach the Hispanic students, whether cognitive or

diverse instruction is provided or the basic development of the English language through word walls. P4 said:

> For the Hispanic students in my class, we have to develop their English while still gauging their level of understanding and filling in any holes that they might have. We base it on the data collected and what ideas that have worked with our colleagues.

P5 was sharing how in the Hispanic population, which is 98% of the campus, there are different levels that a student speaks, reads, and writes in English. Some of those non-English speaking students are either first year immigrants while others who have been in the United States 6 plus years, but still do not speak English. Depending on the level of the English language, further dissection and differentiation is needed when providing resources for those students. A targeted lesson is created to implement diverse lessons for the Emergent Bilingual students, those that speak Spanish at home and with their friends. The determination of the student's level of English, and how to tailor the specific diverse lesson is done through a collaborative-cultured, data-driven PLC. The group looks at data and analyzes it to find ways to help them. P5 shared:

> It is difficult because most of our students are Hispanic, so we really do not adjust the lessons for that group we adjust it for everyone. We do that by using diagrams; teach them how to use their dictionary, because when they take a test they can use their bilingual dictionary to translate.

P6 shared that when working with Hispanics it is all about being culturally diverse, knowing where the kids come from, learning to integrate their culture into the lessons, and avoiding an inherent bias. If the student is testing and they have no cultural experience, they will not know what the passage or image is talking about, causing them to not understand what is being asked or how to respond to the question. P6 stated:

> We need to make sure that we know that we are culturally diverse, making sure that we know that the stories that we are going to use are culturally relevant. They need to be appropriate for our culture, for our grade level, and the development of the students.

According to P7, many of the strategies that help foster and relate to the Hispanic population have come from open dialogue, communication with her team in PLCs, and observing her peers. When the student feels comfortable in the classroom setting and the teachers give them the educational support they need, this will assist their students to gain a better understanding of the lesson. In addition, speaking their language when they do not understand helps them feel comfortable in their classroom and more confident when doing their work. P7 shared in the interview how they help support Hispanic students in the classroom:

> One of my colleagues was teaching in both languages. As I teach them, sometimes I mix in the Spanish so that they can understand, but I remind them that they have to start using their dictionaries and other resources in order to get better and to understand the content as well as the vocabulary.

P10 was visiting a classroom where the majority of the students spoke in Spanish. She noticed the visual stimuli, such as word walls, posters and anchor charts were utilized to help the students understand the translation of words. The students were paired up with a classmate of the same speaking level. It allowed for them to communicate with one another in both English and Spanish. This allowed them to understand the concept from a peer and in their native language, but at the same time, they were encouraged to speak more in English. P10 also observed various the strategies the teacher was using with the Hispanic students. She later shared with her team during a PLC on what she saw. P10 used the time to share and implement a strategy that she saw that was working for her Hispanic students. She shared how the class and the teacher used visual aids, manipulatives. Also, there needed to be collaboration amongst the students such as sharing

and talking with their peers to reach the Hispanic population. The Hispanic students understand the lesson and simple terms in English as well as carry simple conversations with their peers but need more guidance either from their peers or from other resources. P10 stated:

> They may understand everything that I say in English, but they need to be able to feel a sense of trust with their classmates and be able to talk about what they are learning in class. I then look at how they are doing and most of the time I see that it works, and I let it be, but if it does not then I have to readjust so they understand.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to examine the perceptions of 12 Hispanic educators in a large South Texas public school district to perceive if PLCs are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom as well as providing the support and steps outlined in a PLC. This chapter was an in-depth report of the data gathered from 12 interviews done in person and one to one. The individuals interviewed were told that they would be recorded. Once the recording was completed, it was transcribed and uploaded to Dedoose. An analysis of the data revealed three common themes: collaborative culture, data driven instruction, and implementation factors that helped form the perceptions of the PLC participants. Since Hispanics make over 90% of the population at the large district in South Texas, it also expressed the perception of how PLCs help different demographics and the success of Hispanic students. There are various strategies that the interviewees stated that were discussed in their PLCs to help with those students.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to examine if the Hispanic staff at this district will understand if PLCs are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom as well as providing the support and steps outlined in a PLC. However, there is limited research on Hispanic staff at a large district and their perception if PLCs are meaningful and structured to support success in the classroom. District educational employees have different views on what defines a PLC and the implementation of a PLC at their campus or within the district. The district supported and fostered PLCs at the campus and district level. To continue with the district's plan of fostering PLCs, administration needs to implement systems that are conducive to PLCs as they lead the committee to engage positively and collaboratively to support the needs of the group. They need to provide support and build on the culture of collaboration to exchange knowledge and ideas (Bouchamma et al., 2019). Not only is it the responsibility of administration, but also the team members who play a vital role in the flexibility that determines if there will be changes that produce positive results.

