THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF ESTABLISHING A

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNTY THROUGH THE LENS OF

TIERED INSTRUCTION: PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a

Major in Educational Leadership in the

Department of Graduate Education

Northwest Nazarene University

by

Lynn Paslay

May 2017

Major Professor: Russell A. Joki, .Ed. D.

AUTHORIZATION TO SUBMIT

DISSERTATION

This dissertation of Marilyn Paslay, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education with a major in Educational Leadership and titled THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF ESTABLISHING A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNTY THROUGH THE LENS OF TIERED INSTRUCTION: PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER PERSPECTIVE has been reviewed in final form. Permission, as indicated by the signatures and dates given below, is now granted to submit final copies.

Major Professor _____ Date 4/4/17
Dr. Russell Joki

Committee
Members _____ Date 4/13/17
Dr. David Meyer

_____ Date 4/24/17
Dr. Wendy French

Program
Administrator _____ Date 4/4/17
Dr. Heidi Curtis

Discipline's
College Dean _____ Date 5/1/17
Dr. Paula Kellerer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my family for being so patient and supportive during this process. You have been a blessing to me. Life had very little meaning without you. Also, I would like to acknowledge my Jesus for giving me the strength and courage to pursue this endeavor. In addition, I would like thank all the professors at Northwest Nazarene University who have inspired me and challenged me to pursue my dreams. You all have been with me every step of the way, being the cheerleaders that I needed. Thank you for being so influential in my journey of pursuing my doctorate.

Dr. Joki has been a calming voice, an inspirational guide, and my own personal motivator to keep persevering and exceling. Thank you, Dr. Joki, for your words of wisdom, dedication to my success, and most of all your kindness. I am so grateful to you and all that you have done to ensure my success in the completion of my doctorate.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Ryan, and my children, Ryder, Kale and Zachary; I love you with all my heart. You are everything to me. Thank you for joining me on this journey through your endless support with hugs, words of encouragement, back massages, and love. God has truly blessed me with an amazing partner and three wonderful children. I love you all!

ABSTRACT

Since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, schools have focused on continuous school improvement and implementing systems that meet the legislative mandates set forth (DuFour et al., 2010). Additionally, with the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act, more requirements focused on high student achievement rates are expected. When students are at the forefront, teachers and administrators are working for the students' benefit (DuFour, 2015; DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon, Mesmer, Atkins, Greguson, & Olinger, 2009; Fullan, 2011, 2014). Effective teams of teachers collectively work to find what is needed to ensure student learning goals are achieved (DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009; Schmoker, 2006). Creating a climate that promotes student learning embodies the idea of student-focused professional learning communities. In this effort, collaboration through the lens of tiered instruction has emerged as an effective system of school improvement (DuFour et al., 2010; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a Professional Learning Communities through the lens of tiered instruction from the principal and teacher perspective.

In this study, it appeared administrators' and teachers' perceptions were similar, yet males and females differed regarding the importance of the five dimensions of PLC's as defined by Hord, through the Professional Learning Community Assessment Revised (PLCA-R), Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman (2010). Qualitative data using the PLCA-R and focus group interviews, findings suggested that while teachers and administrators viewed PLC's and Response to Intervention teams as essential to increasing student achievement, differences in implementation and sustainability exist within the studied system.

This study noted that school climate is essential to sustainable systems of RTI and PLC. The research conducted advances DuFour and Hord's theory that successful collaboration amongst teachers is an on-going continuous need in today's schools. Building shared knowledge of best practice is an essential part of each team's decision-making process (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). A focus on learning and shared responsibility is one of the foundational premises of professional learning communities and response to intervention. The research findings suggest a disconnect between Batsche's and Fuch's theory with everyday application. Participants note the need for tiered instruction and see the benefit of intervening early as well as raising rigor in core instruction, although application of theory is not consistent across the eleven schools. Seed's theory on effective conditions that are present in successful schools is further advanced by the researcher's findings in this study as participants noted an overwhelming need for more systematic ways to reflect on teaching and learn from peers. The need for effective ways to analyze student data and replicate successful RTI and PLC systems is still needed, as the research findings conclude a barrier still exists in theory to application.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter I
Introduction

In the era of accountability, schools face a great challenge to improve test scores, counsel students, implement Common Core State Standards, and bridge a connection between school and home. An increased awareness of school reform is at an all-time high. The isolated culture of teaching can no longer sustain growth in student achievement, based on the demands of the job (Achinstein, 2002; Adler, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1993, 2009 2013; DuFour, 2015; DuFour, & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2005, 2014). Fullan (2005) stated,

> It was in this period that schools began to shift from a focus on the individual autonomy of the classroom and the isolation of the school toward a focus on specific instructional practices that directly affected student learning and achievement (p. 11).

School teachers have one of the toughest jobs; against substantial odds, they must deliver high achievement scores.

A high school math teacher participant in the study commented:

"*It would be nice to have more teachers teaching the same classes not only in our district, but also within our buildings. By doing so, we would have more opportunity to support each other, share results, and improve instruction.*"

Recently, in 2016, schools have been charged through legislation authorization to monitor student growth through accountability measures. Empirical data must be evident to validate student gains throughout the school year. School ratings are established based on levels of student performance. When choices are permitted, parents choose schools for their children based on student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1993, 2009, 2013; DuFour, 2015; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Fullan 2014). This high-stakes education era requires the need for a systematic team approach to ensure an increase in student learning (Achinstein, 2002; Albritton

& Truscott, 2014; Darling-Hammond, 1993; DuFour, 2015; DuFour et al., 2008; Fullan 2014).

Stewart stated, "Teacher learning has gone through a 'reform' movement over the past decade as

prevailing belief links high-quality professional development (PD) to higher-quality teaching and

high-quality teaching to student achievement" (2014, p. 28).

Teachers and administrators are driven by a moral purpose (DuFour, 2015; DuFour et al.,

2008; Fullan, 2011). Education paves the way to dreams and a better life. From the school

system perspective, the moral purpose is leaving a legacy that demonstrates a "whatever it takes"

mentality (DuFour, 2015; DuFour et al., 2008; Fullan, 2011; Schmoker, 2006). This means day

by day, student by student, teachers and other school professionals focus on making a difference.

Many school visions are aligned around student achievement and the moral imperatives of

ensuring students are college and career ready (DuFour, 2015; DuFour et al., 2008; Fullan 2014;

Schmoker, 2006). However, this becomes more difficult as students enter school with different

abilities and adverse trauma from environmental variables that are out of the control of

educators. In high-stakes testing, faces of children become statistics and school accountability

becomes a number or proficiency rates. The moral imperative is less about students and more

about a rating (Fullan, 2011).

Ratings impact schools both positively and negatively. Accountability is not a bad thing,

if it stays focused on students (Achinstein, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1993; DuFour, 2015;

DuFour et al., 2008; Fullan 2011, 2014). When accountability crosses over to numbers and

ratings without a focus on students, then the data become negative. Working together to bring

home and school into a positive ebb and flow creates a sense of community that impacts the

culture of the school, as well as the social culture within students and teachers. Imparting the

moral imperative and gaining "buy-in" from school and home make the moral imperative a shared responsibility (Fullan, 2011, 2014).

Professional Learning Community

When students are at the forefront, teachers and administrators are working for the students' benefit (DuFour, 2015; DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon, Mesmer, Atkins, Greguson, & Olinger, 2009; Fullan, 2011, 2014). A great teacher, through relationship building, can paint a vison of the future that inspires others to act. It is not something teachers do in isolation. Effective teams of teachers collectively work to find what is needed to ensure student learning goals are achieved (DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009; Schmoker, 2006). Creating a climate that promotes student learning embodies the idea of student-focused professional learning communities.

The greatest student gains occur with a collaborative model that is continuously promoting the highest level of achievement focused on targeting areas of weaknesses and building on student strengths (Albritton & Truscott, 2014; DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009; Schmoker, 2006). The team must ensure that all students are learning and that data exist to support this claim. The focus is on student learning, not teaching. Teacher teams regularly look at climate and culture of the building, as well as classrooms within the building, to make decisions that maximize learning for all (DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009; Schmoker, 2006).

The idea of collaborative problem-solving is not new; rather has become popular in education in recent years. The term "Professional Learning Community" or PLC was first introduced as learning communities. Dewey's (1933) research promoted collaborative problem-solving between teacher and student. His model involved student voice in the learning process as

well as the teacher. Meiklejohn (1932) discovered the significance of teacher–student conferencing in order to maximize learning. His early work provided the framework for PLCs in how they operate today.

Education through the 1970s and 1980s has long been known for being an isolated experience. As education evolved, the need for improving education for students became a mandate at the state and federal level (Hargreaves, 2000; Murphy & Adams, 1998). These mandates caused schools to begin looking at collaborative models of teaching versus instruction in isolation. Teaching became more focused and intentional; learning communities became a collaborative problem-solving model focused on providing effective instruction to increase student achievement (Hord & Summers, 2008). With new mandates and a greater focus on education from the public, collaborative environments continued to evolve as focus on improving student achievement (Hargreaves, 2000; Hord, 2004; Schmocker, 2004). The term PLC became widespread across the country due in large part to the works of DuFour (2008) and Hord (2004).

Hord (1997) denoted five characteristics of PLCs that are crucial to improving student achievement and creating a sustainable system. The five characteristics are (1) shared and supportive leadership; (2) collective creativity; (3) shared values and vision; (4) supportive conditions; and (5) shared personal practice (DuFour & DuFour, 2010; DuFour et al., 2008; Hord, 1997; Hord & Summers, 2008; Murphy, 2013).

Shared and supportive leadership builds the capacity of teachers and principals in a continuous cycle of learning and growing together. Collectively, the team of professionals reflects, adjust, and pursue continuous practices that promote student improvement. Problem-solving through a collaborative model, where each voice counts when a problem arises, can be

difficult. Teachers tend to rely on administrators to intervene (DuFour, 2015; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Shared and supportive leadership encompasses a problem-solving model through collaborative meetings, with all parties contributing an equal voice. Everyone counts, every voice matters, and the focus is student driven.

Collective creativity refers to the commitment of all staff members to continually work toward a common vision of improving student achievement through collaboration, professional development, and shared knowledge. The importance of being intentional with teaching and allowing instructional practices to be driven by results is unparalleled (Adler, 2004; Batsche, Curtis, Dorman, Castillo, & Porter, 2007; Dorn & Soffas, 2005; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). Understanding current trends in pedagogy and setting goals for students that are systematic reinforce solid instruction driven by formative and summative assessments and are essential to effective instruction (Adler, 2004; Dorn & Soffas, 2005; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007).

Shared values and vision are imperative to sustaining an effective and successful PLC model of learning (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Shared values and vision are "how teachers conceive the purpose of the school and how they will construct their vision of what the school should look like and how teachers will work together" (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 9). Believing in the same cause and working toward the same goal create intentional focus and sustainable practice (Batsche et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Fullan, 2014). A culture of collaboration with shared values ensures buy-in and support because those involved have a voice. Building consensus through shared knowledge and collective trusts creates a feeling of community.

The fourth characteristic of PLC's designated by Hord crucial to improving student achievement is supportive conditions. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement

and instruction is imperative to sustaining the PLC process (DuFour, 2007; DuFour & DuFour, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Relationships are built through sharing ideas and experiences through supportive conditions focused on improving student achievement. Districts must examine board policy, school handbooks, and district handbooks regarding procedures and protocols as they relate to student learning. All the key areas and goals are tied to student learning and actions to ensure this happens.

The fifth and last characteristic is shared personal practice. It refers to professionals working together to create a climate of trust and respect that is student driven. Hord and Sommers (2008) asserted that teachers' working alongside one another to perfect their individual craft and improve learning conditions is the essence of shared personal practice. This shared effort aids the collaborative process and creates a sustained system that produces significant gains in student learning and overall achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2009; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker 2006; Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Multi-Tiered Instruction

Duhon, (2009) studied the effectiveness of multi-tiered layers of interventions specific to the treatment of low-performing students in a collaborative problem-solving model. The tiered approach incorporates evidenced-based instruction and intervention into data-based decisions to ensure all students are receiving the necessary supports based on their individual needs (DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009). Duhon's et al., research showed an increase in student test scores when systematic layers of interventions and problem-solving strategies were implemented to target school-wide deficits. Student outcome measures increase when interventions are implemented early and intensity of instruction matches targeted needs. Effective teachers build the capacity of their students. Exemplary schools make no excuses; they focus on the school

culture and increasing student achievement for all students (DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009). Creating a system that promotes student learning embodies the idea of student-focused PLCs through a collaborative Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports (MTSS) through a problem-solving model.

Several studies support the implementation of multi-tiered instruction to increase student achievement as well as increase teacher and principal satisfaction (Torgeson, 2009; Stulkowski, Joyce, & Storch, 2011). According to Batsche et al., (2007) MTSS is designed to increase student outcomes by implementing tiers of support based on early identification indicators that provide teachers with a roadmap for differentiation in type and intensity of instruction to meet the needs of all students. MTSS is a broad term used to identify problem solving models that use a tiered approach such as Response to Intervention (RTI) to increase student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

A concerning trend in the education system is a lack of effective systems that are sustainable and focused on closing the achievement gap (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2005). Andrews and Lewis (2002) argued that not only is it important to create school-wide systems, but it is also just as important that one ensures the replication abilities of systems that are created. The PLC process focuses on collective efficacy and collaborative discussions (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). Teachers come together to problem-solve and focus on student learning to enrich the students' education (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour et al., 2010). PLCs improve student achievement and increase student learning (DuFour, 2015; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Hord, 2004).

PLCs are defined as ongoing systems through which educators work collectively and collaboratively to pursue learning, share learning and to act on their learning, with the goal of enhancing their effectiveness for students' benefit (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Walz, & Germann, 1993). Researchers in the field of education acknowledge the importance of implementing effective and sustainable problem-solving teams to address intensive student deficits and PLCs to ensure guaranteed and viable curriculum centered on essential standards discussions (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; DuFour et al., 2005; DuFour et al., 2010; Fullan 2005).

However, research is limited in how to integrate effective and sustainable interventions through problem-solving or response to intervention (RTI) teams that utilize the components of a PLC to increase student achievement (DuFour, 2015). Additionally, research is limited regarding the application of collaboration in a true PLC model (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour et al., 2010).

RTI is the practice of supporting students with high-quality instruction and designed interventions matched to student need, while frequently monitoring progress to make decisions about changes in instruction, and applying student data to important educational decisions (Albritton & Truscott, 2014; Batsche et al., 2007; Batsche et al., 2005; DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

An elementary teacher participant in the study stated:

"It seems sometimes it is pretty frustrating because you want to help these kids, you want a solution, you want a fix, you want an answer, you want a process or procedure and it just seems like sometimes you are kind of going in circles, That is really frustrating because you know they need help and know there should be help somewhere, but I'm not really sure where it comes from."

The term PLC and RTI are used widely but differ drastically in implementation and application (Albritton & Truscott, 2014; Batsche et al., 2005; Batsche et al., 2007; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). RTI and PLCs are not replicated with fidelity across schools (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). "If researchers are accurate in maintaining that professional learning communities (PLCs) are the best hope for school reform, then school leaders must learn how to facilitate systemic processes to develop these professional cultures" (Oliver, Hipp, & Huffman, 2010, p. 1). If PLCs and tiered instruction provide the best hope for students to be successful, then practitioners must understand the components that define best practices in implementation (Albritton & Truscott, 2014; Batsche et al., 2007; Batsche et al., 2005; DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Shirley Hord's research through the Southwest Education Development Laboratory (SEDL) gave educators a sustainable model of a true PLC and the elements that need to be present in order to be successful. Later, Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman (2010) modified Hord's five attributes to ensure a systematic sustainable PLC: (1) shared and supportive leadership, (2) shared values and vision, (3) collective learning and application, (4) shared personal practice, (5) supportive conditions–relationships and structures. This research led to the development of the Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R) survey.

Background

Problem-solving and RTI teams can be dated back to a report by the National Research Council (1983) in which special education qualification was evaluated and reviewed. In this report, the quality of the general education program, the special education program and its outcomes, and the accuracy of the assessment process in identifying disabilities were studied.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990. It expanded and provided rights to those individuals with disabilities (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs,

2006). The act prohibits discriminating against them based on disability. Under the ADA, civil rights are provided to those with disabilities in equal opportunity, physical accessibility, integration, and reasonable accommodations. Although this act is not funded, it is mandated; therefore, schools and businesses must comply.

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) made the greatest gains in safeguarding equality to those students with special needs and ensuring all students learn, regardless of disability (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). IDEA mandates that students with disabilities are entitled to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). FAPE is outlined and implemented through the evaluation process and the individualized education plan development (IEP). Although IDEA came into law in the 1990s, two revisions or amendments were added in 1997 and 2004. In the 1997 amendment, students with disabilities were provided access to general education curriculum and thus began the discussion of what comprised a least restrictive environment. In the 2004 amendment, highly qualified status for special education teachers came into effect, in addition to the introduction of research-based programs. The three-pronged approach to qualifying students in special education came into law, stating that a disability alone is not enough for special education qualification. The additional two prongs include a need for specially designed instruction and adverse effect in the general education classroom.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights statute that prohibits organizations, institutions, and or businesses receiving federal dollars if they discriminate against persons with a disability. This act impacts school systems. Businesses and schools must provide access to those individuals with disabilities who are able to participate in the opportunity with minimal accommodations. Therefore, students with disabilities under a 504 plan must be

provided the same level of instruction that meets their needs as would students who do not have a disability. In schools, 504 plans are developed annually to increase quality and guarantee access to FAPE. Revisions or amendments can be made as needed, and parents must be notified if placement changes are made. The 504 plans are designed to protect those who qualify to prevent them from being exempt or excluded from FAPE

IDEA, ADA, and Section 504, in conjunction with the report from the National Research Council, the impetus for President George W. Bush creating a Commission on Excellence in Special Education. The goal of this commission was finding policies and systems that would improve the educational performance of students with disabilities, as well as struggling learners. The findings from this commission were recommended and became the foundation of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which became known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and was signed into law in January of 2002.

One of the main pillars of NCLB is improving practices in general education by requiring all teachers to have highly qualified status and use evidence-based best practices that have high rigor and effective pedagogy determined by evidence. NCLB was replaced in 2016 with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This new federal mandate allows states more authority as it relates to student achievement. The key elements of ESSA, starting in 2017–2018, are accountability goals that address proficiency on criterion-referenced tests, English language assessments and graduation rates; school interventions for the bottom 5% of low-performing schools; evidence-based plans for low-performing subgroups; a goal of 95% participation on a criterion-referenced summative test; and rigorous academic standards. This requirement of evidence to show effective gains in student achievement is the underpinning of PLCs.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a PLC through the lens of tiered instruction from the principal and teacher perspective.

The central focus and research questions asked in this study were the following:

1. How does implementing Professional Learning Communities and RTI support increased student achievement from principal and teacher perspective?

2. What benefits and challenges are identified in establishing a Professional Learning Community model and RTI within a school perspective using the PLCA-R?

3. How does creating tiered instruction through a collaborative professional learning community and RTI model support continuous school improvement?

Description of Terms

Technical terms used in this study are based on the literature review. To clarify key terms the following definitions were used:

Collective learning and application. Inquiry-based learning that is pursued and applied to knowledge and ongoing learning for the staff and school. Staff is constantly pursuing new learning opportunities that will benefit their students and school (Hord, 1997; Louis & Marks, 1998; Oliver et al., 2010; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2005).

ESEA: Elementary and Secondary Education Act. President Lyndon Johnson's 1965 "War on Poverty" produced this landmark congressional legislation that created seven "title" programs such as Title I reading, Title II library, Title III supplemental services, Title IV research and training, and Title V aid to state departments of education.

ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act. Act signed into law December 10, 2015 to replace No Child Left Behind mandate.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Supports. The practice of using data to provide tiers of instruction based on students' strengths and weaknesses (California Department of Education, 2015).

No Child Left Behind: (NCLB). Federal mandate that attempted to ensure accountability for all students, based on academic proficiency scores (No Child Left Behind, 2001).

Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised: **(PLCA-R).** Developed by Hord and Oliver the survey assesses (1) shared and supportive leadership, (2) shared values and vision, (3) collective learning and application, (4) shared personal practice, (5) supportive conditions–relationships and structures.

Professional learning communities (PLC). An ongoing process through which teachers and administrators work collaboratively to seek and share learning and to act on their learning, their goal being to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for students' benefit (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Response to intervention (RTI). The practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and applying child response data to important educational decisions (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Severe learning deficit. Lifelong learning needs, where students struggle with learning new concepts and require support with daily activities (The Challenging Behavior Foundation, 2016).

Shared and supportive leadership. Leadership that empowers those around them, with the collective voice committed to the betterment of the whole (Oliver et al., 2010).

Shared personal practice. Staff working alongside one another in a collaborative relationship, which includes mentoring, observing, and sharing ideas to increase student learning and to create a culture of learning and sharing building-wide (Louis & Mark, 1998; Oliver et al., 2010; Sergiovanni, 2005).

Shared values. A shared focus on student learning is intentional and apparent across the school's culture (Oliver et al., 2010; Louis & mark, 1998).

Supportive conditions. Systems incorporated in everyday practices to ensure sustainability and a collaborative culture of respect and learning (Hord, 1992, 1997; Oliver et al., 2010).

Sustainability. Engaging, learning, and leading to create a positive, empowering future for today's children and their children.

Tiered instruction. Described as "the meat and potatoes of differentiated instruction." A tiered lesson addresses a particular standard, key concept and generalization but allows several pathways for students to arrive at an understanding of these components (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Significance of the Study

The important goal of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a PLC through the lens of tiered instruction from the principal and teacher perspective at all grade levels. Systematic interventions that are deficit-specific and viable will increase student achievement (Bollman, Silberglitt, & Gibbons, 2007; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Fullan, 1993). This study ventured to determine the level of student growth by utilizing these systems and the sustainability of this growth model from the principal and teacher perspective.

Bollman, Silberglitt, and Gibbons (2007) focused on how to implement effective problem-solving teams that are school based and successful in raising test scores. Bollman et al. found that using general outcomes measures as a base to determine achievement scores, providing evidence-based instruction for targeted areas of weaknesses, and implementing school-wide teams to continuously review the process for identifying and planning interventions greatly increase the productivity of school-based teams and increase achievement levels in schools.

Bollman et al. (2007) found creating a climate that promotes student learning embodies the idea of student-focused motivation and cultivating goals through relationships. Learning occurs with a collaborative model that is continuously pursuing the highest level of achievement (Bollman et al., 2007; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Schmoker, 1996, 1999, 2005). The team must ensure that all students are learning and that data exist to support this claim. Learning through the observation lens, is high student engagement resulting in, high-quality work through demonstrated perseverance with a given task. Students are engaged in meaningful tasks that are connected to meaningful content (Bollman et al., 2007; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Schmoker, 1996, 1999, 2005). They are interested in the learning and excited about the product that demonstrates the learning.

DuFour and Mattos (2013) challenged schools to look at the PLC process that embodies collective analysis focused on student learning. Principals who promote the PLC process are more likely to have positive school cultures, higher student test scores, and higher student engagement (Bollman et al., 2007; DuFour & Mattos 2013). Those schools that implement PLCs are focused on students; thereby, they ask the right questions versus focusing on the wrong questions (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Bollman et al., 2007; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). "Well-implemented professional learning communities are a powerful means of seamlessly blending

teaching and professional learning in ways that produce complex, intelligent behavior in all teachers" (Sparks, 2005, p. 156).