When utilizing student data, the educator can plan for interventions that improve the achievement and success of the student (Burns et al., 2018). As reported in the previous chapter, there was an increase in STAAR scores. The district personnel reviewed attributes that increased the scores to the common planning, the data, and collaboration of the campus. The district where this study was conducted implements PLC at their campuses and focuses on data gathered from STAAR.

This qualitative descriptive study aimed to identify teacher and administrator perceptions about PLC implementation for professional growth, increasing student achievement, and the effects of participation on improving instructional practices. Qualitative research was used to gather, analyze, and interpret the data from 12 administrators, core coordinators and department

heads through one-on-one interviews. All participants interviewed were Hispanic and service Hispanic students either at their campus or at the district. A set of 19 questions were given to all participants that consented to the interview. The interviews were conducted to gather a perception of the Hispanic staff member's PLC background and knowledge base.

The data collected through interviews were to answer four research questions:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC creates a shared mission, vision, values, and goals which are all focused on student learning?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of PLC participants as to whether the PLC facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of PLC participants' perceptions of whether the PLC is results-oriented?

RQ4: The yearly implementation of the STAAR Test scores has increased except for 1 year due to COVID: In what way do you believe PLCs have affected this change?

The study involved interviewing 12 participants individually to gain their perception and knowledge on PLCs to perceive if they are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom. The study also gained the perception of those interviewed if the steps outlined in a PLC are structured and provide positive results.

Chapter 4 is divided into three sections: sources of data collection, participant information, and thematic analyses, where the data collected and an analysis from each component of the study was presented. Three common themes were found from the analyzed data along with the research literature. The three common themes are collaborative culture, data driven instruction and implementation factors that helped form the perceptions of the PLC participants. This chapter will provide districts with recommendations on how to have meaningful and productive PLCs. This chapter provides administrators and district personnel

with recommendations on how to gain insight on the perception that the PLCs can be meaningful and structured and that can lead to student achievement when PLCs are implemented correctly.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

An analysis of the data revealed three common themes collaborative culture, data driven instruction, and implementation factors that helped form the perceptions of the PLC participants. There were many similarities to the findings of the participants' perception of PLC and those in past literature. The three common themes touched two of the three of the big ideas; collaborative culture and focus on the result. As per DuFour and Reeves (2016), there are five elements that can make a PLC genuine. They are: (a) working together in a collaborative team and taking responsibility for student learning; (b) coming up with a viable curriculum so students acquire knowledge, skills, and dispositions; (c) utilizing an assessment process; (d) using the results of common formative assessments; and (e) coming up with a plan for intervention based on the data. Senge offers five important disciplines to create a learning organization similar to that of a PLC, personal mastery, building shared vision, mental models, systems thinking, and team learning (Senge, 2006). Once again, the common words that came from the perception of the individuals interviewed are similar to Dufour and Reeves five elements and Senge's five important disciplines. The five elements of Dufour and Reeves are similar to the interviewed participants expressed perceptions on PLCs emphasizing on the following key words and phrases: "collaborative," "student learning," "knowledge," "results," and "plan based on data." Senge's five important discipline terms are similar to the interviewed participants expressed perceptions on PLC those key words and phrases "shared vision," "collaborative," "mind-set," "influences," and "analyze."

Collaborative Culture

The theme of collaborative culture corresponds to RQ2, the perception that PLC

facilitates the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on learning. In relations to past literature and according to Jones and Thessin (2017), PLCs are for continuous improvement through collaboration within the group to facilitate learning, to prepare lessons and resources that assist with the development of assessments and analyze data for improving their teaching and their practices for the better of the student. As per individual P6, the collaborative culture at their campus is about the PLC contributions of ideas, focus on learning, and analyzing data for the improvement of their lessons that contribute to an effective PLC and student success. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the three big ideas of PLC are to focus on learning, build a collaborative culture, and focus on the results (Beddoes et al., 2020). The participant's perception of PLCs was also similar to the three big ideas, the words tagged in the study from the individuals interviewed were very similar: collaborative culture, results driven, and focus on improvement. According to past literature from Doğan and Adams (2018), the essentials for PLC, such as teacher collaboration, focusing on student learning, and adjusting the instruction needed to improve student achievement and student success. The common phrases and words from the interviews, such as collaborative culture, the collaboration within the PLCs, help the group focus on student learning. As collaboration occurs focusing on student learning, based on student improvement, that increases teacher capacity and efficacy (Gwinn & Watts-Taffe, 2017).

The results of the participants interviewed indicated that teachers believed that a collaborative culture is needed in PLCs. The collaborative culture of having open discussions, reviewing data, formulating a curriculum that is viable, and how proficient work is measured. The teachers interviewed perceived that all members of the PLC need to work together to come up with targeted results that came from common goals set for the needs of the students.

Data Driven Instruction

The second common theme from the perception of the individuals interviewed is that of

data-driven instruction. The theme corresponds with RQ3, the perceptions of PLC participants' of whether the PLC is results oriented. In relation to past literature, utilizing data correctly can cause an effective PLC, this occurs when data are disaggregated with adjustment to improve instruction (DuFour, 2015). As mentioned by those interviewed, data are what helps them improve instruction, allowing teachers to know where adjustments in instruction are needed and data is also used to measure what a student masters. As per Dufour and Richard (2019), there are four questions that individuals in PLCs ask when analyzing the results: (a) Which students were unable to demonstrate proficiency on this assessment?; (b) Which students are highly proficient and would benefit from extended or accelerated learning?; (c) Did one or more colleagues have excellent results in an area where my students struggled? What can I learn from my colleagues to improve my individual practice?; and (d) Is there an area in which none of us achieved the results we expected? What do we need to learn as a team to teach this skill or concept more effectively? Those four questions are how high-performing PLCs approach data (Dufour, 2015). As per the results of the interview, questions in correlation to the four questions that needed to be asked during PLCs are very similar to what is being used in the districts PLC. The educators look at the results to see those unable to achieve proficiency and those who reached proficiency. The data measures the knowledge of the student, analyzing the results help the educators focus on what the students are lacking during the lessons instruction or for those meeting targeted results, and allows educators to adjust their instruction and add more rigor. The participants stressed that data are important to have in PLCs, but when it is not given, it can hinder an effective PLC. If the data are not given or analyzed to help teachers find out what is not working it becomes wasted time (Wasta, 2017).

In order to develop or improve skills, the members of the PLC group need to understand the data in order to have a supportive and effective PLC that contributes to the development of a

plan for success and implementation (Johnson & Voelkel, 2021). The perception of those individuals is similar to the past literature of Johnson and Voelkel (2021), where the educator's perception is that the data are what drives the instruction, data are used to evaluate the lesson and to make adjustments as needed.

Implementation Factors

Interview questions revealed that participants were familiar with PLCs and the role those educational leaders and administrators play in PLCs. Existing PLC literature has noted that educational leaders need to be strongly focused leaders who are structuring a collaborating environment; the team is on task, data are utilized, and student achievement is occurring within the PLC (Riggins & Knowles, 2020). As mentioned in the past literature from Jones and Thessin (2017), principals of the schools that have knowledge of the definition of PLCs, will have the ability and responsibility of influencing and encouraging the relationships that support the practices and elements needed for an effective PLC. The participants perceived those administrators lacked representation in PLCs as well as setting aside time for PLCs to be efficient. The participants stressed that there was an inconsistency of planned meetings due to other events or the administration not being able to meet. Another concern that the participants expressed frustration about was that there was not enough time provided to meet, due to individuals from the PLC arriving late and/or the administration failing to attend. As mentioned by Farmer (2019), ensuring time is set aside during the workweek for the PLC process allows for collaboration on essential skills, common assessments, and interventions to occur on a weekly basis. Even though time was set, individuals perceived that administration or district coordinators did not fully follow the implementation of PLCs. Leadership not only creates time but also provides clarity and direction during the PLC that aligns with the school's mission, vision, and goals (Farmer, 2019). As told by P10, sometimes there is wasted time, such as waiting for