Professional Learning Communities focus on utilizing collaboration and tiers of instruction in order to improve student learning. Intentional learning occurs with a collaborative model that is continuously pursuing the highest level of achievement. Schools and classroom have dramatically changed over the last 20 years. This high-stakes education era needs a systematic team approach to ensure an increase in student learning. RTI and PLCs change this isolated approach to education and support a collaborative climate for academic success (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Bollman et al., 2007; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). RTI identifies programs to boost student achievement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Meiklejohn (1932) worked to create a more collaborative model where professors and students discussed learning. This process of shared learning lasted for five years. Meiklejohn believed collaboration would be beneficial and meaningful to the learning environment.

The first step to implementing a successful RTI model coupled with PLCs is developing a collaborative systematic team approach that answers the questions: "What do we expect kids to learn? What do we do when they haven't learned it?" (DuFour, 2015 p. 33). This approach allows team members to stay focused on learning objectives and the goal of student achievement (DuFour, 2015). Children learn through intentionality, clarity, and exposure (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; DuFour, 2015; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; McGregor, 2007). In order for the brain to make lasting connections, repeated exposure opportunities must be provided with purpose and rigor (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; DuFour, 2015; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; McGregor, 2007). Relationships and patterns must be overt to ensure they were seen. Patterns open the door to

meaning and create pathways to layers of connections. This is how true learning occurs (DuFour, 2015; Harvey & Goudvis, 2007; McGregor, 2007).

Epstein (2005) discussed the importance of comprehensive school reform in this era of high-stakes testing and results. She emphasized the importance of connecting family, school, and community in order to create an enriched environment for learning. To maximize student achievement, several elements must be present in school reform. The first element requires evidence-based instructional strategies to be utilized in the classroom. Teachers must exhibit strong understanding of instructional pedagogy. The next element is a comprehensive design. The system must be all-encompassing to support students. The next two are professional development for the teachers and goals centered on student and teacher growth. Finally, the school, teachers, and principal must support the reform in order to ensure success. Parents and community must be supportive of the plan, and staff must garner support from them. The focus in effective school reform is student-focused achievement gains.

Integration of Theoretical Framework

The theory for this study centered on an integrated model derived from multiple researchers in the area of collaboration and tiered instruction. Hord's five dimensions that encompass a PLC continuum, created the foundation. They are Supportive and Shared Leadership, Collective Creativity, Shared Values and Vision, Supportive Conditions, and Shared Personal Practice. Hord strongly believed in "peers helping peers" through a collaborative model (Hord, 1997). Collaboration is built on a desire to embrace community improvement and increase student learning (DuFour & Eaker, 2007; Hord, 1997). Hord emphasizes in her research the importance of shared community between all stakeholders focused on increasing student achievement in a culture that is safe and supportive.

Hord (1997) explored in great detail data-driven instruction centered on change, using reliable measures and making informed decisions around data. Creating a climate that promotes student learning through the use of data embodies the idea of student-focused PLCs. Schools that function in a PLC has a shared vision that is valued and encouraged. They seek to learn best practices and coexist collaboratively. Teacher teams regularly look at climate and culture of the building and classrooms within the building to make decisions to ensure learning for all.

Hord's findings provided a foundation for this study: an examination to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a PLC through the lens of tiered instruction from the principal and teacher perspective. Hord (2004) argued the need for more continuous inquiry of learning in schools that are functioning as PLCs to validate the findings and replicate the success of schools that utilize PLCs. She emphasized the importance of additional qualitative research to learn more about the underpinnings that make schools successful. The replication of successful PLCs still needs more research, according to Hord (2004). "One of the greatest challenges to team success is the inattention to results, but there is no getting around the fact that the only measure of a great team—or a great organization—is whether it accomplishes what it sets out to accomplish. When it comes to how a cohesive team measures its performance, one criterion sets it apart from non-cohesive ones: its goals are shared across the entire team" (Lencioni, 2012, pp. 65–66).

The study also relied on Richard DuFour's work at Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois which became one of the most recognized and celebrated schools in America due to their intense focus on building collaborative problem-solving teams focused on improving student learning (DuFour & Eaker, 2007). Dufour (2016) believed educators needed structures to support teacher collaboration and dispersed leadership. Collaboration needed to be purposeful and

reflective to ensure educators were addressing weakness and strengths in instructional practices.

Dufour (2016) continuous to emphasize the importance of collaboration, "The fact that American

educators work in isolation rather than in collaborative teams has consistently been cited as a

primary obstacle to improving student achievement since the 1970's" (p.9)

DuFour (2016) contends,

…when a school begins to function as a professional learning community, teachers

become aware of the incongruity between their commitment to ensure learning for all

students and their lack of a coordinated strategy to respond when some students do not

learn. The staff addresses this discrepancy by designing strategies to ensure that

struggling students receive additional time and support, no matter who their teacher is. In

addition to being systematic and schoolwide, the professional learning community's

response to students who experience difficulty is:

- *Timely*. The school quickly identifies students who need additional time and

  support.

- *Based on intervention rather than remediation*. The plan provides students with

  help as soon as they experience difficulty rather than relying on summer school,

  retention, and remedial courses.

- *Directive*. Instead of *inviting* students to seek additional help, the systematic plan

  requires students to devote extra time and receive additional assistance until they

  have mastered the necessary concepts." (p.6)

DuFour and Mattos (2013) described the significant impact PLCs have on schools and

school improvement. In addition, they challenged current teacher evaluation trends and the

exorbitant amount of time that it takes principals away from the real work of student

achievement and student-focused culture. DuFour and Mattos (2013) challenged principals to look at the PLC process that embodies collective analysis focused on student learning. Principals who promote the PLC process are more likely to have positive school cultures, higher student test scores, and higher student engagement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Those schools that implement PLCs are focused on students; thereby, they ask the right questions versus focus on the wrong questions.

The PLC is a model for schools to follow in order to successfully enact a true collaborative culture. The need for reform is at an all-time high in today's schools (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; DuFour et al., 2010). It is crucial that school districts revisit current policies and cultures that have proven to be ineffective and demonstrate limited results in the area of improving student achievement. The old policies of waiting for students to fail isolated teaching, and one-dimensional teaching only results in schools failing. Districts that want to improve learning, despite the obstacles that embody most schools, need to enact change that is monumental, requires a team approach and a more focused-driven, systematic approach to students' learning. Essentially, districts need to change their mantra from "we teach" to "all students learn regardless of their baseline. This PLC model helps districts do this.

Collaboration with stakeholders is crucial to leading change and supporting people in the process (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Many parents have not always had the best experience in school, both as a student and often as a parent. In order to break this pattern and perception, schools must work extra hard to change their parents opinions. School need to be a safe place for parents and children, because teachers alone will not have the greatest impact on student growth. Educators need parents and the community, working together to build

strong parent and community relationships focused on what is best for kids to maximize student learning (Epstein, 2005).

Cultural and social capital is alive and well in schools, district and surrounding communities. Within schools, there is pressure to be involved and focused on school. The social constructs that are the driving force in schools can be positive for the overall success of students and families who conform to this norm (Darling-Hammond & Post, 2000). Those who are not able to conform due to lack of pure ability or willingness are at a great disadvantage (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). They are the outcast. Although having high expectations is positive, the norm can also impede learning for those who do not conform. Teachers are not always willing to go above and beyond for students whose parents are not present, regardless of the reason. Environmental factors play a significant role in how kids and parents view school and its success. Social mobility can define one's success in school and life, based on the importance placed on education and the emphasis on obtaining higher-paying work (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Without a firm understanding of the window of opportunity that having an education provides, those who minimize the importance will not access their full potential. With the statistics of children going home alone and the increase in single-family households, it is essential for schools to forge relationships and strong community connections to support the family.

Overview of Research Methods

Case studies utilize qualitative research to explore a research problem (Creswell, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015). The researcher selected this methodology to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a PLC through the lens of tiered instruction from the principal and

teacher perspective. The PLCA-R, a Likert 4 point scale survey, and three focus-group interviews were conducted to inquire about themes and trends that emerge from this study. The PLCA-R data was analyzed using the Mann Whitney U and One-Way ANOVA to compare mean scores between selected schools, teachers to administrators and males to females who participated in the study.

According to Tanner (2012) Mann Whitney U analyzes two different groups for significant statistical comparison of the mean. It is a non-parametric test meaning it does not assume any rights to distribution, using the PLCA-R Likert scale survey questions as the dependent variable and the teachers and administrators, and males and females as the independent variables. The Mann Whitney U is most often used to compare mean scores when the dependent variable is ordinal and not normally distributed. In this study the Mann Whitney U was used to compare mean scores from the five dimensions of sthe PLCA-R survey responses.

One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) is a bi-variate test that compares the means between groups to determine whether any of those means are statistically significantly different from each other. Specifically, it tests the null hypothesis. The groups compared were teachers to administrators and males to females.

Open and Axial coding was used to interpret qualitative feedback from the PLC-R and the focus group interviews. Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasize the importance of utilizing appropriate coding methods in order to discover and organize interrelationships found in qualitative data collected. Open coding is used when describing phenomena found in data through identifying naming and categorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher identified eight initial categories from the qualitative portion of the PLCA-R survey responses. The next phase of analyzing the qualitative data was gathering the survey responses and focus group

interview responses to identify existing categories and determine new ones. Once the initial categories were determine from the survey responses and interviews, the researcher began relating codes and categories into common themes that emerged from the research overview. The process of connecting themes to the undercurrents of their relationship to the data is Axial Coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Seven themes emerged from the qualitative and quantitative research.

Chapter II
Review of the Literature

Introduction

The review of literature identified and analyzed theories related to RTI and PLC practices that ensured sustainability. Understanding the foundation, structure, benefits, and barriers to implementing a tiered system of interventions through a PLC model, bridges the path to implementing sustainable systems.

This chapter describes two major authorities in the areas of PLC'S and RTI. The chapter includes the history behind learning communities, professional learning communities, response to intervention, barriers sustainability and theoretical framework.

The major authorities used in this research were Hord and DuFour for their work with Professional Learning Communities, and DuFour's work with collaborative problem solving teams to provide tiered instruction to struggling learners. Hord and DuFour devoted their research to understanding the components of successful collaboration through a learning community model to increase student achievement.

History Behind Learning Communities

Learning communities have been around and impacted education since the early 1900s (Murphy & Adams, 1998). Prior to this notion of learning communities or collaborative problem-solving teams, teachers worked in isolation, delivering instruction through a lecture model with no input from peers or students (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Hargreaves, 1994, 2000). Teacher autonomy and isolation were the norm for schools and higher education well into the 1970s and 1980s, although some researchers and educators began to look at other experimental ideas to increase student learning.

Meiklejohn (1932) worked with the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin to create a more collaborative model where professors and students discussed learning. The goal was to make better citizens and more responsible members of society. By discussing learning and working together collectively, students were more informed and empowered to have a voice. This process of shared learning lasted for five years. Meiklejohn believed collaboration would be beneficial and meaningful to the learning environment.

In 1933 Dewey felt that learning should be shared through a collaborative model between teachers and students. In Dewey's research, students and teachers worked collaboratively to determine what was taught and assessed. He promoted intellectual engagement by allowing students to have a voice in their learning based on their own curiosity and pursuit of knowledge. Dewey believed that students were intellectually engaged improved greatly in their overall learning. Additionally, he believed a collaborative model of problem-solving maximized learning. This is the essence of present- time PLCs.

Learning communities continued to garner attention and evolve as state and federal mandates became rigorous. As school accountability requirements increased, schools were forced to develop plans that improved student achievement and increased standardized test scores. Teachers were no longer able to work in isolation or a high level of autonomy, as the mandates required deeper scrutiny from the administrative level with high degree of performance from teachers. During this time, the term "professional learning communities of PLC" became a prevalent.

Seed (2008) focused on five conditions that he believed play a significant part in positively impacting student achievement. By implementing collaboration, empowerment, reflection, time, and training, teacher's skill level will improve, which in turn increases students'

ability to perform in the classroom. Implementing these five conditions are not easy, as one has

to possess these attributes and model them before gaining buy-in from surrounding teachers.

Additionally, Seed (2008) discussed five actions teachers must take to obtain these conditions:

1. improve educational standards for students;

2. develop protocols for the resources needed to meet learning outcomes;

3. establish assessment protocols to show that students and schools are meeting
   standards;

4. create and define a highly qualified teachers and enforce it; and

5. cultivate processes for recruiting, inducting, retaining, and rewarding highly qualified
   teachers.

Taking action to create these conditions is a team effort. One teacher cannot do this

alone. The power in working together and being collaborative is that multiple voices looking at

potential problems through various lenses allows for many voices to be heard, providing well-

rounded informed decisions.

Shirley Hord, (1997) through the Southwest Education Development Laboratory,

provided one of the first models of PLC. She researched effective schools and determined five

essential characteristics that needed to be present to truly implement a collaborative, problem-

solving team. Richard DuFour at Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois became one of the

most recognized and celebrated schools in America due to the intense focus on building

collaborative problem-solving teams focused on improving student learning (DuFour & Eaker,

2007).

Professional Learning Communities

Student achievement is based on highly effective schools and teachers. Students'

background can minimally impact their overall success, if teachers are willing to go above and

beyond, by setting aside biases and negative attitudes that create a reluctance to change. This

concept can be implemented if staff is willing to set aside biases and negative attitudes that are

reluctant to change. Often teachers say "My class is low" or "I have minimal parent support."

Effective instruction and successful schools look beyond the demographics of a school and look

to what the intended outcomes are (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; DuFour et al., 2010). Schools focus

more on where they are, where they need to go, and how they get there opposed to what we lack

therefore we are limited. Excuses do not exist in a PLC.

PLCs propel teachers to look beyond status quo and seek to better themselves and enrich

their teaching styles. They define the role of collaboration and teamwork in developing a

literacy-focused school. PLCs seek to incorporate a true collaborative community, where the

motto is "All students learn" (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). The professional

learning community model asserts that the core mission of education is not simply to ensure that

students are taught but to ensure that they learn; a focus on teaching to a focus on learning

(DuFour et al., 2010; DuFour, 2016). "Educators functioning in a professional learning

community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of

learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture." (p.7, 2016)

Professional learning communities define their effectiveness on student results. Working

together to improve student achievement becomes the focused work of every staff member in the

school. DuFour (2016) asserts, every teacher team participates in an ongoing process of

identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing goals based on students' needs

and strengths, working together to achieve that goal, and providing systematic evidence of progress.

Marzano and Waters (2009) meta-analysis of effective school research identified five district-level responsibilities that increase the likelihood of student learning and increase student achievement. The correlation between the five responsibilities and student achievement suggested if leaders changed behavior student learning gains would follow (Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean, 2000; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). They explained the *r* values as significant at the 95 percent confidence level, assuming leadership abilities and student achievement are at the 50th percentile. If a superintendent adopted one or more of the responsibilities and moved leadership behavior one or more standard deviations there should be a corresponding gain in student achievement.

The first responsibility, regular collaborative goal setting across the district, had an average *r* value of .24 (Marzano & Waters, 2009). A culture of collaboration at all levels ensures buy-in and support because those involved have a voice. Building consensus through shared knowledge and collective trusts creates a feeling of community. Collaborative leadership entails working mutually to problem-solve issues that stand in the way of shared goals.

According to Marzano and Waters (2009), the importance of setting time aside to instill a collaborative culture is significant to improving student learning. Teachers need time to reflect, discuss, and perfect their craft. As a superintendent it is imperative to make this time. Effective community leadership is built around trust, professionalism, and accountability. This is a place where ideas are shared, and collectively all sides are able to find consensus.

Building a culture that is collaborative and student focused can be challenging. Establishing a culture of transparency and openness creates an environment that is safe for

change to occur and ideas to be shared. Building relationships motivated by student learning

paves the way for a true partnership with the community (Marzano, 2003; Marzano & Waters,

2009; Marzano et al., 2005). This truly is the essence of a PLC working to build academically

stronger, more successful schools and communities.

Establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction is the second

responsibility, with an average *r* value of .33, that a district must embrace (Marzano, 2003;

Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005). It is important that districts provide resources

and support to teachers in order that identified areas of growth are improved upon. Moreover,

administrators must continue to grow and improve in their craft to safeguard collaborative

cultures within schools, so all staff feel supported and valued. Developing a nonnegotiable list,

or accountability measure, aligns systems and policies with the school board's vision, is

imperative to increasing student achievement. A variety of stakeholders must be included in open

dialogue to problem solve and provide clarity of the vision and ensure alignment. Decisions

should be made based on the overarching premise of student learning and how said decisions

promote achievement growth. As a collaborative leader, one must embrace the PLC approach to

problem-solving and finding solutions.

The third responsibility, with an average *r* value of .29, that a district must embrace is

creating alignment with the district and school board's vision. Teachers and parents must

understand the high reliability nature of loose and tight. The term "loose and tight" according to

Marzano denotes the need for administrators to choose which mandates they will allow

flexibility in implementation and which require strict fidelity. Stakeholders are free to ask

questions and gain a better understanding of district directives regarding student learning,

understanding that teachers and administrators have some autonomy in the everyday application

(Marzano, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005). The relationship between stakeholders and district is open and transparent, along with being firm in the nonnegotiable.

The fourth responsibility, with an average *r* value of .27, is monitoring achievement and instruction goals; this is imperative to increasing student achievement (Marzano, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005). In the initial development of the goals, meeting norms should be established and enforced. It is important that the process is respected and time is spent wisely. Once norms are established, district and school data should be reviewed. Determining goals and objectives that are measurable is imperative to attaining clarity and finally achieving the developed goals. The goals should focus on student achievement and resource allocations that ensure student achievement. The writing of goals is a brainstorming session once data are synthesized and analyzed. Using the SMART goal acronym (strategic, specific, measurable, attainable, results oriented, and time bound) is a proven method in goal writing (Marzano, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009). After goals are agreed upon, objectives must be developed in order to ensure goals can be obtained; these include resources and time.

Marzano and Waters (2009) highlighted the importance of accountability embedded in tightly coupled systems demonstrate a greater degree of reliability and achievement in their overarching goals. This is a responsibility that a district must embrace. The lack of accountability breeds complacency. Ensuring that schooling is focused on learning and student achievement is a necessity in improving our schools. Collaborative strategic plans must be developed and reviewed to ensure all entities are working toward the common goal of creating a successful district has students at the forefront. Resources must be allocated to match district vision.

Allocating resources and time with stakeholders ensures is the fifth responsibility, with an average *r* value of .26, according to Marzano and Waters (2009). This step is crucial to the

plan development (Marzano, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005). If the collaborative group can find consensus on goals and objectives, then the "right work" was accomplished and the hard work is almost done.

The focus is proactive versus reactive. When one is proactive, or preventative, they are able to reflect, process, and evaluate given circumstances with a clear mind-set (Marzano, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Reactive behaviors tend to be more infused with emotion and adrenaline, which in turn reduce clarity and become regrettable. Monitoring and evaluating the current trends are important to effective leadership. Once the leader knows what is taking place, it is important to evaluate the effectiveness of potential solutions.

In Dewey's (1933) research, students and teachers worked collaboratively to determine what was taught and assessed. He promoted intellectual engagement by allowing students to have a voice in their learning based on their own curiosity and pursuit of knowledge. He believed in interaction between stakeholders and reflection for improvement based on experience and community. Dewey focused on deriving reflective thoughts based on past experiences to expand future thinking. He believed reflective thinking in teaching needed to be taught and practiced in order to apply it. Teachers and students benefit from reflective practices that allow teachers to analyze their instruction and student progress. Additionally, he believed a collaborative model of problem-solving maximized learning.

Relationships are built through shared ideas and experiences. This shared vision is the cornerstone to second-order change (Marzano & Waters, 2009). The invested community must be willing to get messy and improve areas in schools that are less effective or support areas that are weak by design. A collaborative and purposeful community is built around a common, shared vision that is striving for excellence.

Marzano and Waters (2009) described the key responsibilities to leading the charge to improving student achievement and ensuring the overall success of a district. Each responsibility has the potential to propel individual focus and intentionality toward achieving the mission and vision: high levels of student achievement and learning. Collectively, they defined the role of collaboration and teamwork in developing a literacy-focused school. PLCs seek to incorporate a true collaborative community, where the motto is "all students learn" (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). The PLC process focuses on collective efficacy and collaborative discussions (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). Stakeholders come together to problem-solve and focus on student learning. The goal is to stay focused on students and how we can enrich their education and character. Utilizing Marzano and Waters' (2009) five-phase approach is the first step to developing a continuous improvement plan built around agreed-upon accountability measures.

Andrews and Lewis (2002) conducted a study that focused on the longevity of implementing a PLC and how it can be mainstreamed so it is sustainable. Andrews and Lewis (2002) argued that not only is it important to create school-wide systems, it is also just as important that one ensures the replication abilities of systems that are created. The PLC process focuses on collective efficacy and collaborative discussions (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). Teachers come together to problem-solve and focus on student learning. The goal is to remain steadfast in improving student outcomes and enrich their educational experience.

All staff members, certified and noncertified, have a role in supporting student achievement. The team approach embodies collaboration and a willingness to utilize the strengths of our peers and use them to benefit the whole. Every player has a part in supporting,

reaching, and sharing ideas to increase the success of the school. All schools have support staff, parents' specialists, administrators, janitors, and teachers; do we use them effectively? Do we utilize all the resources in our buildings to maximize student learning? Most schools would answer with a resounding no. Teachers have their own parent helpers, and support staff assigned jobs. By collaborating and combining resources we can train staff and parents to do specific jobs. PLCs adopt the mantra that every person walks into the school can play a significant role in supporting student achievement, as long as we stay focused on high levels of learning for all students (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). We adopt a team approach to learning rather than an isolated one.

PLCs create a systematic method to reflect and change current school policy. Once districts adopt a collaborative approach to teaching, it is imperative that schools incorporate a systematic team approach to ensuring all students learn. SMART goals create a culture of learning with a specific area of focus for each content area that ensures all kids are learning (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; DuFour et al., 2010). Teachers develop learning targets and develop methods for students to demonstrate what they have learned. Developing learning targets helps teachers, students, and parents know what the end game is. They are able to pace the overall goal into achievable objectives.

DuFour and Mattos (2013) argued that once learning targets are established, it is essential that teachers develop a measurable assessment that demonstrates the objectives to be measured. The formative assessments allow teachers to gauge where the students are in achieving the overall learning targets. The assessments must be reliable and assess what has been taught (DuFour et al., 2010). Formative and summative assessments should guide the instruction. An aligned assessment plan provides teachers a snapshot of where students are on the learning

continuum and predicts where they will land at the end. Every school should have a target goal they want all students to achieve, whether it is 80% or 90% proficient. Every year this goal should be reviewed and altered according to current reality. Student outcome measures should guide the instruction. Teams should develop plans based on the reality of students mastering the learning targets (DuFour et al., 2010).

In order for PLCs to occur effectively, it has to be collaborative and nonthreatening environment. It has to be practical and something the teachers view as essential to increasing student achievement. If teachers review and analyze data, interpreting trends in strengths and weaknesses, then the discussions will automatically lead to professional development in both knowledge and curriculum. Professional collaboration will be embraced if teachers see the importance of creating a collaborative culture where they are all learning together to increase student achievement. The PLC model based on assessments driving instruction embodies and propels this notion of change (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; DuFour et al., 2010). The PLC model focuses on formative assessments that show strengths and weaknesses and allow teachers to make solid decisions based on their findings.