administration to attend the PLC, the data are not specifically targeting the goals set by the group, therefore, you cannot see what works or does not work in the classroom causing a negative implementation factor and a misused meeting.

The participants expressed frustrations that affect the implementation and participation of effective PLCs. Teachers in the group felt that "time" was an issue. Either the members of group not being on time was not of importance to them or administration rescheduling the PLC due to other events or other topics became a constant struggle and confusion. Another perception that was noted in the interviews was the result of a lack of support from the administration. Administrators did not honor or value the time needed for effective PLCs.

Not all participants expressed frustration, some expressed positive remarks on PLCs. The interviewees shared their perception of effective results, that there was collaboration, the group focused on a targeted result, and administrative support was given when addressing professional growth.

Hispanics

The majority of the staff at the large district in South Texas are Hispanic and the population of Hispanic students in this district is 93%. The participants shared the impact it has on the instructional practices in their meetings and in the classroom with Hispanic students. The participants also discussed the processes used to create, develop, or sustain PLCs focusing on Hispanic students. There is very little research done with this population on PLCs.

Summary of Findings

1. The participants felt that a collaborative culture is key to having a productive PLC. Collaborative culture is having open discussions within the group, reviewing data, formulating a viable curriculum, and coming up with a plan of intervention. In a collaborative culture members of the PLC need to work together to come up with targeted

results that came from common goals set for the needs of the students.

2. In the participants PLCs, Data-Driven instruction is essential in improving student success. Data-driven instruction is the analysis of data collected through student measured assessments that drive and modify lessons as needed. The participants referenced data as the tool needed to measure the knowledge of the students and to guide them when coming up with an action plan or intervention plan.
3. According to the participants, implementation factors need to be consistent. The implementation factors start with having guidelines, administrative support and collaboration of the group. A key element in implementation of PLCs is respecting time. There needs to be time set aside for the PLC members to meet and follow PLC elements and characteristics defined by Dufour.

Limitations

This qualitative descriptive study analysis consisted of data collected through interviews with 12 administrators, department heads, district coordinators, and teachers in one large district in South Texas. Additional research needs to be conducted to further identify areas and PLC characteristics that gather other conclusions to be drawn on the effectiveness of PLCs (Fred et al., 2020). The study was limited to one district, mostly of Hispanic staff and Hispanic students, in South Texas. In addition, the setting and characteristics of PLCs, the time allotted, and focused leadership support need further research (Kruse & Gates, 2016). PLCs are an area that needs continued research and refinement, “True” PLC implementation can happen, but there is always room for growth because this is a journey more than a destination” (Muñoz & Branham, 2016, p. 9).

As an educator and former administrator for District “A,” I am aware of the increase in state standardized test scores and structures of PLCs in the district. I want to understand if there

is a correlation between Hispanic staff members and the utilization of PLCs and whether PLCs are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom. A limitation of the research is that I will be cautious and careful to avoid bias when interpreting results and to encourage an honest response from the participants due to being employed as an administrator in the previous year at one of the campuses in District "A."

Recommendations for PLCs

The findings of this study based on the analysis of the perceptions of the administrators, department heads, district coordinators and teachers are multiple recommendations to improve PLCs at the campus and district level. The recommendations for PLCs include for collaborative culture, data, and implementation factors for both researchers and for practitioners.

Recommendations for PLCs for Researchers

The findings of this study showed that the perceptions of the individuals interviewed recommend that collaborative culture, data, and implementation factors contribute to PLCs and can be meaningful and structured to lead to student achievement when implemented correctly.

Recommendations for Collaborative Culture. A collaborative culture needs to focus on the goals and target areas set by the campus or district. The collected data that are focused on the goals and targets needs to be analyzed to ensure an effective PLC. Data assist with shaping the learning and evaluation of student understanding. The collaborative culture of the members will positively influence PLCs that will lead to student success. For a collaborative culture to occur, the members of the PLC need to have open communication with each other. They need to trust that their group will guide them and share what is in the best interest for student success. With this trust, they will be able to have academic conversations that allow the group to agree to disagree. The interviewees' comments on collaborative culture recommends that the members of the committee need to have open communication, trust, and change.

Recommendations for Disaggregating Data. The PLC group needs to understand how to disaggregate data and use the data to implement lessons and interventions to provide support for the missing concepts and gaps that the students lack. Data are what helps improve instruction, allowing teachers to know where adjustments in instruction need to occur. Teachers, administrators, district personnel need to be well versed in data disaggregation. Data are what is needed to measure what a student master's and how to implement a plan to improve student success. As per the individuals interviewed, they stressed the importance of having data that drive their decisions and their instruction. Disaggregating data are a key component for successful PLCs.

Recommendations for Implementation Factors. The administration needs to take into consideration the time taken away from PLCs for other activities or as meetings to discuss other items that are not in correlation with PLCs. The implementation and participation in an effective PLC are that the administration needs to set norms and structures on how time in spent during PLCs in a large South Texas District. The group needs not only time, but also a strong relationship that puts differences aside to work for the greater needs of the students.

Recommendations for PLCs for Practitioners

The roles of the campus and district members of a PLC play key roles in promoting a collaborative culture, data analysis and the implementation factors contribute to a successful student. The recommendations are gathered from the perceptions of the 12 individuals interviewed on PLCs that provides administrators and district personnel with recommendations on how to gain insight on the perceptions that the PLCs can be meaningful and structured and that can lead to student achievement.

Recommendations for Collaborative Culture. A collaborative culture in a school setting needs goals at the campus or district to be defined by the PLC. The target needs that are

outlined by the committee, is part of the collaborative culture that bring the group to an agreement on what they want to achieve. When the members of the collaborative culture come together, work together to share ideas, and trust the colleagues on what works it will positively influence PLCs which leads to student success. Open communication amongst the team is essential for collaboration and

Recommendations for Data-Driven Instruction. Data are another key element that (i.e., according to the participants) drive instruction and assist with measuring the knowledge of the students. The targeted needs as well as the goals and targets needs to be outlined by the committee with guidance from administration. Administrators should have resources to collect data and disseminate it to their team. Those individuals in PLCs need to be trained to interpret and analyze data. The data that is collected is to be analyzed to ensure that the proper prescription of intervention is created for the student. Data assists with shaping the learning and evaluation of student understanding.

Recommendations for Implementation Factors. Administrators need to be supportive, active, and contributing members of PLCs. Systems must be in place to ensure that PLCs are run with fidelity. This includes honoring PLCs as to what they are meant to be and described in past literature. As mentioned by the participants and their perception of PLCs, time should be respected. Administrators need to set time aside to discuss goals, analyze data, and come up with a curriculum, measure student outcome and repeat the process if necessary.

The recommendations for PLCs to improve are based on the perceptions of those personnel, and teacher's answers to the interview questions. This study could serve as a guide for future studies to examine other districts through the perception of their staff on the effectiveness of PLCs.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study was to examine the PLCs in a large Texas public school district to see if the Hispanic staff at this district perceive if PLCs are meaningful and structured to support the improvement of Hispanic student success in the classroom as well as providing the support and steps outlined in a PLC. The participants indicated that the PLC's were successful if they are a collaborative culture, there is open communication within the group, administrative support, data disaggregation or data-driven results, and developing an intervention or plan for those students who need additional assistance to master the lesson. As per the perception of those individuals interviewed, if PLCs are conducted with validity and as described by the past literature, they can result in the campus having an increase in scores and student success.