PLCs define the role of collaboration and teamwork in developing a data-driven school (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Collaboration seeks to incorporate a true PLC where the motto is defined that all students learn. All staff members, certified and noncertified, have a role in supporting student achievement. The team approach embodies collaboration and a willingness to utilize the strengths of our peers and use them to benefit the whole. Every player has a part in supporting, reaching, and sharing ideas to increase the success of the school. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) asserted teachers share ideas and curriculum that are systematic and defined to

ensure instructional action. Teachers are working together to ensure student gains are occurring. Isolated teaching is not an option.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

RTI is an effective climate of change that allows teachers to teach and students to learn (Castillo, 2014; Castillo et al., 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Marzano, 2003). All students learning occurs with a collaborative model that is continuously pursuing the highest level of achievement. Teachers now have one of the toughest jobs; against competing forces they must deliver high-test scores. This high-stakes education era needs a systematic team approach to ensure an increase in student learning. RTI changes the isolated approach to education commonly seen in schools and supports a collaborative climate for academic success. "The most significant factor in providing appropriate interventions for students wad the development of layers of support" (Dolejs, 2006, p.3) RTI identifies struggling students through a three-tiered model, utilizing scientifically research-based programs to boost student achievement.

Fuchs and Deshler (2007) highlighted the importance of districts defining the purpose of RTI in their schools. Everyone must have the same understanding of implementation and purpose for RTI to be successfully implemented. Once the purpose is defined, then creating solid tiers of instruction will increase student achievement. Furthermore, RTI was seen as fundamental rethinking and reshaping oriented towards early prevention and intervention. A school moving towards a prevention model by providing layers of instruction offers benefits to a large number of students before they begin to fail (Fuch& Fuchs, 2006).

Batsche, Kavale, and Kovaleski (2006) described essential components to implementing a successful RTI team. All children must be taught core concepts with high instructional rigor incorporating essential learning targets crucial at each grade level. Students must be given the

opportunity to learn key concepts at their grade level as well as instruction in deficit areas. Intervening early is the crucial to closing deficits before struggling learners get too far behind (Castillo, 2014; Castillo et al., 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Using a multi-tiered collaborative model ensures students get the most tailored instruction targeted to their strengths and weaknesses, without missing key concepts.

The premise of RTI is creating a tiered system of interventions for all students. Tier 1 ensures all students receive grade-level standards. Tier 2 increases the intensity of exposure and practice opportunities for those students struggling. Tier 3 is more individualized intervention focused on specific student deficits. The concept behind tiered instruction is all three layers are built on one another, not supplanted by any one level (Castillo, 2014; Castillo et al., 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Marzano, 2003). Implementing RTI creates a systematic way for teachers to be intentional and uniformed about instructional practices and standards, but allows students' needs to be fluid in the lesson design.

Batsche, Kavale, and Kovaleski (2006) described the core principles to implementing a successful RTI team. All children must be taught and have access to high instructional rigor incorporating essential concepts crucial at each grade level. Students must be given the opportunity to learn. Early intervention is the key to closing deficits before struggling learners get too far behind (Castillo, 2014; Castillo et al., 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Using a multi-tiered model ensures students get the most instruction targeted to their strengths and weaknesses, without missing key concepts. Assessments must guide the problem-solving team that is reviewing the data for trends regularly. This allows the team to determine if the interventions are working. The problem-solving team must meet frequently, looking at the data to ensure students are improving and the interventions are working.

The most challenging component of the RTI program is the implementation itself). The idea of documenting, progress monitoring and evaluating students frequently above and beyond the already taxing requirements and responsibilities of teaching may be initially viewed as overwhelming (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). However, RTI is the best method to reach all learners, regardless of background or personal story (Castillo, 2014; Castillo et al., 2015; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

RTI is a three-tiered model, with the first tier focusing on highly qualified teachers delivering targeted instruction. The second tier targets students falling slightly below grade level. The students in this tier need a little more direct instruction on a specific concept or skill. The third tier is the student significantly below grade level. A child here tends to be two years behind grade level and is testing in the bottom 10th percentile of the class. With a team approach being systematic and focused, all three tiers can be developed successfully and implemented easily. Figure 1 demonstrates the tiered-model approach to providing targeted systematic interventions.

Figure 1

Pyramid Response to Intervention
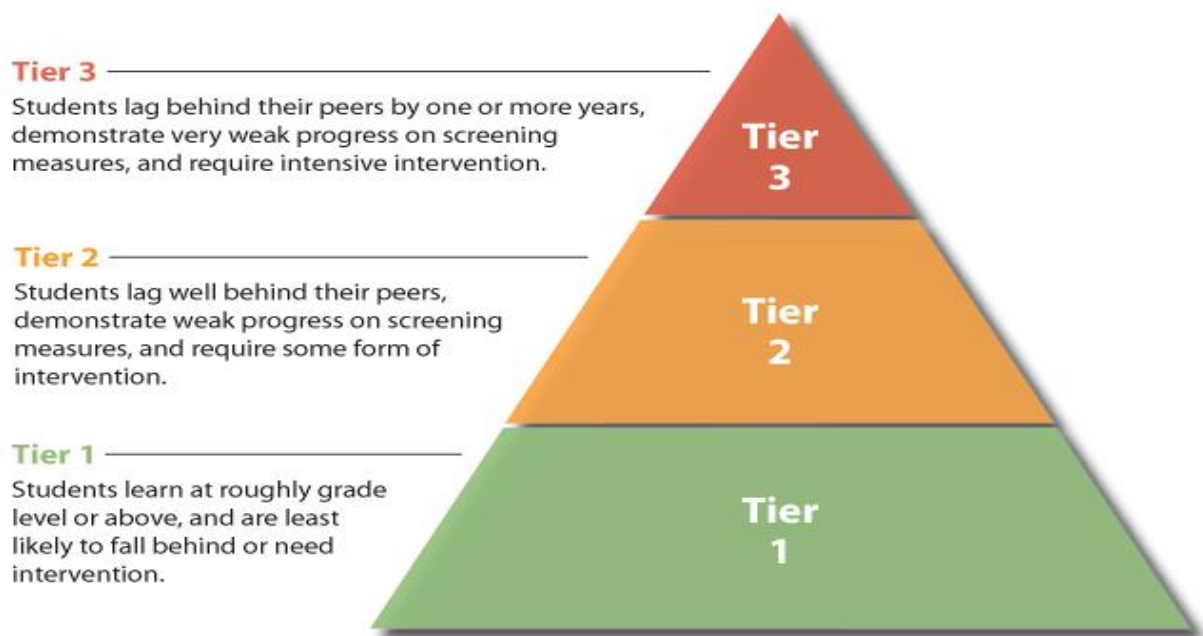
Note: Adapted from "How Do Principals Really Improve Schools?" by R. DuFour and M. Mattos, 2013, *Educational Leadership, 70*(7), pp. 34–40.

When the NCLB Act and the reauthorization of IDEA came into effect, a new vision and change expected (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). RTI allowed for a more focused, collaborative climate between specialists and general education teachers that never existed prior to 2004. It allows them to implement blended, cohesive, highly targeted learning environments that support all types of learners. It allows the lines dividing teachers to be erased. Simply put, RTI provides systematic timely interventions that are viable and sustained (Castillo, March, Stocklager, & Hines, 2016; Cook, Lyon, Kubergovic, Wright, & Zhang, 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). This is RTI at its best.

The first step to implementing a successful RTI model is developing a collaborative systematic team approach that answers the following questions: What do we expect kids to

learn? What do we do when they haven't learned it? (DuFour, 2004). This approach allows team members to stay focused on learning objectives and the goal of student achievement. In some schools, this team is called a student study team or a problem solving team (DuFour, 2004). The main goal of such teams is to formally document and implement strategic plans that will increase student achievement. The team is critical to the RTI process, and it is essential that the team create a collective action in which core instruction and supplemental support are provided to meet the needs of individual students. RTI systems are characterized by (a) instruction and programs are matched to students' needs in tiers of instruction that differ in frequency and intensity and (b) frequent progress monitoring to examine student progress and to make adjustments to instructional plans (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

The first tier, or core program, is the most important element of RTI. This is where learning should occur. It is imperative that teachers are highly qualified and provide solid, specific, targeted instruction (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Educators across the nation RTI become more focused on providing a systematic universal quality of education for all students. Assessment-driven instruction and data-driven curriculum have become the new "buzzwords" words in education.

At the first tier, universal screens, are given to all students to determine baseline data and identify children who fall in the strategic and intensive range. Several examples of differentiated instruction at the first tier are literacy circles, targeted centers, and mini lessons in small groups, or teacher conferencing (DuFour, 2015). This allows the teacher to provide diverse lessons to the different learning modalities. Teachers must set high standards and be willing to make sure their students reach them.

The second tier is a supplemental program in the RTI model. This is in addition to the core program. Specific target deficits are identified and remediated at least three times a week for thirty minute sessions with explicit systematic instruction (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). In this stage, the Title 1 or special education teacher may pull students out or support the teacher in the class to provide targeted instruction. Scientifically researched-based programs should be used if providing alternate curriculum (DuFour, 2009). Students in the second tier must be exposed to all direct delivery of the core instruction. A variety of instructional methods and resources should be used here before determining whether or not a student progresses into the third tier.

The third tier is the intensive range (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). These are the most at-risk students. At this level, students have a significant amount of documentation showing lack of growth, with a list of strategies and instructional programs that have been tried. It is important to note that progress monitoring at this level should be frequent and evaluative. Teachers are continuously adapting curriculum and strategies to support the child's learning style and pace (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Interventions must be occurring five times a week for at least 30 minutes. Progress monitoring should occur every four weeks, and the plan should be adjusted based on need. RTI, if implemented correctly with a team approach and proactive teachers, can and will alter an entire school's climate (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Erchul, 2015). Students will make significant gains in the classroom. Teachers are a collaborative team that is proactive and seeking the highest level of learning with the highest quality of instruction,

Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle (2007) argued that districts want to improve student achievement and learning, despite the many roadblocks that embody most schools, must focus on

students first and building systems that allow best practices to be reviewed and implemented. Schools concentrate on learning at high levels to ensure the success of all students. Bradley et al. (2007) stress the importance of trust and respect between teachers and students. High cultures of learning are built around strong relationships.

Burns (2008) researched current studies on RTI at the secondary level to determine their effectiveness and the variables that defined effective. The schools that were utilizing RTI saw a decrease in student referrals and a rise in grades. Those schools reviewed created a system of interventions based on deficits and systematically provided support for struggling students. Additionally, Burns (2008) noted that the schools that utilized a problem-solving approach coupled with RTI saw a higher increase in student achievement scores and a decrease in behavior referrals. In this study, higher student achievement was due to the intentionality and grit of the staff and students. At every tier, the focus was on how to best deliver instruction and or an intervention based on needs of the students.

Burns, Appleton, and Stehouwer (2005) highlighted two different RTI models that are used to identify students who are struggling and need additional support in the school day. One called the problem-solving model is a group of teachers and specialists come together to tailor a program or intervention for an individual child based on their strengths and deficits. The other model called a standard protocol model, that has prescribed interventions created that students are plugged in to by researchers trying to determine the effectiveness of RTI.

Schools using the problem-solving approach to RTI are seeing increasing gains in the area of student achievement (Burns et al., 2005). The students that are being referred to special education under the category of learning disabled are decreasing. Teacher teams coming together to improve instruction and learning are seeing an increase in their students' performance and

abilities in the classroom. The team approach has a great impact on the success of our students. Schools using the standard protocol models are seeing less academic gains.

Fuchs and Deshler (2007) highlighted the importance of districts defining the purpose of RTI in their schools. Everyone must have the same understanding of implementation and purpose for RTI to be successfully implemented. Once the purpose is defined, then creating solid tiers of instruction, utilizing special education dollars to fund general education to front-load at-risk kids, will minimize the amount of children who qualify for special education services (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Forman & Crystal, 2015; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). In order to successfully implement RTI, Fuchs and Deshler (2007) stated schools must be provided professional development in the area of implementation and sustainability. Administrators must support the implementation of RTI and provide resources to further the cause.

As a district, administrators must hire teachers with an understanding and support of RTI; this is crucial to the sustainability of RTI and its effectiveness with increasing student achievement. Teachers must participate in continuous professional development to increase their skills in effective tiered instruction. Lastly, the culture of RTI must be addressed to ensure a common vision of learning at high levels for all students. Bollman et al. (2007) focus on how to implement effective problem-solving teams that are school based and their effectiveness in rising test scores. Bollman et al. (2007) found that using general outcomes measures as their base to determine achievement scores, providing evidence-based instruction for targeted areas of weaknesses and school-wide teams to continuously review the process for identifying and planning interventions, greatly increases the productivity of school-based teams and increases achievement levels in schools. Table 1 outlines the systematic protocol of effective RTI.

Table 1

Response to Intervention Through a Lens of a Professional Learning Community

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Goal	Provide high-quality exposure to core	Additional support in small group	Intensive interventions
Target Group	All children	Some children	Few children
Intentional	Universal screeners three times a year	Progress monitor to assess growth	Progress monitor to assess growth
Response	Core curriculum	Explicit instruction	Individualized
Collaborative	Reviews data frequently	Reviews data to determine if interventions are working	Reviews data to determine if interventions are working

Note: Adapted from "How Do Principals Really Improve Schools?" by R. DuFour and M. Mattos, 2013, *Educational Leadership, 70*(7)

Barriers Within Tiered Instruction Through the Lens of Professional Learning Communities

Teaching is an intense profession that requires a great deal of time and dedication to persevere through all the demands placed on schools and teachers, creating a sense of isolation due to the time constraints and the workload. Time seemingly is one of the greatest inhibitors of implementing tiered instruction through the lens of a PLC (DuFour et al., 2010; Hall & Hord 2015; Vescio et al., 2008). Limited time inhibits professional development to ensure quality systems are implemented, therefore limiting their effectiveness. Furthermore, due to funding loss, professional development opportunities for teachers and administrators are scarce. The inability to provide ongoing education to build the capacity within the school minimizes the sustainability of change. Time constraints limit teachers' and administrators' ability to

collaborate share ideas, resources, and pedagogy. Limited time accentuates the feeling of isolation in schools.

Lack of funding has also been identified as a barrier to implementing tiered instruction through the lens of a PLC. Principals have difficulty providing collaboration time for teachers due to difficulties in finding substitutes and contract time limitations. Providing time to train staff to create sustainable systems is a hurdle that creates a significant impact in implementation.

Brozo (2009) studied research regarding effective RTI in the area of reading at a secondary level. Limited research is available in this area. With the limited evidence of effectiveness available, secondary schools should pause before jumping into tiered reading interventions (Brozo, 2009). The scheduling and movement that happen in secondary schools also present a problem in implementing tiered interventions. Trying to find time in a packed schedule is a daunting task for secondary administrators. Effective reading instruction is beyond decoding multisyllabic words and grammar. It is complex reading strategies embedded in text, which students must interact with and connect to real-life application. If teachers are lacking in effective understanding of reading instruction or curriculum, then tiered instruction will not be successful.

Sustainability

Duyar, Gumus, and Bellibas (2013) concluded that one of the surest methods to create an increase in student achievement is through teacher collaboration. Furthermore, teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and self-efficacy are directly linked to teachers' ability to collaborate with their counterparts. There are still limited systems in place in schools to ensure collaboration is occurring. Just a sharing of ideas is not enough in collaboration; a shared vision and purpose must be established focused on student learning. There is strong evidence that when

teachers come together to share ideas, instructional pedagogy, and best practices centered on learning, then student achievement improves. This means time during the week must be allocated for collaboration. Teachers must carve out a time and place to meet with their counterparts to talk about students and instruction. This time must be purposeful and focused in order to maximize collaboration. Based on student assessments, learning outcomes are tailored to meet the needs of students. The lessons must be targeted and focused on what teachers expect their students to learn.

Fullan and Miles (1992) described the importance and need of school reform with the demands of accountability placed on schools. In school reform and culture change, there are dos and don'ts. Seven themes of dos and don'ts have surfaced based on their research. First, change is learning with uncertainty. The vision is clear, but the method to get there may be muddy, but the journey matters. Change creates new meaning. The second theme is the journey of change is important; it is not all about the destination. A third theme is shared vision for change is needed in order to be successful in school reform. Change needs resources. This theme is evident in the need for supports to be a focus. The fourth theme is second-order change cannot be implemented without intentionality to supports. The next theme that materialized is shared leadership. Staff and administration must work together, including the central office and surrounding schools. The sixth theme is to ensure sustainability to change and a focus on school reform, the change efforts must be systematic and clear. The last theme that became evident was that change must be local and possess an intimate knowledge of the entity. Change cannot happen from afar.

The reflection process that occurs through self-discovery is important to growing as a leader. For growth and change to occur, one must be willing to look at both strengths and weaknesses in themselves and systems to problem-solve ways to overcome areas of struggle

(DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Research allows one to make changes based on evidence. Students, teachers, and administrators have a voice and together can build dynamic learning environments that enrich the lives of all students and the atmosphere in which they work. It is important to truly listen and glean ideas from others that enrich thoughts and ideas. Effective schools work together with a common goal that improves student achievement and the quality of their lives (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite, & Wilcox, 2015).

Darling-Hammond (2013) focused her research on the new age 21st-century learning and how teachers in this new era must accommodate and adapt to meet the rigor of education reform. No longer is the isolated classroom enough to meet the demands of high learning for all students under Common Core State Standards (Darling-Hammond, 2013b). Teachers need to be innovative, creating new strategies, accessing multiple learning modalities and texts complexities to achieve the demands that they are faced with. Developing teachers' expertise within the standards is the best and safest method to ensue high levels of learning for all students. Policy makers and schools must realize the demands of the profession and safeguard teachers' ability to come together, grow, and share in order to build their repertoire. By collaborating, the system of professional development is built in. Collaborating, if allotted time is frequent, allows teachers to build their understanding of best practices, strategies, and pedagogy.

Theoretical Framework

Hord (2004) collected over nine years of research on collaborations in schools through the Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory. As she was researching, she came to the conclusion that PLCs provide the best chance at raising the bar for children and closing academic gaps in the areas of reading and math. In her findings, she noted, schools that were increasingly getting higher test scores, demonstrated less teacher turnover, and included a positive school

culture were the schools that had a shared vision of learning for all. This included parents,

teachers, administrators, and students.

Hord (1997) discussed the importance of PLCs and the five dimensions that, through her

research, have consistently been commonplace in effective implementation of PLCs. Shared and

supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared

personal practice and supportive conditions are key to sustaining a collaborative culture focused

on student learning. The research is clear on what needs to be present to ensure a successful

PLC. Hord (1997) emphasized the importance of the school leaders and district office staff,

embracing the five common practices to ensure each practice is effectively implemented in all

schools. Each of the five attributes must be present and observable to maximize the potential of a

collaborative culture. Figure 2 illustrates the theoretical framework that directed this research,

identifying the five components essential to implementing and sustaining a successful PLC.

Figure 2

Theoretical Framework based on Hord's Five Dimensions
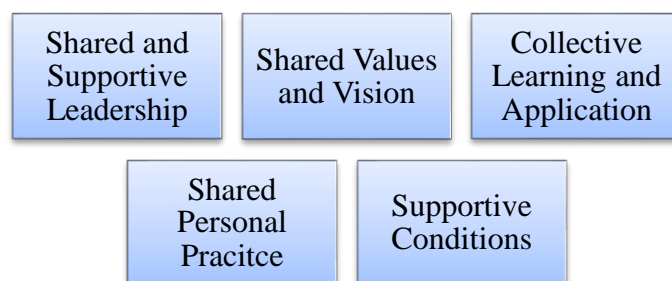
Note. The above figure emphasizes the importance of implementing and sustaining a
professional learning community focused on student learning based on Hord's five dimensions.

Shared and supportive leadership is the notion that leadership is focused on building the

capacity of continuous learning in all. It is leadership that empowers those around them, with the

collective voice committed to the betterment of the whole (Oliver et al., 2010). All staff members

are included in the decision and brainstorming of solution about school issues. The voice through collaboration is heard; ideas are shared. Teachers tend to rely on directives from administration when dealing with difficulty or problem-solving a solution (Dufour, 2005; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Shared leadership changes this phenomenon and embraces collective learning and empowers teachers to find solutions.

Shared values and vision incorporate a shared focus on student learning that is intentional and apparent across the school's culture (Louis & Marks, 1998; Oliver et al., 2010). Everyone is working toward a collective mission and vision focused on student learning. Shared values is "How teachers conceive the purpose of the school, and how they will construct their vision for what the school should look like and how teachers will work together" (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p.9). When the vision of a school is embraced and shared by the mass, its purpose and focus becomes centered on what is important and prioritized. Schools share vision for school improvement that has an unwavering focus on improving student learning.

Collective learning and application embed inquiry-based learning that is pursued and applied to knowledge and ongoing learning for the staff and school. Teachers and administrators are constantly pursuing new learning opportunities that will benefit their students and school (Hord, 1997; Louis & Marks, 1998; Oliver et al., 2010; Senge, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2005). Collective learning embraces the notion of a school or system committed to remaining steadfast in the pursuit of greatness by both administration and staff. Teachers and administrators engage in meaningful collaboration that centers on student learning and improving student results (Hord, 1997). Schools that foster this high level of collaboration focused on student learning and collective application have a greater chance of reaching its intended goal (Hord, 1998).

Shared personal practice is working alongside one another in a collaborative relationship, which includes mentoring, observing, and sharing ideas to increase student learning and to create a culture of learning and sharing building wide (Louis & Marks, 1998; Oliver et al., 2010; Sergiovanni, 2005). Opportunities for staff to observe peers provide feedback related to instructional pedagogy and evidenced based instruction embodies shared personal practice. Mentoring and coaching to increase student achievement is embraced and application of what is learned is part of the overall accountability system. Teachers seek out other teachers to perfect their craft and apply newly learned skills in the classroom (Louis & Marks, 1998; Oliver et al., 2010; Sergiovanni, 2005).

Supportive conditions are incorporated in everyday practices to ensure sustainability and a collaborative culture of respect and learning (Hord, 1997; Oliver et al., 2010). Relationships in a PLC model are built around trust, respect and accountability to shared vision. Success is celebrated and recognized for sustain a unified effort to apply change and growth to enhance teaching and learning.

Figure 3 outlines the theoretical frameworks used as experts to guide this research. The figure outlines the experts' researched and studied in each field of this study.

Figure 3

Theoretical Framework illustrating the integration of research authorities
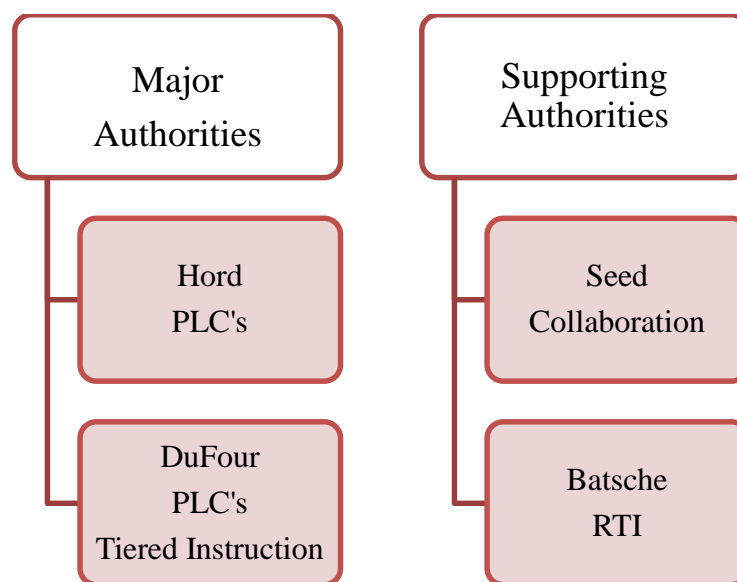
Note. This figure illustrates the experts in their field of study that were used as a foundation for the Theoretical Framework used in this research.

Hord (1998) emphasized the importance of high rigor and high-stakes school reform that the new current expectation in schools. With high demands from legislation regarding school reform and best practices, schools must be more vigilant and intentional with ensuring students are making gains. Hord (1998) stated the surest method to improve academics in schools is teachers working collaboratively and with focus. Schools that were led by inquiry and evidence had the greatest gains in the area of student achievement. Schools that allowed teachers to work with a shared vision and mission, allotted time to collaborate, and defined the expectations and or norms were more successful in garnering academic gains. The key to successful implementation of a PLC is the understanding of the why behind it, time, and a focused goal. This is a continuous model of learning shared by the principal and the staff.

Hord and Sommers (2008) emphasized the importance of continuous learning from all levels of school reform to enact true change. The focus must be on learning, as well as results. The

expectation is reflecting on practices to improve education as a constant. Teachers and administrators are always seeking learning opportunities to grow and strengthen their understanding of pedagogy, content, and best practices. Building the capacity of those around you as a continuous cycle of learning embodies the foundational shifts of a PLC. Everyone is a learning always working to improve their craft regardless of the role. Teachers and administrators are continuously questioning systems as it relate to students and best practices. The goal is focused learning to ensure all students learn at high levels.

Shirley Hord, through the Southwest Education Development Laboratory, provided one of the first models of PLC. She researched effective schools and determined five essential characteristics that needed to be present to truly implement a collaborative problem-solving team. Richard DuFour at Adlai Stevenson High School in Illinois became one of the most recognized and celebrated schools in America due to their intense focus on building collaborative problem-solving teams focused on improving student learning (DuFour & Eaker, 2008).

DuFour and Mattos (2013) described the significant impact PLCs have on schools and school improvement. DuFour and Mattos (2013) challenged schools to look at the PLC process that embodies collective analysis focused on student learning. Schools that encourage the PLC process are more likely to have positive school cultures, higher student test scores, and higher student engagement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). High performing schools set high learning expectations for all students, use assessment data to make decisions regarding student success and employ systems for identifying intervention to match student needs (Ragland, Clubine, Constable, & Smith, 2002).

DuFour and Mattos (2013) believe schools that implement sustainable PLC systems have a significant impact on school improvement. They challenged school leaders to look at PLC

systems that embody collective analysis focused on student learning through a collaborative problem-solving model. "One of the most productive ways for districts to facilitate continual improvement is to develop teachers' capacity to use formative assessments of student progress aligned with district expectations for student learning and to use formative data in devising and implementing interventions" (Louis et al., 2010. P. 214). Those schools that implement PLCs are focused on students; thereby, they ask the right questions to safeguard teacher growth to propel student academic growth.

According to DuFour, (2016) when educators do the hard work needed to implement the essential components of PLC's, focus on learning, collaborative culture, and focus on results, their collective ability to help all students learn will increase. If schools fail to demonstrate the commitment to implement and sustain this work, then their school is unlikely to become more effective. The success or failure of the professional learning community concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the commitment and persistence of the educators within it.

According to Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) RTI is the best method to reach all learners, regardless of background or personal experience. Dr. Lynn Fuchs is a is the Nicholas Hobbs Professor of Special Education and Human Development at Vanderbilt University, where she specializes in reading interventions, tiered instruction and special education. She emphasizes the importance of screening assessments to determine at risk populations and corresponding interventions to identified student deficits (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) underscore the significance of intervening early with a tiered model of instruction as a prevention model for school failure. Furthermore, they accentuate the magnitude of Tier 1 as the need for teachers to differentiate instruction to meet the range of learners' needs (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007).

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) argue the importance of providing systematic approaches to address learning deficits through a problem-solving model to increase student achievement.

Seed (2008), accentuates the importance of five common practices or conditions that must be evident in schools in order to positively impact student learning. To develop deep learners, schools must have highly skilled teachers (Hargreaves, 1994, 2000). According to Seed, creating an environment safe to collaborate about student learning and best teaching practices is an essential condition to successful schools. Collaboration minimizes the isolated phenomenon that has persistently existed among educators. Effective teacher communities establish safe boundaries and criteria for teachers to share and learn from their colleges focused on student learning. "The most successful corporation of the future will be a learning organization" (Senge, 1990, 9.4).

Empowerment is a crucial condition that must be present to sustain effective school improvement (Seed, 2008). Seed argues teachers that are empowered have a vested interest in the school and community. For schools to survive in the high stakes education world, the capacity for shared leadership through teacher leaders must be developed and fostered. More responsibility is assumed when teachers are empowered to make decisions, persevere collectively through struggles and find solutions (Seed, 2008).

Related to Dewey's work, Seed (2008) also emphasizes the importance of reflective teaching and learning practices within in school. He considers reflective practices essential to innovation of new ideas and creative approaches to addressing student achievement. "Reflective practices begin with the belief that one's own efforts are worthwhile and moves on to a careful examination of one's own action and thought processes" (Seed, 2008, P. 587) Building shared

reflection through collaboration is important in enhancing school climate, community and creating ethical practices centered on student achievement.

Time is another crucial condition that must be evident in successful school systems according to Seed. Teachers need time to collaborate, reflect on their teaching and students learning, and implement changes based on data (Seed, 2008). A key to successfully implementing high academic rigor in classrooms is when teachers have the time to meet frequently to collaborate on strategies, set goals, and analyze data (Schneider, 2015). Successful implementation of PLC or RTI systems is contingent on teachers having the time to collaborate on their students learning and teaching practices (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Schneider, 2015; Seed, 2008).

Professional Development is the last condition Seed believes is essential to improving student learning. Teacher training in systems, best instructional practices, and effective assessment alignment is fundamental to successful implementation and sustainability of any system or practice. On- going job embedded training promotes continued learning and growth opportunities for staffs. "A precondition for doing anything to strengthen our practice and improve a school is the existence of a collegial culture in which professionals talk about practice, share their craft knowledge, and observe and root for the success of one another. Without these in place, no meaningful improvement, no staff development, no teacher leadership, no sustained growth is possible" (Barth, 2006, p.13).

George M. Batsche is Professor and Co-Director of the Institute for School Reform at the University of South Florida. Batsche (2007) defines RTI as practices that involves identifying academic risk, intervening early prior to academic failure with increasingly intensive interventions, and monitoring student growth. His research centers on taking action to support

student learning with intentionality and purpose. RTI is designed to provide students a chance to improve their learning with continuous support in their deficit areas as well as grade level standards (Batsche, 2007). Batsche argues that a challenge to successful sustainable RTI systems is the long term commitment from educators to maintain fidelity and dedication to the process. He defines four common implementation components that support successful RTI programs.

Batsche (2007) emphasizes the importance of smarter screening protocols in terms of assessment tools in order to find struggling learners early and intervene. A lack of clarity with how assessments are used impedes teachers' understanding of data driven instruction and results oriented problem solving models (Batsche, 2007; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Batsche (2007) states, planned instructional trials between assessment improves the accuracy and efficiency of screening decisions to determine small groups of students who need more intensive support outside of the core program that is offered to all students..

Next he supports a focus on effective instruction at Tier 1 for all learners. RTI is not sustainable if core instruction is lacking due to classroom management concerns, student disengagement, or weak instruction (Batsche, 2007). When instruction and classroom procedures are strong Batsche argues most students are not at-risk, class wide interventions to address deficits for the entire class is an effective strategy used to increase student achievement.

Batsche (2007) argues schools need effective interventions to address student needs which include personnel, resources, and instructional expertise. Schools must allocate the appropriate resource for effective RTI systems to be successful and sustainable. Interventions must match students' needs individually prescribed by the problem-solving team opposed to matching pre-determined interventions to students.

Lastly, Batsche emphasizes the importance of using research evidence to determine instructional action to ensure strong returns on student learning and increasing student achievement. Tools for successful implementation of RTI include, alignment with interventions to student proficiency, increased learning trials or formative assessments to demonstrate learning, frequent feedback to students, and altering interventions based on student growth (Batsche, 2007). He believes through his research RTI is an effective practice to increasing student learning if effective systems are put in place with rigor and fidelity.

Conclusion

The literature review support two central themes: (1) PLCs greatly impact student growth in all academic areas, and (2) RTI provides systematic interventions to ensure student achievement.

The first theme supported by the literature review is implementing PLCs. Fulton and Britton (2011) believed the idea of change is hard for most people. In our schools we have support staff, parents' specialists, administrators, janitors, and teachers. Fulton and Britton (2011) ask the question do schools use their people effectively Do we utilize all the resources in our buildings to maximize student learning? Teachers have their own parent helpers; support staff has assigned jobs. The need for reform is at an all-time high in today's schools. It is crucial that school districts revisit current policies and cultures that have proven to be ineffective and demonstrate limited findings in the area of improving student achievement. The old policies of waiting for students to fail isolated teaching, and one-dimensional teaching only results in schools failing.

Fulton and Britton (2011) found that districts that want to improve learning despite the obstacles that embody most schools need to enact change that is monumental and requires a team

approach and a more focused-driven systematic approach to students' learning. Essentially, districts need to change their mantra from "we teach" to "all students learn regardless of their baseline. In order for PLCs to occur effectively, it has to be collaborative and within a nonthreatening environment. It has to be practical and something the teachers view as essential to increasing student achievement. The PLC model based on assessments driving instruction embodies and propels this notion of change. If teachers review and analyze data, interpreting trends in strengths and weaknesses, then the discussions will automatically lead to professional development in both knowledge and curriculum.

The second theme supported through the literature review is the effective implementation of RTI, or tiered instruction. RTI, if implemented correctly with a team approach and proactive teachers, can and will alter an entire school's climate (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Students will make significant gains in the classroom and on state testing. Teachers will feel more part of a collaborative team that is proactive and seeking the highest level of learning with the highest quality of instruction. Effective instruction will be at its best and happening in every classroom. Overall, RTI will change attitudes about education. Students will make growth, and the highest level of learning will be achieved. This is what effective schools at their best look like.

Chapter III

Design and Methodology

Introduction

Since the passage of NCLB in 2001, schools have focused on continuous school improvement and implementing systems that meet the legislative mandates (DuFour et al., 2010). Additionally, with the passage of ESSA, more requirements focused on high student achievement rates are expected. In this effort, collaboration through the lens of tiered instruction has emerged as an effective system of school improvement (DuFour et al., 2010; DuFour & Mattos, 2013). The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a PLC through the lens of tiered instruction from principal and teacher perspective.

This chapter discusses the research design and methods used to synthesize and analyze data related to PLCs and RTI. Included in this chapter are the researcher's role and details regarding setting, site, and population used. Ethical considerations must be followed when conducting research. Instruments used in this study include interviews, surveys, statistical data, and informed consent forms. They are in the appendices of this study.

The central focus and research questions asked in this study were:

1. How does implementing Professional Learning Communities and RTI support increased student achievement from principal and teacher perspective using the PLCA-R?

2. What benefits and challenges are identified in establishing a Professional Learning Community model and RTI within a school perspective using the PLCA-R?

3. How does creating tiered instruction through a collaborative professional learning community and RTI model support continuous school improvement?

The researcher used a mixed-method approach that included an exploratory sequential design to study relationships between qualitative and quantitative data. Mixed Methods research provides an in-depth look into the perception of the participants, variation in data collection leads to greater validity, answers the question from a number of perspectives, ensures that there are no 'gaps' to the information or data collected, ensures that pre-existing assumptions from the researcher are less likely (Creswell 2013; Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Gathering data that provided an in-depth look into the benefits and challenges of establishing a PLC was crucial, therefore a case-study approach was used. A case-study approach yielded an in-depth look into PLCs because it addressed the social actions and structures that existed within. Creswell (2007) defined case study as an exploration of a process. Case-study research involves an in-depth comprehensive examination of a single entity. This study used a mixed method design, using Creswell's (2012) description of "a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a singly study to understand a research problem" (p. 535).

Setting

The study was conducted in a northwestern state school district with an enrollment of 4225 students with 11 public schools organized as elementary (k-6), middle (7-8), and high school (9-12) . Minority enrollment was 6% of the student body (the majority of which was Hispanic), less than the state average of 23%. Generally described as a medium sized district, it is located in a rural community with a student-teacher ratio of 19:1, slightly less than the state average of 20:1. The community is considered a rural agriculture and service economy. The district's overall reputation is regarded as stable, with good community support.

Currently the district of study is working to align all goals and resources to their strategic plan that is focused on being collaborative and ensuring non- negotiable goals are achieved. Professional development in the area of Professional learning Communities and Response to Intervention has been a key focus at the district and school level. Three days of intense training in both areas was completed in August of 2015, with ongoing one-hour collaborations led by instructional coaches and building administrators throughout the year.   Strategic planning and alignment at the district level to the building level has been a priority for the past seven years.

To ensure successful and sustainable implementation of PLC and RTI systems, teachers are provided one hour of grade level collaboration with their building partner and three shared prep periods weekly. This time is designated for synthesizing student data and data driven changes to instruction. Additionally, teachers meet monthly district wide to share instructional ideas and student achievement. The focus is developing and reviewing common assessments, sharing data, and collaboratively sharing best instructional practices aligned to our essential learning targets. SMART goals are resolute on student learning not teaching.

Each school in the selected district embarks on the PLC journey every year by developing SMART goals for their grade level and building. Administrators meet at the beginning of each quarter to collaborate and review progress toward grade level and building goals. As part of the checkout process, teachers and administrators are required to put together a portfolio centered around student achievement based on their SMART goals.

To ensure board alignment, every principal must present to the board twice a year, to highlights of their success in reaching the vision of high levels of learning for all and a summary

of their plans to achieve their goals. Additionally, the strategic plan is reviewed yearly by board and administrators. This process includes updating non-negotiables and allocating resources.

In the past five years, the studied district has hired three different Superintendents, two Assistant Superintendents and hired three new Building Principals. The district leadership turnover has minimized effectiveness of valued focus on essential non-negotiables and allocation of resources at the district level. The turnover at the building level has impacted sustainability in the implantation of effective systems and their on-going analysis of success.

The study was conducted in two phases. In phase one, administrators and teachers in the district participated in an online survey by choice. An initial email was sent by the researcher encouraging participation, but stating that participation was voluntary. The survey was sent to 240 teachers in the school district through the PLCA-R online version of the Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory. The data was coded and sent back to the researcher to maintain confidentiality. Only the researcher viewed data.

Because the researcher was an employee of the studied district, extraordinary steps were taken to ensure participant confidentiality to encourage truthful responses and to protect participants from any form of peer or supervisor criticism. The steps taken to provide participant anonymity reduced an element of context for other researchers in that participant gender and school assignment were obscured or generalized.

This study used the PLCA-R designed by Oliver et al., (2010) to generate a survey, for determining what characteristics and attributes were adopted by the participants based on the five dimensions of effective PLCs from Hord's (1998) research, to better understand benefits, challenges, and overall perceptions (see Appendix F). The researcher requested permission to use

the assessment from Dr. Diane Oliver, a research colleague of Hord, designated as the person

who grants permission to use the assessment tool. Permission was granted and included (see

Appendix D). The 4-point Likert scale survey was categorized into five dimensions based on

Hord's research of successful and sustainable PLC's. Table 2 demonstrates each dimension and

the number of questions that correspond to each.

Table 2

The PLC-R survey dimensions with statement numbers.

PLC Dimensions	Statement Numbers
Shared and Supportive Leadership	1-11 = 11
Shared Values and Vision	12-20 = 8
Collective Learning and Application	21-30 = 9
Shared Personal Practice	31-37 = 6
Supportive Conditions	38-52 = 14

Participants were able to provide quantitative information via scaled scores and

qualitative information via comments. Statistical tests were run on the quantitative information to

determine significance. The Mann Whitney U and the ANOVA were used for comparative data

to determine variances between subgroups and populations. Open and axial coding were used to

determine categories, themes and relationships from the qualitative data gathered from the

survey.

In phase two, the researcher conducted three different focus groups to gather more

information regarding perceptions of PLC's and RTI based on teacher and principal perspective.

This case-study, using a mixed-method approach centered on investigating principal and teacher perception of the level of RTI implementation based on DuFour's continuum through the use of a focus group interviews. (See Appendix I) This continuum is a non-copyrighted document generated from *Learn by Doing* (DuFour et al., 2010). The researcher modified the continuum by changing statements into questions in order to utilize the continuum in the interviews. The purpose of the focus groups was to ascertain beliefs and perceptions associated with the implementation of Professional Learning Communities and tiered instruction to increase student achievement. This provided the researcher a window into what stages of RTI implementation each school identified with.

A confederate or surrogate was used during the focus groups to eliminate potential bias on the part of the researcher. A confidentiality form was completed and a resume submitted by the confederate, prior to focus group interviews being conducted. All of the questions utilized in the focus group interviews were piloted with a group of teachers not participating in the study in August of 2016. Based on feedback from the pilot rubric (See Appendix J) questions were revised to ensure validity and reliability.

The first focus group included participants who were not directly associated with the RTI team. Five teachers from five elementary schools participated. The teachers were chosen by purposeful sampling. The researcher sent an email to building administrators requesting names of participants that had limited knowledge and or participation with their school RTI and PLC teams. Once names were selected, the researcher requested voluntary participation via an email. Ten participants were emailed in the first focus group and five participated.

The second focus group conducted included participants who were directly associated with their schools' RTI team. These teachers were chosen by purposeful sampling. The

researcher sent an email to building administrators requesting names of participants that had

recently participated on a yearly RTI and or PLC team. Six participants from five different

elementary schools participated in this phase of the study. This group of participants was chosen

due to their experience and insight into their schools' systematic approach to implementing RTI

and PLC's at the building level. Ten participants were emailed in the first focus group and six

participated.

The last focus group held was comprised of district and building administrators; a total

of six administrators participated. The teachers and administrators chosen to participate in the

focus groups volunteered to attend and participate. A letter was sent out detailing the objective of

the focus group and requesting participation (see Appendix C). The focus groups were conducted

at the district office in the board room. Three different focus-group opportunities were provided

to increase participation and minimize the number of participants in each session.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a

PLC through the lens of tiered instruction from principal and teacher perspective. The study used

mixed-methods studies where quantitative and qualitative methods were predetermined and

planned at the start of the research process. The mixed-method approach to research enriched the

findings built upon both quantitative and qualitative information (Creswell, 2009, 2013). The use

of quantitative data allowed the researcher to provide a numeric description of trends, themes, or

opinions that emerged (Creswell, 2009, 2013). Qualitative research focuses on understanding the

themes and trends that emerge in greater detail (Creswell, 2013).

The exploratory nature of this research design allowed the researcher to collect and

synthesize qualitative and quantitative data. Using qualitative data allowed the researcher to

investigate the embedded relational connections, through survey comments and focus-group interviews (Creswell, 2008). Incorporating the quantitative data using SPSS statistical software to determine statistical significance strengthened the overall results of the study (Creswell, 2009, 2013). Triangulating these variables allowed the researcher to make connections with patterns and trends through the different findings in the research (Creswell, 2009). A qualitative approach to this study allowed the researcher to glean information by interviewing those in the field.

Quantitative data are more numbers driven, which allows for more concrete information regarding statistical significance and central tendency (Creswell, 2009). Using quantitative data to generalize demonstrates patterns, which leads to uncovering facts.

Ethical Issues

Establishing ethical boundaries, trust, and rapport were essential to the effectiveness of this study. To maintain confidentiality and respect the privacy of those administrators and teachers participating was a cornerstone to the reliability and validity of the study. Pre-established relationships in the building presented an ethical consideration to maintaining established rapport and remaining objective. Because the researcher was a principal in the studied school district, a school employee served as a surrogate to conduct focus-group interviews. She was an expert in PLCs and RTI implementation. This method was proposed because of the sensitivity surrounding the interviews and the researcher's role as an administrator in the district. The method of using a surrogate addressed the ethical consideration of privacy. Validity was enhanced by using a surrogate because subjects were more likely to answer questions based on their beliefs versus what they thought the researcher wanted them to say. Using a surrogate eliminated a potential bias in the study.

Moreover, as noted above, because the researcher was an employee of the studied district, extraordinary steps were taken to ensure participant confidentiality to encourage truthful responses and to protect participants from any form of peer or supervisor criticism. The steps taken reduced an element of context for other researchers in that participant gender and school assignment were obscured or generalized.

In the study, the surrogate interviewed the participants in their natural environment, with minimal disruption to avoid skewing or altering outcomes. Surveys and interviews remained confidential to ensure adherence to ethical practices. At the onset of this study, permission was requested from the superintendent and the principals of each school. The administrators approved in writing of the study and felt the advantages of the research would be to the betterment of the district (see Appendix B).

Reliability and validity measures are important when conducting surveys as one needs to know if the instrument is testing what the researcher wants tested consistently. Reliability specifically is determining the consistency of the measure. Is it repeatable and over multiple tries from a variety of researchers? Reliability measures determine if the same questions elicit the same responses when re-administered to participants. There are four forms of reliability; Inter-observer, Test-retest, Parallel-forms and Split half. A reliable test will yield similar results with similar populations. Validity tests determine if the test accurately measures what it is supposed to. Internal Consistency connects the inter-relatedness of each item of the test and should be determined prior to performing research.

The most popular reliability statistics used today for internal consistency is the Cronbach's alpha (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). It calculates the average correlation of items in the survey to determine reliability scales. The alpha coefficient determines the range of

consistency between 0 and 1. Nunnaly (1978) defines $\alpha = 0.7$ to be an acceptable reliability coefficient. According to Tavakol and Dennick (2011) it is important to determine if the alpha coefficient value is high due a large number of redundant questions or low due to a minimal amount of questions.

When looking at Internal Consistency within The Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R), the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients examines the average correlation of items on the survey instrument. Research, although arguable by many statisticians' states that anything below $\alpha = .70$ is deemed unreliable. The following is the internal consistency using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for Shared and Supportive Leadership ($\alpha = .94$); Shared Values and Vision ($\alpha = .92$); Collective Learning and Application ($\alpha = .91$); Supportive Conditions-Structures ($\alpha = .88$); and a one-factor solution ($\alpha = .97$).

Participants

The researcher took great precaution to ensure the sampling size was represented by the population. In phase one of this study, all the administrators and teachers in the district were provided the opportunity to participate in the survey by choice. A total of ten administrators and one hundred and thirty-seven teachers participated in the online survey. The sample size of phase two was comprised of nine teachers from each of the six elementary schools and six administrators. All of the administrators were invited to participate in the focus groups. The teachers chosen to participate in the focus groups volunteered to attend and participate. A letter was sent out detailing the objective of the focus group and requesting participation (see Appendix C). The focus groups were conducted at the district office in the board room. Three different focus-group opportunities were provided to increase participation and minimize the number of participants in each session. The names of participants in this study will not be

disclosed. All information will be kept confidential. Data collection sheets, notes and transcripts will be stored electronically on encrypted computer files with the password only known to the researcher. Only the researcher could match participants with identifying codes. All participants had the right to refuse to answer any or all questions or discontinue their participation in the study.

Data Collection

Marshall and Rossman (2016) discussed the importance of defining the methods of study and describing the data that will be collected to inform research and answer the following research questions. The following table illustrates each method of data collection and the qualitative and quantitative analysis methods used.