Developing and implementing effective PLCs requires support from administration, the district core coordinators, educators, and any stakeholders that have a vested interest in student success. As the participants stressed their perception of PLCs there needs to be collaboration from all individuals in the group, an organized structured plan and for the team to adjust to change and be open-minded to be successful as a campus and district. Effective PLCs are about engaging and embracing the process of improving student learning and the needed professional learning of the members. As mentioned by the interviewees, it is their perception that, if there is a positive relationship within the team, they can openly communicate their thoughts, ideas, and be honest with one another to accept change and have trust that shared lessons are successful. According to past literature, research claimed that there is a link between having an effective PLC and student learning (Burns et al., 2018). As they develop a collaborative culture and set specific targets on what they want to focus on they can gather the data needed to make decisions on the areas that they need to focus on. The data are what drives instruction and can indicate the

needs of the students.

The results of this qualitative study complement other research on the significance of PLCs and that PLCs play an integral part in improving the states standardized test. The findings indicated the perceptions in which participants felt supported and prepared for PLCs and it indicated where they felt a lack of support during PLCs. The results of this study balance with other past research on the importance of PLCs in improving students' scores and success. The results also reiterate the need for administration support, teacher involvement in collaborative culture, and data analysis. It is critical to identify the implementation factors that work effectively in a large district in south Texas that benefit students, teachers, leaders, and district personnel. The results of this qualitative descriptive study supported that PLCs can be effective if there is collaboration.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Professional Learning Communities have elements, characteristics, and three big ideas that guide the team when collaborating. The following interview questions seek to gain an understanding of your perception of how these characteristics affect and implement the current level of PLC in this district.

1. Please state your educational background and professional experience.
2. What does the term professional learning community mean to you?
3. What are the shared mission, vision, and goals of your school/district? (RQ 1)
4. When developing goals for students based on data, are the shared mission, vision, and goals focused on student learning? (RQ 1)
5. During PLCs, do you align the goals mission and vision with the curriculum outlined and created by the collaboration of the members of the PLC? (RQ 1)
6. Do you see the relationships between the mission, vision, and goals of the district that implement student success? (RQ 1)
7. Who is part of your professional learning community? (RQ 2)
8. During a PLC, has there been a time that your instruction was influenced by a colleague? (RQ 3)
    a. If so, please share the experience.
    b. If not, is there collaboration during a PLC?
9. Does the PLC agree to disagree on the effectiveness of the PLC and collaborative inquiry? (RQ 3)
    a. Is there trust within the team to make changes?
    b. Is the team open to change?
10. How has your PLC helped students become successful and is it action oriented? (RQ 3)

11. Do you feel that the PLCs conducted has reflected on the STAAR scores? If so how? (RQ 4)
12. How do you contribute to the development of PLCs and what do you contribute to continuous improvement? (RQ 2)
13. What type of data do you collect for the team and how is it utilized (RQ3)?
14. How are data utilized when meeting with your team? How often is it used and is it different for every demographic? (RQ 4)
15. What are the processes you use to create, develop, or sustain professional learning communities focusing on Hispanics? (RQ 4)
16. Does the data drive instruction? If so, how? (RQ 3)
17. How are professional learning communities different than a grade level, content, or faculty meeting? (RQ3
18. How have PLCs shaped your classroom instruction and helped improve student success? (RQ 2)
19. What factors appear to get in the way or hinder the PLC?
    a. Have you discussed them with your principal?
    b. What are you or your campus doing to reduce these factors?

Appendix B: Study Site Permission Letter

[redacted]

[redacted] President
[redacted] Vice-President
[redacted] Secretary
[redacted] Trustee
[redacted] Trustee
[redacted] Trustee
[redacted] Trustee
[redacted] Ed. D., Superintendent

August 19, 2022

Abilene Christian University
College of Doctoral Studies / Institutional Review Boards (IRB)
Organizational Leadership Doctoral Program
1600 Campus Ct.
Abilene, Texas 79601

To Whom It May Concern:

Mrs. Corina C. Saenz, Doctoral student at Abilene Christian University has requested permission to conduct a qualitative case study at [redacted] Independent School District titled: ***A Study of Professional Learning Communities; Are they Meaningful and Structured to support the Improvement of Student?***

As Superintendent of School, I grant permission for Mrs. Saenz to conduct her study. Mrs. Saenz will be under the supervision of the Superintendent's designee [redacted] Associate Superintendent for Instructional Leadership to oversee the selected staff that will volunteer to participate in her study. All selected staff who volunteer to participate in her study will be given a consent form and a letter with the purpose of the survey and will complete the interviews after business hours.