Table 3

Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

How does implementing Professional Learning Communities and RTI support increased student achievement from principals' and teachers' perspective?	Focus Group	Open Coding- themes Axial Coding- categories
What benefits and challenges are identified in establishing a Professional Learning Community model and RTI within a school using the PLCA-R?	Descriptive Survey	ANOVA- detects significant differences among groups (5 dimensions of PLCR-A) Mann Whitney *U*- analyzes two different groups for significance (Administrators and Teachers Males and Females)
How does creating tiered instruction through a collaborative professional learning community and RTI model support continuous school improvement?	Focus Group	Open Coding- themes Axial Coding- categories

Principals and teachers from eleven schools were invited to participate in both phases of this study. This study used the PLCA-R designed by Oliver et al., (2010) to generate a survey, for determining what characteristics and attributes were adopted based on the five dimensions of effective PLCs from Hord's (1998) research, and to better understand benefits, challenges, and overall perceptions (see Appendix F). The researcher requested permission to use the assessment from Dr. Diane Oliver, a research colleague of Hord, who was designated to grant permission to

use the assessment tool. Permission was granted and included (see Appendix D). An e-mail explaining the purpose of the study and the importance of the survey was sent to all certified district employees, one week before the survey was conducted, inviting them to participate in this study. An additional reminder e-mail was submitted three days before the survey was disseminated. Once the survey was disseminated to certified employees, it remained open for three weeks. All survey responses were recorded anonymously to increase the integrity and reliability of the participants' responses.

One month after the online survey was completed; three focus-group interviews were conducted, representing a sample from the five elementary schools. Each focus-group session was held after school on three consecutive days for approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. Each session was recorded using a portable audio-recording device. After the completion of the focus groups, the recordings were transcribed and then analyzed by the researcher.

Additionally, this case study focused on investigating principal and teacher perception of their level of PLC implementation, based on DuFour's continuum; through the use of focus-group interviews (see Appendix I). This continuum is a non-copyrighted document generated from *Learn by Doing* (DuFour et al., 2010). The document was altered by the researcher to change statements into questions. The purpose of these focus groups was to ascertain beliefs and perceptions associated with the implementation of PLCs and tiered instruction to increase student achievement. This allowed the researcher a window into what stages of PLC implementation each school identified with and their perceptions of benefits and challenges.

A reflective journal was used to tell the story behind the data through the lens of the researcher. The journal included notes, quotes, and cognitive thoughts that occurred during each phase of the study. Reflective journals, according to Mills (2007), create a pathway to

transparency of the research and the findings. It opens a bird's-eye view to what the researcher was thinking and processing while involved in the study.

To ensure an ethical study was conducted and followed to fidelity, the researcher completed training for human research through the National Institute of Health and gained consent from the Human Research Review Committee prior to conducting the study (see Appendix I). Furthermore, permission was granted from the district's superintendent to access student data and pursue this study.

Analytical Methods

Descriptive research is used to analyze and provide accurate data based on variables that demonstrate the relationships between the experiences encountered by those involved. Descriptive research relies on surveys and interviews to collect information that can be changed into meaningful data. For this study, surveys and interviews were used to collect data on teachers' and administrators' viewpoints regarding PLCs. A version of "grounded theory" methodology was used to code and develop emerging themes based on the focus-group data. The researcher analyzed the responses to locate emerging themes, correlation, inferences, and commonalities.

Data from the survey were calculated as numbers to determine the mean and standard deviation. All numbers were added and divided by the total number. Comparison of the recorded responses across the district was converted to mean scores. While RQ1 addresses student growth, the study was designed to illicit perceived growth and no student achievement data was analyzed.

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a PLC through the lens of tiered instruction from principal and te perspective.

According to Creswell (2012, 2013) there exists in any research underlying limitations and assumptions or "potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher" (Creswell, 2005, p. 198). Research without limitation considerations brings into question the internal validity of the findings (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, limitations are influences in the study that cannot be controlled. These are variables that may influence or impact the study without the researcher's ability to regulate. By openly stating the limitations of the research, a researcher can help other researchers "judge to what ex-tent the findings can or cannot be generalized to other people and situations" (Creswell, 2005, p. 198). The research questions were intended to determine staffs' perception of PLC and RTI implementation, the following limitations were acknowledged:

- This study focused on a specific sample population from a school district in a northwestern state. The limited sample size made generalizability to other populations difficult. Purposeful sampling was used in each of the three focus groups interviews. The first focus group included participants who were not directly associated with the RTI team, the second focus group conducted included participants who were directly associated with their schools' RTI and PLC teams, and the last was elementary administrators whom have underwent extensive training in both RTI and PLC systems.

- The study presumed that all teachers and administrators who participated in the study had a working knowledge of PLC's and RTI. Although the district had participated in extensive professional development in both areas, the underpinnings of this research

depended on an established understanding of how PLC's and RTI systems work in a school setting; understanding concepts in theory is different than understanding in application.

- This study did not take into consideration that specific sample populations may be over represented in the survey portion of the research. Because the survey portion of this study was anonymous, although the researcher was able to collect demographic information on each participant based on their school name, the survey was voluntary.

- This study used a familiar site to create an embedded vested interest that may or may not impact teachers' and administrators willingness to participate due to concerns of judgment or recourse. The researcher has been associated with the research site as a teacher, instructional coach, and a principal. The familiarity with staff and parents could pose a bias in the research.

- Limitations included the trustworthiness of the participants who responded to the study's survey. While the researcher believed the participants answered questions truthfully, it was possible some participants responded based on what they perceived to be answers desired by their employer or the researcher. Although the site created an embedded vested interest, it may or may not have impacted participant willingness due to concerns of judgment or recourse. The researcher has been associated with the research site as a teacher, instructional coach, and a principal. The familiarity with staff and parents may have created a bias in the research.

- The study was limited to the reliability of the survey instruments.

- The study has limited generalizability due to the lack of underrepresented populations. The research sites were high poverty and Title 1 schools but lacked ethnic diversity. The lack of diversity created a bias and an inability to generalize results.

Delimitations in this study included the time of year the research was conducted and the time frame given to participants during the focus group interviews. The beginning of each school year is a busy time for teachers and administrators. Conducting research during this time of year made finding willing participants difficult in both phases of this study.

Chapter IV

Results

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe in detail the collected data, both the quantitative and qualitative analysis for each of the three research questions. This chapter includes the purpose statement, research questions, summary of collected data, tables and analyses reporting for the three research questions mean comparisons for each of the five dimensions of Hord's PLC survey, and emerging themes from focus groups interviews.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a Professional Learning Community through the lens of tiered instruction from the principal and teacher perspective.

Research Questions

The central focus and research questions asked in this study were:

1. How does implementing Professional Learning Communities and RTI support increased student achievement from principal and teacher perspective?

2. What benefits and challenges are identified in establishing a Professional Learning Community model and RTI within a school perspective using the PLCA-R?

3. How does creating tiered instruction through a collaborative professional learning community and RTI model support continuous school improvement?

The survey instrument used was the PLCA-R designed by Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman (2010) to determine what characteristics and attributes were adopted based on the five

dimensions of effective PLCs from Hord's (1997) research: (1) shared and supportive

leadership; (2) collective creativity; 3) shared values and vision; (4) supportive conditions; and

(5) shared personal practice to better understand benefits, challenges, and overall perceptions.

The researcher requested permission to use the assessment from Diane Oliver, a research

colleague of Hord, designated to grant permission to use the assessment tool. Permission was

granted. The following table highlights the five dimensions and the corresponding number of

statements assigned to each dimension.

Table 4

Hord's Five Dimensions and Number of Statements Assigned to Each Dimension

Category	Number of Statements
Shared Supportive Leadership	11
Shared Values and Vision	9
Collective Learning and Application	10
Shared Personal Practice	7
Supportive Conditions- Relationships	5
Supportive Conditions- Structures	10

The 52 item survey consisted of a four point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 =

disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). Comments from the participants were analyzed and

included to gain a qualitative insight into the survey and glean more perspective regarding

teachers and administrators perceptions. A complimentary e-mail explaining the purpose of the

study and the importance of the survey was sent to all certified district employees, one week

before the survey was conducted, inviting them to participate in this study. An additional

reminder e-mail was submitted three days before the survey was disseminated. Furthermore,

demographic information was collected from survey participants to better comprehend

backgrounds and job descriptions. The following demographic information was collected on

each participant: (a) assigned building, (b) position, (c) years of teaching experience, (d) years in

school district, (e) gender. Table 5 highlights the demographic information collected.

Table 5

*Demographic Information*_____

Participant	Number	Percent
Elementary	92	63%
Junior High	21	14%
High school	34	23%
Administrators	10	7%
10 or more years of Teaching Experience	104	71%
5 or more years in the Researched District	120	82%
Female	112	76%

Once the survey was disseminated to certified employees it remained open for three

weeks. All survey responses were recorded anonymously to increase the integrity and reliability

of the participants' responses. Of the entire sample population of 240 certified staff in the studied

district, a total of 137 teachers from all 11 schools ranging from elementary to high school and

10 administrators, totaling 147 or 62% participated in the online survey.

One month after the online survey was completed; three focus-group interviews were conducted, representing a sample from the 6 elementary schools.

As previously stated, extraordinary steps were taken to ensure participant confidentiality to encourage truthful responses and to protect participants from any form of peer or supervisor criticism. The steps taken reduced an element of context for the other researchers in that participant gender and school assignment were obscured or generalized. Hence, the following matrix was created when participant voice is used in reporting findings:

Table 6

Participant Coding

Participant Gender	Participant Assignment		
Even numbers for	P = primary	M = middle school	T = teacher
female participant	I = intermediate	H = high school	A = administrator

Each focus-group session was held after school on three consecutive days for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. A total of 20 teachers were asked to participate in the focus group interviews, $n = 9$ or 45% participated and 7 administrators were asked to participate and $n = 6$ or 86% participated. Each session was recorded using a portable audio-recording device. After the completion of the focus groups, the recordings were transcribed and then analyzed by the researcher. The purpose of these focus groups was to ascertain beliefs and perceptions associated with the implementation of PLCs and tiered instruction to increase student achievement. This allowed the researcher a window into what stages of PLC and RTI implementation each school identified with and the perceptions of benefits and challenges. The following table illustrates each interview participants' demographic information.

Research Findings

Research Question 1

The first research question posed "How does implementing Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention support increased student achievement from principals' and teachers' perspective?"

Through a process known as open coding, the researcher was able to develop common themes and categories that resulted from the Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised comment section for each dimension. According to Creswell (2015) open coding is the portion of the qualitative analysis focused on identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena discovered in narrative.

Initially, data was reviewed multiple times, to ensure a greater more in-depth understanding of how each participant was answering the survey and providing feedback. Then, an open-coding method was used to look for trends of words that aligned to a topic or category. Each category was highlighted with specific colors to denote a difference in theme. From there the relationship between the words and the categories were studied to understand themes. The frequency in which the words or topic were used was noted and recorded by the researcher. Subsequently, anecdotal excerpts from each highlighted comment were indicated to categorize all the thoughts associated with each theme. Axial coding was then used as a process for relating categories to each other. Throughout this chapter, pseudonym names were given to each participant.

The following qualitative themes emerged from the results of the survey:

Climate. Many of the comments included both ends of the spectrum; either staff believed in their school and enjoyed the people they worked with or there was a lack of trust and comradery

between staff. Climate received the greatest total frequency of 17 comments from participants. 8

participants said teacher input was collected from a select few. The select few were teacher

leaders in the building.

According to participant coded 1MT:

"*Certain staff members tend to have more input in certain things than others. The*

principal has a few people that he talks with and takes advice from. Often times we are

the last to know something in the district."

Participant coded 2PT stated:

"*I don't feel that some staff support teachers in a leadership role. I volunteer for many*

things but feel like I shouldn't very often in the future because staff is sick of same people

being in leadership type rolls (even though nobody else volunteers) I am hoping my

feeling changes this year."

Participant coded 2PT elaborated:

"*It was difficult to determine if the entire staff had a shared vision. Can only speak for*

the primary wing first through third; they all have the same vision and focus on student

learning. We collaborated often and shared teaching strategies and insight on the kids."

Participant coded 1IT stated:

"*We truly all work very well together and support our vision for the school.*"

An opposing reflection from the survey was staff input had been limited for fear of

negative consequences.

The success of implementing Professional Learning Communities and Response to

Intervention support increased student achievement was dependent on a successful community of

collaborators focused on students. According to Schmoker (2004) successful schools craft

conditions for teacher teams to continuously improve instruction through a collaborative group focused on a single purpose.

Participant coded 2HT stated:

"*Our staff (teachers) works very well together, we are constantly looking at our students to see where things need to be addressed and altered*".

The researcher observed that staffs that care about each other and work together well still need support and time to provide effective instruction through a community of learning.

Participant coded 2IT elaborated on her experience from the previous year:

"*A staff member was extremely harmful to the culture of our school last year and caused many people to believe risk was not encouraged. Trust was broken based on the untruths spread by this staff member. Hopefully, this will be changing soon as we move forward.*"

Several staff noted caring relationships exist among staff and students built on trust and respect; although they are unsure if there is trust among all staff. This concept of respect and building a positive community through the lens of PLC and RTI were essential to the underpinning of successful implementation in both systems. Strong school communities boost student and teacher learning (Borko, 2004) ignite passion for teaching (Owen, 2015) and transform instructional pedagogy (Owen, 2015; Tam, 2015).

Participant coded 1MT:

"*I've taught over twenty years and have far less time to work in my classroom. We test the students frequently and often times the data goes some place and we never have time to implement changes.*"

Participant coded 2HT continued:

"We are just too messed up for this to really work. We are not a big enough district at the high school level for PLC to work. Not enough teachers teaching just one subject. Most big schools have 20 Algebra teachers. It will never really work at our school with administration that is afraid to give power to teachers."

Leadership. Another theme that emerged from the study in both a positive and negative view was leadership and how it directly impacts school culture and student achievement. In the participants comments from the PLCA-R, multiple participants emphasized that leadership was top down, directive driven and non-collaborative. The comments denoted that there was limited trust in leadership, because only a selected few were participating in the decision making with limited input from the faculty.

Participant coded 1MT:

"Not even close in our building, complete top down do as I say style of leading. Makes me want to quit teaching here and go somewhere else."

Participant coded 2PT:

"The leadership is shared and supportive at our building level. If answering these questions about our district grade level team leadership and communication, I would mark all of them disagree or strongly disagree. Also, leadership is not always nurtured among staff members. There seems to be jealousy and lack of respect for others' views when our principal assigns leadership positions. This does not include the entire staff and we have had a few very negative and detrimental staff members leave in the last few years so hopefully this will change."

Widespread leadership is the foundation of a true professional learning community (Hord, 1997; Oliver et al., 2010). Leadership is promoted among all staff as a desire, but nurturing is not done with all. Fostering leadership in teachers is essential to building effective response to intervention and professional learning communities.

Participant coded 2IA:

"Decisions this year have solely been made by building principal without staff input. Due to this, our building has been nothing but chaos for the past 3 weeks."

Participant coded 2IA:

"As a new principal at this school, and upon direction from my superintendents, some decision making may not appear committee based as I've been addressing some issues regarding past decision making and the dynamics of the staff. One dynamic has been only a few people making decisions or pushing others in directions for their way to prevail. Last year I often set strict boundaries as a response to this culture. This year I hope to have stronger representation on committees for shared leadership opportunities."

Participant coded 2IT:

"I feel that in our building, the principal gives us time to collaborate, but the opinions of the group are not listened to very well, especially if they differ from the principal's views. It seems like the principal will do things the way she sees fit, no matter what the outcome of the collaboration."

From the comments it appeared focus from leaders was mostly on data rather than how to support teachers and improve teaching and learning. Teachers were weighted down by top down leadership to implement collaborative practices. Directives appeared more focused on change for change sake than issued for improvement.

According to participant coded 1MT:

"Change is not defined or explained just mandated." We have never been asked what changes need to happen for this to be a great school. It seems the only people that ever have good ideas are administrators, which is really strange because they haven't been in a classroom for a long time."

There were significant trust and respect issues with leadership based on the comments from the participants. Risk taking was supported for a few people but not for others. Only a few were celebrated for their hard work. The researcher observed some steps were being taken this year by leadership to repair issues, but it may take sustained effort over time rather than irregularly scheduled agenda items.

Participant coded 1MT reported:

"We will continue to be controlled by poor leadership. We have not been nor will ever be part of the solution. My school is successful despite the poor leadership. Teachers will continue to do what is best for kids and ignore the stuff that really doesn't matter."

One of the characteristic of a PLC designated by Hord that is imperative to improving student achievement is supportive conditions. Shared Leadership is a necessity to support the

goals for achievement and instruction is imperative to sustaining the PLC process (DuFour, 2007; DuFour & DuFour, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009)

Stakeholder Input. Another theme that emerged from the study that directly correlated to student and parent involvement was the method of including stakeholders input in the decision making process. The number of responses from this theme was 9. Some noted that they believed community and parent support was thriving although, most noted it was lacking.

Participant coded 2HT stated:

"I don't feel as if the staff has much input on decisions as needed. I also have not seen parents and community members as part of the process."

She continued to report that schools do a very good job communicating between staff and administration. Although she believed she was free to agree or disagree with a decision made as a staff, must supported whatever was decided.

Five participants stated, they believed stakeholders, specifically parents, were becoming less involved as a whole with sharing the responsibility of their child's learning. They felt less and less parents were involved in their child's education and more responsibility was demanded of the schools. The trend seemed to be in the use the primary grades as send home less homework or no homework because the parents were too busy.

Participant coded 1IT stated reflected:

"Community and parent involvement has been lacking. We have our great group of parent teacher organizations, but other than that not a huge involvement in education from community."

Schools working together to unite home and school, create a sense of community that positively impacts the culture of the school, and increases academic improvement (Hord, 2009; Oliver & Hipp, 2010).

Use of Data. An additional theme with a frequency of 15 responses that emerged from the PLCA-R survey comments was how collected data was used at the building and district level. Some comments denoted that the use of data was appropriate, although most believed too much data was collected without real purpose and intention.

One 2HT reported:

"Many teachers from my building and other buildings agree that we do not use the data after we come up with the data. It's a big waste of time."

Teachers agreed that data was constantly collected, but they did not have time to implement change. They stated time was needed to do their job effectively; analyze data and then adjust teaching. Principals incorporate "data days" where teacher teams as grade levels and other important staff checked progress and made changes to meet the needs of students, but stated such activities fell short of true collaboration in a professional learning community.

Participant coded 2PT stated:

"I wish we would use data to drive our decisions, we never quite make it that far."

Participant coded 2PT stated reported:

 "I do believe that data drives decisions and they are made with the district goals in mind but I do not see the staff involved in that process as much as they should be. The time we invest in all this data compiling is a huge waste of time for the teachers. I believe we take

a great curriculum and use it the way we see fit. Sometimes, I think, I need a secretary

just to keep track of all the data."

The consensus from the survey comments was that too much data was collected, without intentionality that did not directly influence instruction and student learning.

However, teachers constantly look at student results as a way to improve instruction within their own isolated classroom. Staff was still learning how to gather data and analyze it.

As with most schools, staff members were very involved in using data to drive instruction and continue to have open dialogue to improve teaching but there appear to be a few that do not see the value in it. The data that is mandated is not always useful, and teacher input regarding data is not always welcomed.

Lack of Time. Time for staff to meet and collaborate was a crucial physical structure of a successful PLC team. Time for teams to meet is important for successful PLC implementation. It is critical this time is used to focus on improving student learning, Lack of time became a theme that emerged from this study. Six teachers reported there was not enough time to do what needed to be done to ensure the success of students and increase student achievement.

Participant coded 2IT stated reported:

"We do not have enough time to analyze the data, if the tests indicate our students are

under-performing, and then approach us about what we need to do differently. We need

more time to get past the planning of common assessments and actually share data."

Principals agreed that time was provided for staff to meet with their grade level teams, although little time was allotted for teachers of all grade levels to interact with teachers of all grade levels.

According to DuFour et al, (2005) implementing a professional learning community is hard work yet rewarding. It requires and extensive commitment and effort from all staff in the school. The process is based upon the idea that all educators and support staff working in collaboration have the potential to maximize learning and increase student achievement. PLC's requires teamwork, combined resources, and shared expertise. The collaborative team is the basic structure of a PLC and the engine that drives improvement. In a PLC, collaboration is a process in which teachers work together in order to improve their classroom practice in ways that ensure students learn (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010).

Student Learning. Another theme that emerged through this study with 4 responses was the notion that staff and administrators did not always agree on ways to improve student learning and best pedagogical practices. Teams in a PLC relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results. Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of each team's decision-making process (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010).

According to Participant coded 1HT:

"Stakeholders at Columbia have shown patterns throughout schooling of not taking responsibility and sometimes accountability for student learning."

A focus on learning and shared responsibility is one of the foundational premises of professional learning communities and response to intervention.

Collaboration. In a PLC, educators work together interdependently in collaborative teacher teams to accomplish common goals for which they are mutually accountable. The structure of the school is aligned to ensure teams are provided the time and support essential to teacher learning. Collaboration is a systematic process in which we work together, interdependently, to

analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results (Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean, 2000; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

According to the survey comments, Teachers believed collaboration was used ineffectively and driven by the principal versus the teacher needs. Others felt very lucky to be working with great teams of teachers, paraprofessional and principals. The things that were accomplished through shared values were done by the teams of teachers with administration.

Participant coded 2MT stated:

"As a team we share the same values and vision but not as a directed result of our administration."

Routines and scheduled collaboration time was agreed upon at the beginning of the year with equitable time allotted for all teachers to meet with the facilitating team (leadership) to review student progress and discuss instructional strategies. Beyond meeting regularly, next steps were for staff to share instructional ideas, strategies and evidence based practices to see more growth happen.

Participant coded 1HT stated reported:

"The word collaboration is used a lot; however, it has a lip-service feel to it rather than true collaboration. Most of the teachers work very collaboratively. However, the decisions are made by a few staff and dictated to the rest. The people with decision making power work collaboratively with each other but do not seem to work collaboratively with all teachers."

One teacher reported that collaboration was done in pockets, not schoolwide. There were 23 teachers who believe in the power of sharing best practice, but were still allowed however to work in isolation.

Participant coded 2IT stated:

"I believe that staff is collaborating and working to meet the needs of students but not in conjunction with principals and other administration."

In effective PLC and RTI teams staff must want the best for all students and work hard to provide the teaching and learning that ensures improved student achievement.

At the 2HT stated:

"We are too diverse of a staff to have this work successfully. With different styles of leadership it is very difficult to get stuff done. One staff has to do everything, while the other staff has input on what needs to be done. Staff members collaborating, usually means among isolated grade levels, not vertical grade levels."

Participant coded 2PT stated:

"As a team we share the same collective learning and application but not as a directed result of our administration."

She also reported that with the recent improvement with the RTI process the secondary level appears to be more isolated in their teaching style and more dictated by age or number of years in education in terms of their willingness to collaborate or make changes.

At the elementary level teachers reported the focus in collaboration was still on students and not on teaching. Staff members work together to grow their skills, but again, there was a divide with all teachers being involved. This area, along with a few other areas, was really difficult to accurately address. The majority of teachers worked collaboratively and supportively to improve teaching and student learning. The few leaders appeared to be supportive of the other few leaders and work collaboratively among each other, yet did not appear to transfer those collaborative and supportive practices to all teachers.

A 2HT reported:

"One of the biggest issues with the PLC process in our district is that we're a small district. It would be nice to have more teachers teaching the same classes not only in our district, but also within our buildings. By doing so, we would have more opportunity to support each other, share results, and improve instruction."

A 2PT stated:

"I feel that we do not do enough cross classroom sharing of our teaching expertise. I would love to see time allocated to letting teachers observe each other, and work collaboratively on becoming better at what we do- teaching. Of course, some of that has to do with the fact that we are such a small school, and we all teach our specialties. Although I feel that our primary grades consistently collaborate on all students within their grade, where secondary grades could move towards this direction."

Building Maintenance. According to Hord (2004) Professional learning communities require structures and collegial relationships to enhance the PLC process. Structures include a variation

of conditions such as school size, proximity of staff to each other, communication systems, and built in collaboration for staff to meet and to examine current practice. Based on the feedback provided by the survey participants noted that several of the buildings were falling apart with leaky ceilings and peeling paint. They expressed concern regarding the lack of technology stating that technology use was an issue and resources were limited.

Participant coded 1HT stated reported:

"We have tape holding down the new carpet, we were not made aware of what was found in the ceilings or from the tiles. Classrooms go decades without being painted despite the walls looking awful. Routine cleaning doesn't include basics like dusting window sills or cleaning white boards. When teachers come back in the fall, they spend time cleaning what should have been part of summer maintenance."

Participant 1HT reported:

"Our custodial staff does an amazing job. The building is clean, however, the building is old, leaking and in bad repair aesthetically. Paint and water damaged ceiling tiles are visually uninviting. Inside of our building is mostly clean and inviting. However, the outside of our building is not."

The following table provides a summary of open coded themes that emerged from this study and frequency of comments.

Table 7

Open Themes that emerged from PLCR-A

Open Coded Themes	*f*	Anecdotal
Climate	17	• Inequitable distribution of power • Minimal teacher input • Only select few have a voice • Jealousy • Columbia staff is amazing

		• We have the same vision and focus • Our staff works well • Staff care about each other • One staff member was extremely harmful to our building • Caring relationships exist • Building falling apart • Passive/aggressive behavior exist • Trust and respect exist
Leadership	16	• Micro-manager • Leader not a boss • Shared supportive building leadership not district level collaboration • Top down-makes me want to quit • Controlled by poor leadership • Principal does their own thing does not listen to staff • No staff input- top down • Leadership shared by select few • We are told what to do –no input • Principal doesn't listen to us • Top down • Principal focused on data not people • No trust and respect
Stakeholder Input	9	• Minimal teacher input • Great job communicating • Parent /community input is minimal (5) • Stakeholders are involved
Use of Data	15	• Data is useless (5) • Data day is helpful • Don't use data effectively (5) • Data driven (6)
Time	6	• Not enough of it
Student Learning	4	• Students take ownership of their learning • Staff and admin don't agree on student learning • Programs aren't used to fidelity
Collaboration	23	• Great team (10) • Collaboration is used ineffectively (11) • Collaboration is effective
Building Maintenance	6	• Building is falling apart • Technology is limited • Classrooms need to be painted • Building is clean • Water damage • Bathrooms are terrible

Research Question 2

The second research question posed "What benefits and challenges are identified in establishing a Professional Learning Community model and RTI within a school using the PLCA-R?"

Participants responded to the 52 item survey categorized into Hord's five dimensions. The following figure reflects the mean score for each of the dimensions based on the four point Likert scale. The following figure reflects teacher and administrator perceptions of each of Hords'(2004) dimensions that encompass a professional learning community.

Figure 4

Means scores from each of Hord's Five Dimensions
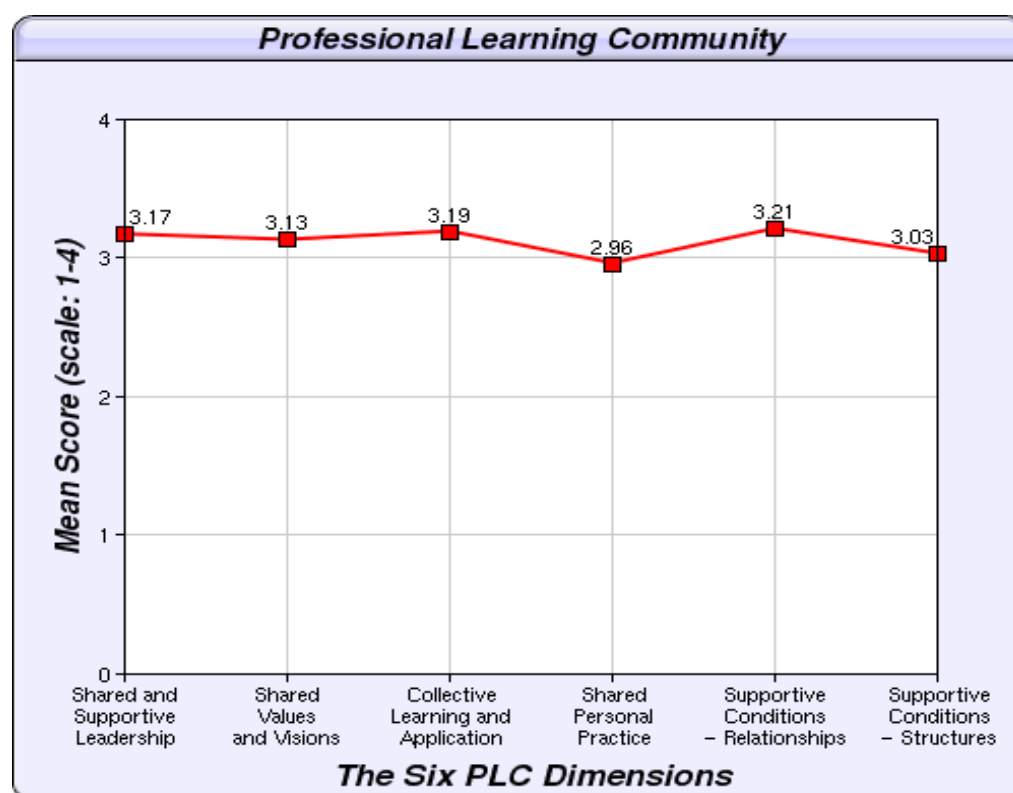
Note: This figure shows mean scores from the 11 schools from Hord's five dimensions.

A total of ten administrators and one hundred and thirty-seven teachers participated in the online survey. Of those that participated in the survey 63% were elementary teachers, 14% were junior high teachers, 23% were high school teachers; 93% of the participants were teachers and 7% were administrators; 71% had 10 or more years of teaching experience; 82% have been in the studied district for more than 5 years; 76% were females. Of the entire sample population of 240 certified staff at the studied district, a total of 137 teachers from all 11 schools ranging from elementary to high school and 10 administrators, totaling 147 or 62% participated in the online survey.

District wide, the data indicated, teachers and administrators mean score was $M = 3.17$ within the Shared and Supportive Leadership dimension. The highest reported Likert rating was 4.0. This demonstrated a high rating in the area of shared leadership across the district. Although the mean score was high, the individual comments demonstrate inconsistencies within some buildings. Question 10 (Stakeholders assumes shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority) of Shared and Supportive Leadership mean score was $M = 2.86$. This was the lowest outlier in the eleven questions encompassed in this dimension. Question 10 (Stakeholders assumes shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority) directly connected stakeholders' involvement in the shared responsibility and accountability in student learning and improving school improvement. The highest mean score $M = 3.26$ related to the principal as a leader in assuming a proactive stance of providing support when it is needed.

Shared Values and Vision data indicates the mean score was $M = 3.13$. In this area, teachers and administrators differed at times in the shared focus of the school according to the qualitative data aligned to the survey. According to the survey results Question 19 (Stakeholders

are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement) in the Shared Values and Vision dimension of the survey mean score was $M = 2.86$. This was the lowest score in this category, addressing the lack of stakeholders' active involvement in the schools. Question 15 (Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision) had the highest mean score $M = 3.24$ specifically speaking to the alignment of the school's vision regarding decisions that are made.

Teachers and administrators survey data indicated the mean score was $M = 3.19$ within the Collective Learning and Application dimension. This demonstrated a high level of collaboration and efficacy to ensure focus in the classroom was on student learning. According to the survey results Question 27 (School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems) in this dimension of the survey mean was $M = 2.93$. This was the lowest score in this category, addressing the lack of stakeholders' active involvement applying new knowledge during collaboration with staff members. Question 28 (School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning had the highest mean score $M = 3.35$ specifically speaking to staffs dedication to implementing successful instructional pedagogy with effective programs to enhance learning opportunities for students

In the category of Shared Personal Practice, the participants rated it the lowest across the other dimensions, with a mean score of $M = 2.96$. This dimension specifically addressed the collaborative portion of a successful PLC with ensuring that teacher teams were interdependently focused on student learning with intentionality and purpose. The lowest ranking score was Question 32 (Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices) with a mean score of $M = 2.72$, addressing the need for staff to provide feedback between peers related to instructional practices systematically and with accountability. Question 33 (Staff members

informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning) had the highest score with a mean $M = 3.35$, this was the informal process of sharing ideas related to student learning.

In the area of Supportive Conditions - Relationships the mean score was $M = 3.21$. This was the highest ranking category across all dimensions. Question 38 (Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect) with a mean score of $M = 3.49$ demonstrated a strong relationship between staff and students built on trust and respect. The lowest score came from question 41 (School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school) with a mean of $M = 2.97$. This again addresses the lack of staff and stakeholders effort to implement change and impact the culture of the school through a collaborative effort.

In the area of Supportive Conditions-Structures the mean score was $M = 3.03$. This dimension represented the collective support from all stakeholders that ensure teachers have all the means necessary to ensure success. Fiscal resources provided for professional development in Question 45 (Fiscal resources are available for professional development) with a mean score of $M = 2.43$ was the lowest score. Without systematic means for providing professional development as it relates to best practices limits teachers ability to sustain grown and change. Proximity for effective collaboration in terms of grade level access in Question 49 (The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues)was the highest mean score with $M = 3.31$.

Table 8 highlights the mean scores from each of the eleven schools that were surveyed. School names have been deleted and replaced with fictional names to ensure confidentiality.

Table 8

Means scores from each of Hord's Five Dimensions from the 11 Schools Surveyed

Mean Scores

Selection	#		Shared & Supportive Leadership	Shared Values and Vision	Collective Learning and Application	Shared Personal Practice	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Supportive Conditions - Structures
Elementary School 1	11	M	2.96	2.79	2.89	2.53	3.15	2.75
		SD	0.88	0.69	0.67	0.74	0.80	0.84
Elementary School 2	15	M	3.36	3.39	3.36	2.96	3.51	3.28
		SD	0.54	0.53	0.51	0.69	0.62	0.60
Elementary School 3	19	M	3.73	3.56	3.55	3.47	3.48	3.32
		SD	0.49	0.58	0.58	0.60	0.58	0.65
Elementary School 4	14	M	3.10	3.00	3.18	2.66	2.99	3.10
		SD	0.81	0.68	0.66	0.92	0.77	0.69
Elementary School 5	14	M	3.36	3.29	3.17	2.89	3.20	2.91
		SD	0.74	0.71	0.65	0.74	0.73	0.79
Elementary School 6	19	M	3.18	3.01	3.22	3.27	3.07	3.16
		SD	0.83	0.81	0.67	0.70	0.75	0.76
Junior High 1	13	M	2.41	2.79	3.00	2.76	2.65	2.48
		SD	0.92	0.76	0.77	0.82	0.87	0.86
Junior High 2	8	M	3.64	3.47	3.53	3.11	3.73	3.38
		SD	0.55	0.60	0.62	0.78	0.45	0.75
High School 1	14	M	3.19	3.13	2.96	2.87	3.29	2.91
		SD	0.66	0.54	0.63	0.73	0.64	0.69
High School 2	18	M	2.74	2.78	2.99	2.85	3.16	2.83
		SD	0.86	0.76	0.71	0.71	0.75	0.60
High School 3	2	M	3.68	3.94	3.70	2.64	3.60	3.65
		SD	0.72	0.24	0.57	1.15	0.70	0.49

Across the six categories the means scores vary between the elementary, junior high and high schools. A One-Way ANOVA test was applied using *SPSS* to analyze statistical significance between the five dimensions. It was hypothesized that schools that focus on schoolwide systems of PLC and RTI would have greater levels of consensus amongst educators demonstrating a significant relationship between Hord's dimensions of PLC and the eleven schools that participated in the study.

In all categories, a statistically significant difference existed when comparing the eleven schools to each of Hord dimensions of a professional learning community: Shared and Supportive Leadership F (11,136) = 4.808 p = .000, Shared Values and Visions F (11,136) = 4.188 p = .000, Collective Learning and Application F (11,136) = 3.250 p = .001, Shared Personal Practice F (11,136) = 3.856 p = .000, Supportive Conditions- Relationships F (11,136) = 3.297 p = .000, and Supportive Condition- Structure F (11,136) = 4.406 p =. 000. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is rejected due to F statistics and p value. Independent Variable (IV) represents the 11 schools and the dependent variable (DV) represents the Likert scale survey. Table 9 demonstrates the researcher's findings from the One Way ANOVA.

Table 9

One Way ANOVA scores from each of Hord's Five Dimensions from the 11 Schools Surveyed

Between Buildings

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Shared and Supportive Leadership	Between Groups	19.499	11	1.773	4.808	.000
	Within Groups	50.135	136	.369		
	Total	69.634	147			
Shared Values and Visions	Between Groups	12.763	11	1.160	4.188	.000
	Within Groups	37.678	136	.277		
	Total	50.441	147			
Collective Learning and Application	Between Groups	7.654	11	.696	3.250	.001
	Within Groups	29.121	136	.214		
	Total	36.775	147			
Shared Personal Practice	Between Groups	11.668	11	1.061	3.856	.000
	Within Groups	37.416	136	.275		
	Total	49.084	147			
Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Between Groups	10.404	11	.946	3.297	.000
	Within Groups	39.018	136	.287		
	Total	49.423	147			
Supportive Conditions - Structures	Between Groups	10.513	11	.956	4.406	.000
	Within Groups	29.499	136	.217		
	Total	40.012	147			

Table 10 highlights the mean scores from administrators and teachers that were surveyed.

Table 10

Means scores from each of Hord's Five Dimensions based on Teachers and Administrators

Mean Scores

Selection	#		Shared & Supportive Leadership	Shared Values and Vision	Collective Learning and Application	Shared Personal Practice	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Supportive Conditions - Structures
DO Administrator	2	M	3.23	3.00	2.90	2.43	2.80	3.05
		SD	0.53	0.59	0.55	0.51	0.42	0.39
Principal	9	M	3.40	3.21	3.40	3.07	3.38	3.34
		SD	0.63	0.67	0.61	0.68	0.59	0.71
Teachers	137	M	3.15	3.12	3.18	2.95	3.20	3.00
		SD	0.84	0.74	0.69	0.79	0.76	0.76

A One-Way ANOVA test was applied using *SPSS* to analyze statistical significance between administrators and teachers. It was hypothesized that administrators have a greater level of consensus regarding successful implementation and sustainability of PLC's and RTI than teachers demonstrating a significant relationship between Hord's dimensions of PLC from teachers and administrators perspective.

Comparing administrator and teacher scores a statistically significant difference did not exist when comparing five out of the six of Hord's dimensions of a professional learning community. Supportive Conditions- Structure showed a significant difference between the two groups: $F (1,146) = 4.533$ $p = .035$. Shared and Supportive Leadership $F (1,146) = 1.583$ $p = .210$, Shared Values and Visions $F (1,146) = .443$ $p = .507$, Collective Learning and Application $F (1,146) = 1.439$ $p = .232$, Shared Personal Practice $F (1,146) = .229$ $p = .633$, Supportive

Conditions- Relationships F (1,146) =.478 p = .491 all showed a statistically significant

difference did not exist between the two groups. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is accepted due

to F statistics and p values.

Table 11

One Way ANOVA scores based on Teachers and Administrators

Comparison of Teachers and Administrators Perception

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Shared and Supportive Leadership	Admin	11	3.421818182000000	.407475599000000	.122858516000000	3.148072350000000	3.695564014000000	2.820000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Teacher	137	3.151021898000000	.703073384000000	.060067613000000	3.032234542000000	3.269809253000000	1.000000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Total	148	3.171148649000000	.688256719000000	.056574353800000	3.059344526000000	3.282952771000000	1.000000000000000	4.000000000000000
Shared Values and Visions	Admin	11	3.241818182000000	.481722289000000	.145244735000000	2.918192745000000	3.565443619000000	2.440000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Teacher	137	3.119343066000000	.593889478000000	.050739402400000	3.019002814000000	3.219683318000000	1.000000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Total	148	3.128445946000000	.585778989000000	.048150736300000	3.033288857000000	3.223603035000000	1.000000000000000	4.000000000000000
Collective Learning and Application	Admin	11	3.363636364000000	.467488454000000	.140953072000000	3.049573347000000	3.677699380000000	2.600000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Teacher	137	3.175912409000000	.501692070000000	.042862446200000	3.091149316000000	3.260675501000000	1.600000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Total	148	3.189864865000000	.500168661000000	.041113610600000	3.108614778000000	3.271114952000000	1.600000000000000	4.000000000000000
Shared Personal Practice	Admin	11	3.040000000000000	.523335456000000	.157791577000000	2.688418456000000	3.391581544000000	2.430000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Teacher	137	2.953138686000000	.583273914000000	.049832453500000	2.854591981000000	3.051685392000000	1.290000000000000	4.000000000000000

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
	Total	148	2.959594595000000	.577844786000000	.047498548800000	2.865726380000000	3.053462809000000	1.290000000000000	4.000000000000000
Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Admin	11	3.327272727000000	.515928113000000	.155558179000000	2.980667505000000	3.673877950000000	2.600000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Teacher	137	3.201459854000000	.585358789000000	.050010576400000	3.102560900000000	3.300358808000000	1.800000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Total	148	3.210810811000000	.579835202000000	.047662160000000	3.116619263000000	3.305002359000000	1.800000000000000	4.000000000000000
Supportive Conditions - Structures	Admin	11	3.345454545000000	.408322511000000	.123113869000000	3.071139750000000	3.619769341000000	2.700000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Teacher	137	3.001459854000000	.522576395000000	.044646714500000	2.913168263000000	3.089751445000000	1.600000000000000	4.000000000000000
	Total	148	3.027027027000000	.521718066000000	.042884960900000	2.942276339000000	3.111777715000000	1.600000000000000	4.000000000000000

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Shared and Supportive Leadership	Between Groups	.747	1	.747	1.583	.210
	Within Groups	68.887	146	.472		
	Total	69.634	147			
Shared Values and Visions	Between Groups	.153	1	.153	.443	.507
	Within Groups	50.288	146	.344		
	Total	50.441	147			
Collective Learning and Application	Between Groups	.359	1	.359	1.439	.232
	Within Groups	36.416	146	.249		
	Total	36.775	147			
Shared Personal Practice	Between Groups	.077	1	.077	.229	.633
	Within Groups	49.007	146	.336		
	Total	49.084	147			
Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Between Groups	.161	1	.161	.478	.491
	Within Groups	49.262	146	.337		
	Total	49.423	147			
Supportive Conditions - Structures	Between Groups	1.205	1	1.205	4.533	.035
	Within Groups	38.807	146	.266		
	Total	40.012	147			

A Mann Whitney *U* statistical test was applied using *SPSS* to determining if there are differences between two independent groups. This test determines the *U* value or the difference between each group and the *p* value or statistical significance in the median score between administrators and teachers perceptions of each dimension; a statistically significant difference did not exist $U = 552$, $p = .139$, therefore, the Null Hypothesis was accepted. Administrators have a higher score of M=92.82 compared to Teachers, M= 73.03.

Table 12

Mann Whitney U scores based on Teachers and Administrators

Comparison of Teachers and Administrators Perception

Ranks

	Position	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Building/Campus	Admin	11	92.82	1021.00
	Teacher	137	73.03	10005.00
	Total	148		

Test Statistics[a]

	Building/Campus
Mann-Whitney U	552.000
Wilcoxon W	10005.000
Z	-1.481
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.139

a. Grouping Variable: Position

Administrators and Teachers perceived each of the dimensions as a strength and benefit to successfully implementing a professional learning community. Table 13 illustrates the mean scores comparing gender.

Table 13

Mean scores from each of Hord's Five Dimensions based on Gender

Mean Scores based on Gender

Selection	#		Shared & Supportive Leadership	Shared Values and Vision	Collective Learning and Application	Shared Personal Practice	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Supportive Conditions - Structures
Female	112	M	3.21	3.17	3.19	2.97	3.24	3.03
		SD	0.78	0.69	0.66	0.79	0.74	0.76
Male	36	M	3.05	3.00	3.19	2.93	3.13	3.03
		SD	0.95	0.84	0.74	0.80	0.80	0.78

A Mann Whitney U statistical test was applied using SPSS to determine statistical significance in the median score between females' and males' perceptions of each dimension. It was hypothesized that females have a greater level of consensus regarding successful implementation and sustainability of PLC's and RTI than males do demonstrating a significant relationship between Hord's dimensions of PLC. A statistically significant difference did exist $U= 1212.000$ $p = .000$. The females in the studied district perceive each of the dimensions as a greater strength and benefit to successfully implementing a professional learning community compared to the males. The Null Hypothesis is rejected.

Table 14

Mann Whitney U scores based on Gender

Mann Whitney *U*

Ranks

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Building/Campus	Males	36	96.83	3486.00
	Females	112	67.32	7540.00
	Total	148		

Test Statistics^a

	Building/Campus
Mann-Whitney U	1212.000
Wilcoxon W	7540.000
Z	-3.613
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: Gender

Research Question 3

The third research question posed "How does creating tiered instruction through a collaborative professional learning community and RTI model support continuous school improvement?"

This question was answered though a series of focus group interviews with purposeful sampling by the researcher. Each group was purposely selected based on their experience of PLC and RTI systems in their building. The following table illustrates each participant's demographic information.

Table 15

Interview Participants Synopsis

Pseudonym	Personal	Grade Level	School
Robert	Male	Third grade	Elementary One
Debbie	Female	First grade	Elementary One
Carrie	Female	Fifth grade	Elementary One
Kristie	Female	First grade	Elementary Two
Amy	Female	Second grade	Elementary Two
Tim	Male	Kindergarten	Elementary Three
Stan	Male	Sixth grade	Elementary Three
Karen	Female	Fourth grade	Elementary Four
Randy	Male	Fifth grade	Elementary Four
Sandy	Female	Sixth grade	Elementary Five
Becky	Female	Resource	Elementary Five
Samantha	Female	Third grade	Elementary six
Jasmine	Female	Administrator	Elementary Five
Sarah	Female	Administrator	Elementary six
Tom	Male	Administrator	Elementary Two

Focus Group 1. Group one was selected due to their limited knowledge of RTI and PLC's and how they co-exist in a blended model.

Carrie stated her understanding of RTI is taking students to RTI team meetings, to determine if the teacher should continue on that track for extra help.

She noted:

"Seems to me we have to bring a lot of data to the RTI meetings, very much data based, to determine if they are going to get extra help."

Debby reported:

"RTI is very data driven, response to intervention is the tier 1 which includes everyone, and tier 2 which is like title and tier 3 which is sped. Students have to go through that process, to be referred for special services hoping we can catch learning processes low levels so they don't have to go into sped if the interventions started early enough so that they don't have to be referred for sped, but also if they need to be it is a great way to say is it a want to need to or is it a organic or is it a learning disability it is a good way to find out what exactly is going on with the child."

Several participants noted a variety of challenges have arisen from implementing multi-tiers of intervention through the lens of a professional learning community.

Robert stated at-risk students were pulled from the classroom for additional supports or interventions; this limited teacher's exposure to their struggling student population. He reported:

"I have that student very little. I am responsible for their academic gains; however my teaching opportunities are minimal."

Kristy noted:

"It seems sometimes it is pretty frustrating because you want to help these kids, you want a solution, you want a fix, you want an answer, you want a process or procedure and it just seems like sometimes you are kind of going in circles, That is really frustrating because you know they need help and know there should be help somewhere, but I'm not really sure where it comes from."

Many participants from focus group one noted the limitations of personnel and structural

supports to successfully implement RTI.

Amy reported:

"*I think sometimes part of the problem is just getting them in into RTI, there are very few*

slots, and then once those are full, sorry we don't have room for anybody else. So those

kids have to wait until the next October/November, Those kids are waiting a long time."