Should I be of further assistance, please call or email.

Sincerely,

[redacted] Ed. D.,
Superintendent of Schools

[redacted]

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in the Research

Subject: Invitation to participate in the research project titled: A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Teacher and Administrator Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in a Texas School District with a Predominance of Hispanic Staff and Students.

Dear _____,

I am conducting interviews, as part of a research study to better understand how Hispanic teachers who participate in professional learning communities describe their ability to utilize decision-making skills related to the selecting and using of strategies to improve instruction for Hispanic student success. The initial interview will require a minimum of one, but no more than two hours. Follow-up interviews, if needed, will be limited to no more than one hour. The questions asked during the interview(s) are designed to capture your perspectives as it relates to the topic. Your responses to the questions will be kept confidential. I will be using a handheld audio recorder to record the interview. There is no compensation for participating in this study; however, your participation will be a valuable addition to the research.

I will be contacting you in the next few days to discuss any questions you may have about the research. I have attached the consent form for your review.

Sincerely,

Corina C. Saenz

Principal Investigator

Abilene Christian University

Appendix D: Consent Form

Abilene Christian University

Department of Education

A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Teacher and Administrator Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in a Texas School District with a Predominance of Hispanic Staff and Students.

Principal Investigator: Dr. John Kellmayer

Student Principal Investigator: Corina C. Saenz

I. Purpose:

You are being invited to participate in the above titled research study to better understand how Hispanic teachers who participate in professional learning communities describe their ability to utilize decision-making skills related to the selecting and using of strategies to improve instruction for Hispanic student success. You are being invited to participate because you are a department head, academic coach, administrator, or district core coordinator at the school and district chosen for the research study. A total of 12 participants will be invited to participate in the overall study. As one of these individuals, your participation will require a minimum of one hour of time participating in interviews with the researcher; however, the interviews will require no more than two hours of your time participating in interviews with the researcher.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in at least one semistructured interview with the researcher. The interviews will be held in a private location at your school and will be audio-recorded. The interviewer will conduct the first interview around specific questions. A follow-up interview may be conducted to further investigate and clarify themes that emerge during the initial interview. The follow-up interview will be limited to no more than one

hour. In total, participants will spend no more than two hours being interviewed. The interviewer will record interviews with a digital recorder and transcribe all recordings.

III. Risks:

In this study, you will not have any more risks than you would in a normal day of life.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may benefit you personally, offering the opportunity to reflect on your participation in a professional learning community. Overall, to better understand how Hispanic teachers who participate in professional learning communities describe their ability to utilize decision-making skills related to the selecting and using of strategies to improve instruction for Hispanic student success.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may choose not to answer questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

VI. Confidentiality:

The identity of all participants, schools, and school system will be masked in the final document in order to maintain confidentiality. We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Only the student principal investigator and the principal investigator will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (ACU Institutional Review Board). All paper records will be shredded and electronic media used to store data will be scrubbed after the files are deleted. Audio data will be erased and physically destroyed following transcription. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results.

VII. Contact Persons:

Corina C. Saenz at xxx-xxx-xxxx or xxxxxxxxxxxxx if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research and be audio recorded, please sign below.

_____ _____

Participant Date

_____ _____

Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix E: IRB Exemption Letter

Date: June 22, 2023

PI: Corina Saenz

Department: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online

Re: Initial - IRB-2023-39

A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Teacher and Administrator Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in a Texas School District with a Predominance of Hispanic Staff and Students.

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *A Qualitative Descriptive Study of Teacher and Administrator Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities in a Texas School District with a Predominance of Hispanic Staff and Students.*. The administrative check-in date is --.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Research Notes:

Additional Approvals/Instructions: This study is exempt.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

• When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
• According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
• It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...
or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board