Tim stated:

"*It is frustrating, the process seems so slow, and we have students that are just failing.*"

He continued to emphasize that time constraints and the data driven push in RTI was not

swift enough in providing interventions to students that truly need it in a timely manner.

One participant noted a positive aspect of implementing RTI from her perspective was,

RTI has grown as far as participants, with more people involved giving more ideas.

She stated:

"*When you are able to get help for struggling learners, it is a celebration, everybody*

knows they need the help, but it seems like the process is so difficult, I don't know what

the percentages of kids that actually get in, or get the help they need, but when that

happens that is a huge celebration."

Sandy verbalized that she had seen RTI successful when students were actually getting

the help they needed. Although she continued:

"*We have to have so much data to support those decisions, then we have to let them fail,*

3 weeks in a row before we redo something then we see where they go then re do

something or change the goal then go another 3 weeks to see where they are at by that

time we are at 9 weeks wow that is a lot of time. In RTI there is a lot of wasted time,

frustrated time for kids, teachers, and parents too."

Stan stated implementing RTI through the lens of tiered instruction had positively

impacted student achievement. He continued:

"Kids are more successful getting things at their level, in small groups for core

instruction, then all of our kids are together to hear what good reading sounds like and in

depth discussions builds upon their success."

Focus Group 2. Focus Group Two was selected due to their immense knowledge of RTI and

PLC's and how they co-exist in a blended model. Although there were differences in how each

focus group perceived challenges and benefits, there were some similarities. Both groups

recognized the need for data to determine interventions and instruction for at-risk students.

Additionally, groups one and two saw the need for staff buy in for successful implementation.

*Beck*y noted:

"One of the challenges for successful implementation has been to get the whole staff

involved in a part of the process. Communication and follow through for all the whole

staff is important."

Supporting teachers in their understanding of looking at data to drive decisions had been

a challenge. Knowing that a student was struggling is the first step in the RTI process. In order to

maximize learning more information was needed in order to tailor the intervention to best meet

the students' needs. Another challenge according to both focus groups was finding resources that

allow teams to provide interventions, this included time, personnel, and programs.

Samantha noted many benefits to successful implementation of both PLC and RTI.

She stated:

"I have seen students that have been in RTI since kindergarten and I get the chance to see them become a learner, a high achiever. We have supported students from a team perspective , when one teacher just doesn't know what to do to help that child RTI process has been a good avenue for helping those children that we know struggle but do not qualify for special education but we can still provide them with the intervention through the RTI avenue. Implementing RTI and PLC put the focus of struggling students in the hands of the whole school, not just on the Title teacher or the classroom teacher. It has increased awareness which has increased overall accountability and results."

Focus Group 3. Focus group three was comprised of administrators from the district. Their perceptions varied from the first two focus groups.

From the administrators' perspective,

"The PLC and RTI teams were totally focused on kids and getting results quickly. By keeping the focus on and strengthening Tier 1 teaching contributed significantly to the success of the process if you are not constantly trying to support everyone at Tier 2and 3 but you're really solidifying that at Tier 1. We need to all be looking collectively at what we are doing from tier 1 to 3; those are the things that seem to really start to make changes with kids when that step is happening the most and the best. When you see the staff take ownership, that is not your student but our student, that just kind of spreads, we will help any child any grade level and then to see teachers from different grade levels wanting to jump in and help."

Another area the administrators saw as a need for successful implementation was professional development. He stated:

"*Professional development for not just identified team but across the building to embed more understanding, continuous training to truly understand across all of teachers and all of support staff resulting in a deeper understanding of the process, tiers, and how students were served at each Tier.*"

Jasmine stated:

"*RTI is creating a climate where people feel safe and want to raise the bar by learning new things. Those key shifts in the core really did raise the bar. We probably don't do as good as a job as we cold looking at our core instruction and what we are doing as teachers looking at students and what Is wrong with the student and why they are not being able to maintain in the core so I feel like some of the shifts and some of the raining through RTI teachers have been involved in really has shifted that focus back to what can I do as a teacher and can I do to change how I'm presenting this or how I'm delivering this to increase the amount of students that are being successful in that core, instead of it being a student problem.* "

Many of the principals responded that RTI and PLC teams have made instruction better, more thorough, more precise, and more comprehensive. Overall it had a positive impact on student achievement.

According to *Stephanie*:

"*We are getting better at what we do and how we teach kids, our students have a better chance at learning*"

RTI allows schools to focus on intensive kids and support the most disadvantage students. The implementation of RTI had improved student achievement for some of those demographics and all students.

Sarah reiterated:

> *"I think we have come a long way with staff saying they want to close gaps for kids by looking at tiered instruction, this process is helping us impact student achievement. We are fortunate in that our teachers are really here to teach kids they are here to get kids to learn reaching every kid that comes through the door with the attitude of we are going to accomplish this."*

Summary of the Results

Findings suggest administrators' and teachers' perceptions were similar regarding the importance of the five dimensions of PLC's as defined by Hord, through the PLCA-R, Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman's (2010). Each of the eleven buildings studied show statistical significance in each of the domains as they relate to each other. Through the qualitative data collected through the PLCA-R and focus group interviews, findings suggested that although teachers and administrators viewed PLC's and RTI's teams essential to increasing student achievement, flaws and barriers still existed within the current systems.

School climate according to DuFour and Hord's research asserts the success of implementing Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention systems to support increased student achievement is dependent on a successful community of collaborators focused on students. "The single most important factor for successful school restructuring and the first order of business for those interested in increasing the capacity of their schools is building a collaborative internal environment that fosters cooperative problem solving and

conflict resolution" (Eastwood & Louis, 1992, p. 215). This study noted that school climate is essential to sustainable systems of RTI and PLC. The research conducted advances DuFour and Hord's theory that successful collaboration amongst teachers is an on-going continuous need in today's schools. In a PLC, educators work together interdependently in collaborative nature to accomplish common objectives for which they are mutually accountable. Building a safe collaborative school climate focused on learning is the best chance for students to be successful, though implementation and sustainability is still an area of concern according to the research findings.

Building shared knowledge of best practice is an essential part of each team's decision-making process (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). A focus on learning and shared responsibility is one of the foundational premises of professional learning communities and response to intervention. High-performing, low socially economic schools build multifaceted collaborative systems that focus on student learning embedded in the culture of the school. Structures and systems are set up to ensure teachers work together rather than in isolation, and the point of their collaboration is to improve instruction and ensure all students learn (Chenoweth, 2009).

Batche's and Fuch's research addresses the need for early intervention and intentional prevention methods to address diverse learning population in schools. The research findings suggest a disconnect between Batche's and Fuch's theory with everyday application. Participants note the need for tiered instruction and see the benefit of intervening early as well as raising rigor in core instruction, although application of theory is not consistent across the eleven schools. " If a school can make both teaching and time variables and target them to meet each

student's individual learning and developmental needs, the school is more likely to achieve high levels of learning for every student" (Mattos & Buffum, 2015 p.2).

According to DuFour et al, (2005) implementing a professional learning community is hard work yet yields successful outcomes if implemented with a systematic intentional approach. It requires and extensive commitment and effort from all staff in the school. The process is based upon the idea that all educators and support staff working in collaboration have the potential to maximize learning and increase student achievement. PLC's requires teamwork, combined resources, and shared expertise. The collaborative team is the basic structure of a PLC and the engine that drives improvement.

Hord's theory emphasized the importance of continuous learning from all levels of school reform to enact true change. The expectation is reflecting on practices to improve education as a constant. Teachers and administrators are always seeking learning opportunities to grow and strengthen their understanding of pedagogy, content, and best practices. Building the capacity of those around you as a continuous cycle of learning embodies the foundational shifts of a PLC. The research findings advance Dewey's theory that ongoing reflective practices are a continued need to ensure teachers are fully equipped to support the diverse needs in their classroom in a collaborative environment rather than in isolation.

Seed's theory on effective conditions that are present in successful schools is further advanced by the researcher's findings in this study as participants noted an overwhelming need for more systematic ways to reflect on teaching and learn from peers. The need for effective ways to analyze student data and replicate successful RTI and PLC systems is still needed, as the research findings conclude a barrier still exists in theory to application.

Additionally, Seed's findings note time is an essential component to successfully implement any systems. The lack of time for staff to meet and collaborate was a significant

finding in this study as participants noted this is not systematic across the district and varies within each building. Time for teams to meet was important for successful PLC implementation according to Seed. It is critical that time is used to focus on improving student learning. Current findings do not advance Seed's theory on providing teachers time to collaborate and analyze student data as this is still an area that the researched district is lacking in, although participants note time as an overwhelming need.

Leadership directly impacts school culture and student achievement. Shared and supportive leadership is the notion that leadership is focused on building the capacity of continuous learning in all. It is leadership that empowers those around them, with the collective voice committed to the betterment of the whole (Oliver et al., 2010). Teachers tend to rely on directives from administration when dealing with difficulty or problem-solving a solution (Dufour, 2005; Hord & Sommers, 2008). Shared leadership changes this phenomenon and embraces collective learning and empowers teachers to find solutions. Hord's theory on shared leadership is advanced in the findings from this study. Participants note a need for collaborative leadership that empowers all stakeholders to have a voice and participate in a solution focused environment. Shared Leadership is a necessity to support the goals for achievement and instruction is imperative to sustaining the PLC process (DuFour, 2007; DuFour & DuFour, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Table 16 illustrates the research findings.

Table 16

Themes From Qualitative and Quantitative Data

Themes

Themes
Theme 1: School Climate
Theme 2: Focus on Student Learning
Theme 3: Collaboration
Theme 4: Lack of Stakeholder Input
Theme 5: Use of Data
Theme 6: Lack of Time
Theme 7: Leadership

Chapter 4 summarized the benefits and challenges of establishing a Professional Learning Community through the lens of tiered instruction through teachers and principals' perspective. Based on building level, teaching assignments and job titles, benefits and challenges were perceived differently. One participant's benefit was another's challenge based on a variety of variables.

Chapter V

Discussion

Introduction

DuFour (2015) emphasized the importance of implementing PLC's and how to sustain them: ". . .focus less on what the educators in high-performing PLCs do and more on how the members of the organization think, the mindset of those educators. . ." (p.100). Effective teams of teachers collectively work to find what is needed to ensure student learning goals are achieved (DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009; Schmoker, 2006). Creating a climate that promotes student learning embodies the idea of student-focused professional learning communities.

The greatest student gains occur with a collaborative model that is continuously promoting the highest level of achievement focused on targeting areas of weaknesses and building on student strengths (Albritton & Truscott, 2014; DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009; Schmoker, 2006). The team must ensure that all students are learning and that data exist to support this claim. The focus is on student learning, not teaching. Teacher teams regularly look at climate and culture of the building, as well as classrooms within the building, to make decisions that maximize learning for all (DuFour et al., 2008; Duhon et al., 2009; Schmoker, 2006).

RTI is an effective climate of change that allows teachers to teach and students to learn (Castillo, 2014; Castillo et al., 2015; DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Marzano, 2003). All student learning occurs with a collaborative model that is continuously pursuing the highest level of achievement. RTI changes the isolated approach to education commonly seen in schools and supports a collaborative climate for academic success. RTI identifies struggling students through a multi-tiered model, utilizing scientifically research-based programs to boost student

achievement (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Forman & Crystal, 2015; Fuchs &

Deshler, 2007).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a

Professional Learning Community through the lens of tiered instruction from principal and

teacher perspective. The study used mixed-methods studies where quantitative and qualitative

methods were predetermined and planned at the start of the research process. Case studies utilize

qualitative research to explore a research problem (Creswell, 2007, 2012, 2015). The researcher

selected this methodology to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a PLC through

the lens of tiered instruction from principals' and teachers' perspective. The PLCA-R, a Likert 4

point scale survey, and three focus-group interviews were conducted to inquire about themes and

trends that emerge from this study.

The mixed-method approach to research enriches the findings built upon both

quantitative and qualitative information (Creswell, 2009, 2013). The use of quantitative data

allowed the researcher to provide a numeric description of trends, themes, or opinions that

emerged (Creswell, 2009, 2013). Qualitative research focuses on understanding the themes and

trends that emerge in greater detail (Creswell, 2013).

 Research Questions

The central focus and research questions asked in this study were:

1. How does implementing Professional Learning Communities and RTI support increased

   student achievement from principals' and teachers' perspective?

2. What benefits and challenges are identified in establishing a Professional Learning

   Community model and RTI within a school perspective using the PLCA-R?

3. How does creating tiered instruction through a collaborative professional learning community and RTI model support continuous school improvement?

Summary of Results

Chapter Four revealed benefits and challenges of establishing a Professional Learning Community through the lens of tiered instruction through teachers and principals perspective. The Following themes emerged: School climate, focus on student learning, and collaboration, lack of stakeholder input, use of data, lack of time, and leadership. Based on building level, teaching assignments and job titles, benefits and challenges were perceived differently. One participant's benefit was another's challenge based on a variety of factors. Both teachers and administrators agreed that all of the themes discussed in this chapter are essential to successful implementation of a professional learning community through the lens of tiered instruction. Both systems are essential to continuous school improvement and increasing student achievement.

Theme 1: School Climate. The success of implementing Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention to support increased student achievement is dependent on a successful community of collaborators focused on students. The evidence gathered from the researcher noted a benefit of a professional learning community was an increased focus on positive climate. According to Schmoker (2004) successful schools craft conditions for teacher teams to continuously improve instruction through a collaborative group focused on a single purpose. The researcher concluded:

The researcher observed that staffs who cared about each other and worked together

well provided effective instruction to students through a community of learning. Caring

relationships existed among staff and students built on trust and respect; although the

participants were unsure if there was trust among all staff.

The concept of respect and building a positive community through the lens of PLC and

RTI are essential to the underpinning of successful implementation in both systems. Strong

school communities boost student and teacher learning (Borko, 2004) ignite passion for teaching

(Owen, 2015) and transform instructional pedagogy (Owen, 2015; Tam, 2015). The researcher

concluded:

The success of implementing PLC"S and RTI in terms of building school climate had

made teams smarter with a greater understanding of how to reach struggling learners.

The studied schools were more exact and diagnostic, figuring out why students were

having difficult.

Participants stated they were now. . .

"making best practices decisions based on research and evidence to build programs

plans for students. Students made gains on ----because a sound decision was made based

on research and data. Implementing PLC's through the lens of tiered instruction made a

positive impact on the entire staff and increased pedagogical understanding in teachers.

One elementary teacher reported teachers *had more successes with students, when the*

students come to them with learning challenges."

Implementing PLC"S places the focus of struggling students not just on the one teacher

but it creates a focus building wide, where everyone is looking at this student, stepping up to

provide insight and support to ensure growth. Implementing effective systems increased

awareness, overall accountability, and results (Owen, 2015; Tam, 2015).

Theme 2: Focus on Student Learning. Teams in a PLC relentlessly question the status quo,

seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results.

Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of each

team's decision-making process (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). A focus on learning

and shared responsibility is one of the foundational premises of professional learning

communities and response to intervention.

One elementary principal noted. . .

"*in the second year of changing things to where classroom teacher of the student being*

brought to RTI or has been a part of RTI is now the case manager has greatly impacted

the focus on learning building wide. This used to be taken out of the hands of the teacher

but the team felt it was more valuable for that teacher to do the data entry and analyze

growth on the student so they are well aware services are being given or interventions

are in place and if there is growth or not."

Schools starting with an overarching look at data to drive monthly collaborations with

grade level teams, ensures teacher teams are looking at all kids and making sure tier one

supports are strong, this includes building a better understanding of tier two supports that can be

provided through the lens of PLC and RTI (DuFour et al., 2010).

One participant noted*:*

"*I agree that the biggest challenge is professional development for every staff member in*

the school to ensure we are focusing on learning. Some of us have a deep understanding

of everything that we would layer in for a child to be successful, but others lack

knowledge in how to support our most intensive level students. Teachers have their eyes

on the whole spectrum but do not understand that it takes a lot of attention and time to

meet the needs of every student to ensure learning is occurring."

Theme 3: Collaboration. In a PLC, educators work together interdependently in collaborative

teacher teams to accomplish common goals for which they are mutually accountable. Teachers

believed it. The researcher concluded:

> *collaboration was used effectively and felt very lucky to be working with teams of*
>
> *teachers, paraprofessional and principals. The things that were accomplished through*
>
> *shared values were done by the teams of teachers with administration. Routines and*
>
> *scheduled collaboration time were agreed upon at the beginning of the year with*
>
> *equitable time allotted for all teachers to meet with the facilitating team (leadership) to*
>
> *review student progress and discuss instructional strategies. After meeting regularly,*
>
> *steps were for staff to share instructional ideas, strategies and evidence based practices*
>
> *to see more growth happen.*

The system built within the culture of the school are designed to ensure teams are

provided the time and support essential to teacher learning. Collaboration is a systematic process

in which teacher teams work together, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to

improve student learning (Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean, 2000; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano,

Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

The researcher concluded:

> *In effective PLC and RTI teams, staff must want the best for all students and work hard to*
>
> *provide the teaching and learning that ensures improved student achievement. The focus*
>
> *on collaboration was on students' learning, not on teaching. Staff members worked*
>
> *together to grow their skills collaboratively and supportively to improve teaching and*

student learning. The few leaders appeared to be supportive of the other few leaders and work collaboratively among each other, yet did not appear to transfer those collaborative and supportive practices to all teachers.

An administrator noted*:*

"It just takes time for some people to gain more access and understanding to the essential components of a collaborative model. One of the biggest challenges is getting that shift in teachers' mindset that the RTI process is not the fix all for every student. It doesn't remove their responsibility from helping that kid make growth."

Theme 4: Lack of Stakeholder Input. One of the themes that emerged from the study that directly correlated to student and parent involvement was the method of including stakeholder input in the decision making process.

Some noted that they believed. . .

"community and parent support is thriving although, most note this is lacking."

Participants stated they believed. . .

"stakeholders, specifically parents, are becoming less involved as a whole, with sharing the responsibility of their child's learning. They felt less and less parents are involved in their child's education and more responsibility is demanded of the schools. The trend seems to be at least in the primary grades, send home less homework or no homework because the parents are too busy."

Schools working together to unite home and school, create a sense of community that positively impacts the culture of the school, and increases academic improvement (Hord, 2009; Oliver & Hipp, 2010).

Theme 5: Use of Data. An additional theme that emerged from the PLCA-R survey comments was how collected data was used at the building and district level. Some comments denoted that data use was appropriate, although ten participants believed too much data was collected without real purpose and intention. Teachers agreed that data was constantly collected, but they did not have time to implement change. They stated:

"Time was needed to do their job effectively; analyze data and then adjust teaching. Principals incorporated "data days", where teacher grade level teams and other instructional support staff checked progress and made changes to meet the needs of students, but stated such activities fell short of true collaboration in a professional learning community."

The consensus from the survey comments was that too much data was collected without intentionality that did not directly influence instruction and student learning. However, most teachers consistently looked at student results as a way to improve instruction within their own classroom. The researcher concluded:

Staff members were very involved in using data to drive instruction and continue to have open dialogue about improving teaching. Mandated data such as fluency and comprehension scores was not always useful, and teacher input regarding data was not always welcomed. Being data driven, made instruction better, more thorough, more precise, and more comprehensive. Overall it had a positive impact on student achievement and teachers were getting better at what they do and how to teach children to ensure students have a better chance at learning.

An administrator commented:

"Getting teachers to really take ownership of their student data has been a struggle.

When they refer a student to RTI, they feel like the team takes over, so they can step back.

My goal is to make them be really involved and know what the progress, what is

happening with their student, what am is happening in the classroom, and what is being

provided in the intervention. This blends both the RTI and PLC systems together."

Theme 6: Lack of Time. Time for staff to meet and collaborate was a crucial physical structure

of a successful PLC team. Time for teams to meet was important for successful the studied PLC

implementation. It is critical this time was used to focus on improving student learning, Lack of

time became another theme that emerged from this study. Teachers reported *there was not*

enough time to do what needed to be done to ensure the success of students and increase student

achievement.

Principals agreed:

"Time was provided for staff to meet with their grade level teams, although little time

was allotted for teachers of all grade levels to interact with teachers of all grade levels."

According to DuFour et al, (2005) implementing a professional learning community is

hard work yet rewarding. It requires and extensive commitment and effort from all staff in the

school. The process is based upon the idea that all educators and support staff working in

collaboration have the potential to maximize learning and increase student achievement. PLC's

requires teamwork, combined resources, and shared expertise. The collaborative team is the

basic structure of a PLC and the engine that drives improvement. In a PLC, collaboration is a

process in which teachers work together in order to improve their classroom practice in ways that

ensure students learn (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010).

Theme 7: Leadership. Another theme that emerged from the study in both a positive and negative view is leadership and how it directly impacts school culture and student achievement. In the participants comments from the PLCA-R, 7 participants emphasized that leadership is top down, directive driven and non-collaborative. The comments denoted. . .

"*There is limited trust in leadership, because only a selected few are participating in the decision making with limited input from the mass*."

Widespread leadership is the foundation of a true professional learning community (Hord, 1997; Oliver et al., 2010). The researcher concluded:

Leadership is promoted among all staff as a desire, but nurturing is not done with all. Fostering leadership in teachers is essential to building effective response to intervention and professional learning communities.

From the comments it appears focus from leaders seems to be mostly focused on data rather than how to support teachers and improve teaching and learning. The researcher concluded:

Teachers are too weighted down by top down leadership to implement collaborative practices. Directives appear more change based rather than for improvement. There are significant trust and respect issues with leadership based on the comments from the participants. Risk taking is supported for a few people but not for others. Only a few are celebrated for their hard work. It looks like some steps are finally being taken this year by leadership to repair issues, but it will take sustained effort over time versus just a few agenda items.

One of the characteristic of a PLC designated by Hord that is imperative to improving student achievement is supportive conditions. Shared Leadership is a necessity to support the goals for achievement and instruction is imperative to sustaining the PLC process (DuFour, 2007; DuFour & DuFour, 2003; Marzano & Waters, 2009)

Conclusions

The mixed-method approach to research enriches the findings built upon both quantitative and qualitative information (Creswell, 2009, 2013). The use of quantitative data allowed the researcher to provide a numeric description of trends, themes, or opinions that emerged (Creswell, 2009, 2013). Qualitative research focuses on understanding the themes and trends that emerge in greater detail (Creswell, 2013).

This study was conducted in two phases. In phase one of this study, administrators and teachers in the district participated in an online survey by choice. The survey was sent to 240 teachers in a northwestern state school district through the PLCA-R online version through Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory. The data was coded and sent back to the researcher to maintain confidentiality. This allowed the data to be confidential, and only the researcher viewed data.

This study used the PLCA-R designed by Oliver et al., (2010) to generate a survey, for determining what characteristics and attributes were adopted based on the five dimensions of effective PLCs from Hord's (1998) research, to better understand benefits, challenges, and overall perceptions (see Appendix F). The researcher requested permission to use the assessment from Dr. Diane Oliver, a research colleague of Hord, who was the designated person granted permission to use the assessment tool. Permission was granted and included (see Appendix D).

The 4-point Likert scale survey was categorized into five dimensions based on Hord's research of successful and sustainable PLC's. Table 2 demonstrates each dimension and the number of questions that correspond to each.

In phase two, the researcher conducted three different focus groups to gather more information regarding perceptions of PLC's and RTI based on teacher and principal perspective. This case-study, using a mixed-method approach centered on investigating principals' and teachers' perception of their level of RTI implementation based on DuFour's continuum through the use of a focus group interviews. (See Appendix I) This continuum is a non-copyrighted document generated from *Learn by Doing* (DuFour et al., 2010). The purpose of the focus groups was to ascertain beliefs and perceptions associated with the implementation of Professional Learning Communities and tiered instruction to increase student achievement. This allowed the researcher a window into what stages of RTI implementation each school identified with.

Evidence from the mean scores and comments derived from the survey, and the focus interviews indicates school climate remains a significant factor in successfully implementing a professional learning community focused on increasing student achievement. The evidence gathered from the researcher noted a benefit of a professional learning community is an increased focus on positive climate. This encompasses teachers and administrators working together interdependently. The success of implementing Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention support increased student achievement is dependent on a successful community of collaborators focused on students. According to Schmoker (2004) successful schools craft conditions for teacher teams to continuously improve instruction through a collaborative group focused on a single purpose. Schools that incorporate caring relationships among staff and students built on trust and respect demonstrate a higher degree of success.

Strong positive school communities boost student and teacher learning (Borko, 2004) ignite

passion for teaching (Owen, 2015) and transform instructional pedagogy (Owen, 2015; Tam,

2015).

Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of

each team's decision-making process (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). A focus on

learning and shared responsibility is one of the foundational premises of professional learning

communities and response to intervention. In a PLC, educators work together interdependently in

collaborative teams to accomplish common goals. Collaboration is a system in which educators

work together, to analyze and impact professional practice by building stronger and more in-

depth understanding of learning, in order to improve our individual and collective results

(Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean, 2000; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty,

2005).

The researcher noted that teachers believed collaboration was used effectively and felt

very lucky to be working with great teams of teachers, paraprofessional and principals. The

things that were accomplished through shared values were done by the teams of teachers with

administration to share instructional ideas, strategies and evidence based practices to see more

growth occur.

One of the themes that emerged from the study was the weaknesses in including

stakeholders input in the decision making process district wide. Stakeholders, specifically

parents, becoming less involved as a whole, with sharing the responsibility of their child's

learning. Teachers and administrators felt fewer parents are involved in their child's education

and more responsibility is demanded of the schools. Schools working together to unite home and

school, create a sense of community that positively impacts the culture of the school, and increases academic improvement (Hord, 2009; Oliver & Hipp, 2010).

Teachers agreed that data was constantly collected, but they did not have time to implement change. They stated time was needed to do their job effectively; analyze data and then adjust teaching. The consensus from the survey comments was that too much data was collected, without intentionality that did not directly influence instruction and student learning. The data that is mandated is not always useful, and teacher input regarding data is not always welcomed.

Time for staff to meet and collaborate was a crucial physical structure of a successful PLC team. Time for teams to meet is important for successful PLC implementation. It is critical this time is used to focus on improving student learning, Lack of time became another theme that emerged from this study. Teachers report there was not enough time to do what needed to be done to ensure the success of students and increase student achievement.

In the participants comments from the PLCA-R, multiple participants emphasized that leadership is top down, directive driven and non-collaborative. The comments denote that there is limited trust in leadership, because administrators only selected a few to participate in the decision making. Widespread shared leadership is the foundation of a true professional learning community (Hord, 1997; Oliver et al., 2010). Fostering leadership in teachers is essential to building effective response to intervention and professional learning communities.

Recommendations for Further Research

The researcher recommends additional areas of future research that have a potential benefit and adds further depth to the current research regarding successful implementation of PLC's and RTI teams.

First area for further research recommended is developing a study that examines small rural districts that are isolated and limited in their ability to network. This study focused on a medium sized district, with a population over 4000 students in 11 schools. Several districts across the state are smaller in size with more square miles covered. Collaboration and shared experiences become more difficult to cultivate with a district this size. Exploring technology advancements and professional development opportunities to further PLC and RTI implementation outside of the traditional model is recommended.

Another area for further research is to consider a study that identifies leadership traits in both principals and teachers that are necessary to sustaining and establishing successful PLC and RTI teams. Building the capacity among school leaders including principals and teachers is a necessity to ensuing sustainability in on-going systems. Teacher leaders and or Instructional Coaches taking more substantial roles in implementations and sustaining current programs regarding PLC's and RTI needs further research to identify key attributes that can be fostered in staff.

Student achievement data should be analyzed in future research beyond perceived growth. Comparing schools and or districts that implement professional learning communities through a tiered model allows researcher to connect theory to application as it relates to student achievement.

Professional development in the form of on-going job embedded support is another area that needs further research. Determining the elements of each system, RTI and PLC that maximizes student achievement to provide additional training for sustainability and implementation needs to be revisited and studied.

Implications for Professional Practice

From the themes generated through the qualitative and quantitative research and the thorough review of literature, the researcher recommends the following insights and implications for professional practice. Implementation of professional learning communities and response to intervention rely on teamwork and collaboration. Hord and Sommers (2008) define PLC's as "continuous and intentional staff earning, so that staff always are increasing effectiveness leading to students' increased successful learning" (p. 24). Principals that lead by the top down approach minimize the shared leadership aspect of PLC's therefore hindering the empowered organization. Successful principals move away from the person with all the answers to the person who facilitates professional responsibility and growth in the area of teacher leadership. The idea that educators may have a incomplete understanding of what constitutes PLC and RTI systems is reflected in the findings regarding the difference in perceptions of teacher and principals. The need for additional professional development to build shared understanding is needed.

The focus of implementing PLC's through the lens of tiered instruction is creating systematic collaborative practices to enhance student achievement. Both of these systems serve as a means for developing a shared knowledge and creating deliberate practices essential to improving student achievement by focusing on learning rather than teaching. Hipp and Huffman (2010) state, "currently, researchers and practioners maintain the concept of a PLC is perceived

as the promise for school change and lasting reform" (p.12). Successful implementation and sustainability of these systems relies on a constant shared focus on student learning

The researcher concluded: *"There is no recipe, no professional development set of worksheets, no new teaching method, and no band-aid remedy. Itis a way of thinking: 'My role, as teacher, is to evaluate the effect I have on my students.'"*

This requires that teachers gather defensible and dependable evidence from many sources, and hold collaborative discussions with colleagues and students about this evidence, thus making the effect of their teaching visible to themselves and to others" (Hattie, 2011, p. 19).

References

Achinstein, B. (2002). Conflict amid community: The micropolitics of teacher collaboration. *Teachers College Record*, *104*(3), 421–455.

Adler, C. R. (2004). Seven strategies to teach students text comprehension. *Reading Rockets.* Retrieved from http://www.readingrockets.org/article/3479

Albritton, K., & Truscott, S. (2014). Professional development to increase problem-solving skills in a response to intervention framework. *Contemporary School Psychology*, *18*(1), 44–58.

Amanda L. March, Jose M. Castillo, George M. Batsche & Donald Kincaid (2016) Relationship Between Systems Coaching and Problem-Solving Implementation Fidelity in a Response-to-Intervention Model, Journal of Applied School Psychology, 32:2, 147-177, DOI:10.1080/15377903.2016.1165326

Andrews, D., & Lewis, M. (2002). The experiences of a professional community: Teachers developing a new image of themselves and their workplace. *Educational Research, 44*(3), 237–254. ISSN 0013-1881.

Bland J, & Altman D. (1997). Statistics notes: Cronbach's alpha. BMJ. 314:275. 10.1136/bmj.314.7080.572

Batsche, G.M. (2007). Response to Intervention: Overview and Research-Based Impact on OverRepresentation. Florida RtI Update, 1(1), Summer 2007. Retrieved from http://floridarti.usf.edu/resources/ newsletters/2007/summer2007.pdf

.Batsche, G. M., Curtis, M. J., Dorman, C., Castillo, J. M., & Porter, L. J. (2007). The Florida problem-solving/response to intervention model: Implementing a statewide initiative. In S. R. Jimerson, M. K. Burns, & A. M. VanDerHeyden (Eds.), Handbook of Response to

Intervention: The Science and Practice of Assessment and Intervention (378–395). New York, NY: Springer.

Batsche, G. M., Elliot, J., Graden, J. L., Grimes, J., Kovaleski, J. F., Prasse, D., Reschly, D. J., Schrag, J., &. . . Tilly III, W. D. (2005). *Response to intervention: Policy considerations and implementation.* Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education,

Batsche. G. M., Kavale, K. A., & Kovaleski, J. F. (2006). Competing views: A dialogue on response to intervention. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 32*(6).

Battersby, S. L. 1., & Verdi, B. (2015). The culture of professional learning communities and connections to improve teacher efficacy and support student learning. *Arts Education Policy Review, 116*(1), 22–29. doi:10.1080/10632913.2015.970096

Berckemeyer, J. C. (2013). Using team time effectively. *Association for Middle Level Education.* Retrieved from http://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet/TabId/270/ArtMID/888/ArticleID/109/Using-Team-Time-Effectively.aspx

Bollman, K. A., Silberglitt, B., & Gibbons, K. A. (2007). The St. Croix River education district model: Incorporating systems-level organization and a multi-tiered problem-solving process for intervention delivery.

Bradley, R., Danielson, L., & Doolittle, J. (2007). Responsiveness to intervention: 1997 to 2007. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 39*(5), 8–12.

Brozo, W. G. (2009). Response to intervention or responsive instruction? Challenges and possibilities of response to intervention for adolescent literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 53*(4), 277–281.

Burns, M. K. (2008). Response to intervention at the secondary level. *Principal Leadership, 8*(7), 12–15.

Burns, M. K., Appleton, J. J., & Stehouwer, J. D. (2005). Meta-analytic review of responsiveness-to-intervention research: Examining field-based and research implemented models. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 23*(4), 381–394.

Castillo, J. M. (2014). Best practices in program evaluation in a model of response to intervention/multi-tiered system of supports. In P. L. Harrison & A. Thomas (Eds.), *Best practices in school psychology: Foundations* (pp. 329–342). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists.

Castillo, J. M., Dedrick, R. F., Stockslager, K. M., March, A. L., Hines, C. V., & Tan, S. Y. (2015). Development and initial validation of a scale measuring the beliefs of educators regarding response to intervention. *Journal of Applied School Psychology, 31*(1), 1–30. doi:10.1080/15377903.2014.938282

Castillo, J. M., March, A. L., Stocklager, K., & Hines, C. V. (2016). Measuring educators' perceptions of their skills relative to response to intervention: A psychometric study of a survey tool. *Assessment for Effective Intervention*, *41*(2), 94–108.

Cook, C. R., Lyon, A. R., Kubergovic, D., Wright, D. B., & Zhang, Y. (2015). A supportive beliefs intervention to facilitate the implementation of evidence-based practices within a multitiered system of supports. *School Mental Health*, *7*, 49–60.

Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conduction and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational research: Planning, conduction and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Plano Clark, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research design: Selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist, 35*(2), 236–264.

Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. Psychometrika 16, 297-334

Danielson, L., Doolittle, J., & Bradley, R. (2007). Professional development, capacity building, and research needs: Critical issues for response to intervention implementation. *School Psychology Review, 36*, 632–637.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1993). Reframing the school reform agenda. *Phi Delta Kappan, 74*(10), 752.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2009). Recognizing and enhancing teacher effectiveness. *The International Journal of Educational and Psychological Assessment, 3,* 1–24.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2013b). What teachers need and reformers ignore: time to collaborate. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/04/11/what-teachers-need-and-reformersignore-time-to-collaborate/

Darling-Hammond, L., & Post, L. (2000). Inequality in teaching and schooling: Supporting high-quality teaching and leadership in low- income schools.

Darling-Hammond, L., & Richardson, N. (2009). Teacher learning: What matters? *Educational Leadership, 66*(5), 46–53.

Dewey, J. (1933). How we think. Lexington, MA: Heath.

Dewey, John (1902), The Child and the Curriculum, in The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum, pp. 67-77, Digireads.com Publishing, 2010.

Dewey, John (1915), The School and Society, 2nd ed., in The School and Society and The Child and the Curriculum, pp. 5-65, Digireads.com Publishing, 2010.

Dewey, John (1916),Democracy and Education, NY: Barnes and Noble Books, 2005.

Dorn, L. J., & Soffas, C. (2005). Understanding comprehension. *Teaching for deep comprehension,* 5–12. Portland, MA: Stenhouse.

DuFour, R. (2004). What is a "professional learning community"? *Educational leadership, 61*(8), 6–11.

DuFour, R. (2007). Professional learning communities: A bandwagon, an idea worth considering, or our best hope for high levels of learning? *Middle School Journal (J1), 39*(1), 4–8.

DuFour, R. (2015). *In praise of American educators: And how they can become even better.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2003). Building a professional learning community. *School Administrator, 60*(5), 13–19.

DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2010). Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R. B., DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. E. (2006). *Professional learning communities at work: Plan book.* (p. 141). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R. B., & Eaker, R. E. (2008). *Revisiting professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2006). *Learning by doing.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010) *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., 1947, & Eaker, R. E. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA; Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.

DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (Eds.). (2005). *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2007). *Leader's companion: Inspiration for professional learning communities at work.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., & Mattos, M. (2013). How do principals really improve schools? *Educational Leadership, 70*(7), 34–40.

DuFour, R., & Reeves, D. (2016). The futility of PLC lite. *Phi Delta Kappan, 97*(6), 69–71. doi:10.1177/0031721716636878

Duhon, G. J., Mesmer, E. M., Atkins, M. E., Greguson, L. A., & Olinger, E. S. (2009). Quantifying intervention intensity: A systematic approach to evaluating student response to increasing intervention frequency. *Journal of Behavioral Education, 18,* 101–118.

Duyar, I., Gumus, S., & Bellibas, M. S. (2013). Multilevel analysis of teacher work attitudes: The influence of principal leadership and teacher collaboration. *International Journal of Educational Managment*, *27*(7), 700–719.

Ebrahim, N., Ahmad, S., & Taha, Z. (2009). Virtual teams: A literature review. *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences, 3*(3), 2653–2669.

Epstein, J. L. (2005). A case study of the partnership schools Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model. *Elementary School Journal*, *106*(2), 151–170. doi:10.1086/499196

Erchul, W. P. (2015). Put me in, coach: Observations on selected studies implementing supportive interventions to teachers. *School Mental Health*, *7*, 74–79.

Forman, S. G., & Crystal, C. D. (2015). Systems consultation for multitiered systems of supports (MTSS): Implementation issues. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, *25*, 1–10.

Fuchs, D., & Deshler, D. D. (2007). What we need to know about responsiveness to intervention (and shouldn't be afraid to ask). *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 22*, 129–136.

Fuchs, L. S., & Fuchs, D. (2006). Introduction to response to intervention: What, why, and how valid is it? *Reading Research Quarterly, 41*(1), 93–99.

Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., Hamlett, C. L., Walz, L., & Germann, G. (1993). Formative evaluation of academic progress: How much growth can we expect? *School Psychology Review, 22,* 27–48.

Fuchs, D. (2002). Is learning disabilities just a fancy term for low achievement? A meta-analysis of reading difficulties between low achievers with and without the label. In R. Bradley, L. Danielson, & D. P. Hallahan (Eds.), Identification of learning disabilities: Response to treatment (pp. 737–771). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum

Fuchs, L. S., Fuchs, D., & Speece, D. L. (2002). Treatment validity as a unifying construct for identifying learning disabilities. Learning Disability Quarterly, 25, 33–45.

Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform.* London: Falmer Press.

Fullan, M. (2005). *Leadership and sustainability: System thinkers in action.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Fullan, M. (2011). *The moral imperative realized.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact.* John Wiley & Sons.

Fullan, M. G., & Miles, M. B. (1992). Getting reform right: What works and what doesn't. *Phi Delta Kappan, 73*(10), 744–752.

Fulton, K., & Britton, T. (2011). *Stem teachers in professional learning communities.* Washington, DC: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2013/06/13-facts-higher-education

Glaser, Barney G & Strauss, Anselm L., 1967. The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, Chicago, Aldine Publishing Company

Hall, G. E., & Hord, S. M. (2015). Implementing change: Patterns, principles and potholes (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Hallam, P. R., Smith, H. R., Hite, J. M., Hite, S. J., & Wilcox, B. R. (2015). Trust and collaboration in PLC teams. *NASSP Bulletin, 99*(3), 193–216. doi:10.1177/0192636515602330

Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the post-modern age*. London: Cassell.

Hargreaves. A. (2000). Four ages of professionalism and professional learning. *Teachers and Teaching: History and Practice, 6*(2), 151–182.

Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2007). Tools for active literacy: The nuts and bolts of comprehension instruction. In *Strategies that work* (pp. 44–59). Portland, MA: Stenhouse.

Hord, S. M. (1992). *Facilitative leadership: The imperative for change*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S. M. (1997). *Professional learning communities: What are they and why are they important?* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S. M. (1998). *School professional staff as learning community*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Developmental Laboratory.

Hord, S. M. (2004). *Learning together, leading together: Changing schools through professional learning communities*. New York: Teachers College Press; Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

Hord, S., & Sommers, W. (2008). *Leading professional learning communities: Voices from research and practice.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Introduction to SAS. UCLA: Statistical Consulting Group. From http://www.ats.ucla.edu/stat/spss/faq/alpha.html (accessed November 27, 2016).

Koellner, K., & Jacobs, J. (2015). Distinguishing models of professional development: The case of an adaptive model's impact on teachers' knowledge, instruction, and student achievement. *Journal of Teacher Education, 66*(1), 51–67. doi:10.1177/0022487114549599

Louis, K. S., & Marks, H. M. (1998). Does professional communities affect the classroom? Teachers' works and students' experiences in restructuring schools. *American Journal of Education, 106*, 532–575.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.)*.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Marzano, R. H., Gaddy, B. B., & Dean, C. (2000). *What works in classroom instruction*. Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

Marzano, R. J., & Waters, J. T. (2009). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R. J., Waters, J. T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McGregor, T. (2007). Metacognition: It's the thought that counts. In H. Daniels & S. Chapman (Eds.), *Comprehension connections* (pp. 11–27). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Meiklejohn, A. *The experimental college*. New York: HarperCollins, 1932.

Mills, G. E. (2000). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher*. Upper Saddle River, NJ:

Murphy, J., & Adams, J. E., Jr. (1998). Reforming America's schools 1980–2000. *Journal of Educational Administration, 36*(5), 426–441.

Murphy, J., Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2013, July). Leading via teacher evaluation: The case of the missing clothes? *Educational Researcher, 42*(6), 349–354.

National Center on Response to Intervention. (2010). *Essential components of RTI: A closer look at response to intervention*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, National Center on Response to Intervention. Retrieved from http://www.rti4success.org/sites/default/files/rtiessentialcomponents_042710.pdf

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Washington, DC: National Commission on Excellence in Education. Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/index.html

Ning, H. K., Lee, D., & Lee, W. O. (2015). Relationships between teacher value orientations, collegiality, and collaboration in school professional learning communities. *Social Psychology of Education, 18*(2), 337–354. doi:10.1007/s11218-015-9294-x

Nunnaly, J. (1978). Psychometric theory. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2010). Assessing and analyzing schools. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.), *Demystifying professional learning communities: School leadership at its Best.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Schmoker, M. (1996). *Results: The key to continuous school improvement.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Schmoker, M. (1999). *Results: The key to continuous school improvement* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Schmoker, M. (2004). Tipping point: From feckless reform to substantive instructional improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan, 85*(6), 424–432.

Schmoker, M. (2005). Here and now: Improving teaching and learning. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker, & R. DuFour (Eds.), On common ground: The power of professional Pages 1–9 used with permission from Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work (DuFour,

DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree .learning communities (pp. 137–138), Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree (formerly National Educational Service).

Schmoker, M. J. (2006). *Results now: How we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Schultz, B. K., Arora, P., & Mautone, J. A. (2015). Consultation and coaching to increase the uptake of evidence-based practices: Introduction to the special issue. *School Mental Health*, *7*, 1–5.

Seed, A. H. (2008). Redirecting the teaching profession: In the wake of a nation at risk and NCLB. *Phi Delta Kappan 89*(8), 586.

Seed, A. H. (2006). Making empowerment and collaboration part of the lives of highly qualified team teachers. *The Middle School Journal, 37*(6), 40-44.

Seed, A. H. (2008). Redirecting the teaching profession in the wake of a nation at risk and no child left behind. *The Phi Delta Kappan* 89(9), 586-589.

Seed, A. H. (2008). Cohort building through experiential learning. *Journal of Experiential Education, 31*(2), 209-224.

Senge, P. (1990). The fifth discipline: The art & practice of the learning organization. New York: Currency Doubleday.

Sergiovanni, T. (2005). The virtues of leadership. *The Educational Forum, 69*(2), 112–123.

Sims, B., March, A., Barrett, S., & Knotek, S. (2015) Systems coaching: What's systems got to do with it? [Webinar]. *Technical Assistance Coordination Center (TACC) Webinar Series*. Retrieved from http://systemscoaching.events.tadnet.org

Sims, R. L., & Penny, G. R. (2015). Examination of a failed professional learning community. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 3*(1), 39–45.

Sparks, D. (2005). Leading for transformation in teaching, learning, and relationships. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker, & R. DuFour (Eds.), *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities* (pp. 155–175). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree (formerly National Educational Service).

Sparks, S. D. (2013, July). Dropout indicators found for first graders. *Education Week, 32*(37). Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/07/29/37firstgrade.h32.html?tkn=YRXFxf2U7f neiqZz7tQQsojrJgXCEYZRzZxk&cmp=ENL-EU-NEWS1

Stewart, C. (2014). Transforming professional development to professional learning. *Journal of Adult Education, 43*(1), 28–33.

Strauss, A. and Corbin, L (1990). Basics of Grounded Theory Methods. Beverly Hills, CA.: Sage. Sulkowski, M. L., Joyce, D. K., & Storch, E. A. (2012). Treating Childhood Anxiety in Schools:
Service Delivery in a Response to Intervention Paradigm. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *21*(6), 938-947. DOI: 10.1007/s10826-011-9553-1

Tavakol, M. & Dennick. R. (2011) Making Sense of Cronbach's Alpha. International Journal of

Medical Education. 2:53-55 Editorial

Torgesen, J. K. (2009), The Response to Intervention Instructional Model: Some Outcomes From a Large-Scale Implementation in Reading First Schools. Child Development Perspectives, 3: 38–40. doi:10.1111/j.1750-8606.2009.00073.x

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional

    learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher*

    Education, 24(5), 80–91.

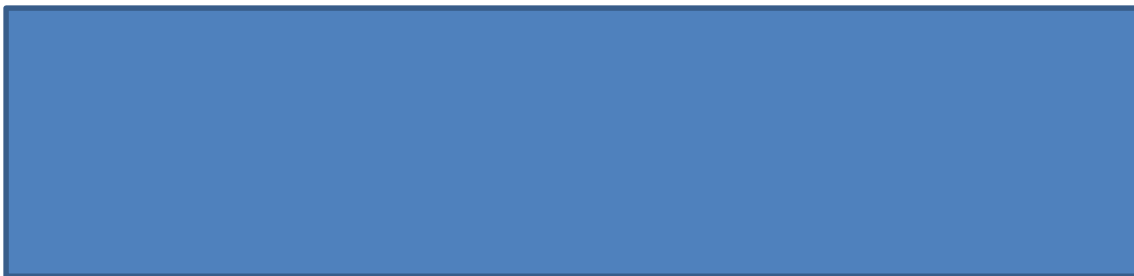**Appendix A**

Certification of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Marilyn Paslay** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 01/19/2015

Certification Number: 1654691

Appendix B
Consent For Research

01/26/2016

To Whom It May Concern:

Mrs. Paslay would like to conduct a research study that focuses on the benefits and challenges of establishing a Professional Learning Community through the lens of tiered instruction from principals' and teachers' perspective.

Mrs. Paslay is a graduate student at Northwest Nazarene University, and as part of her Dissertation, she would like to conduct a study within our district. All data used in the research study will remain confidential and only those involved will be able to view the data. I fully understand Mrs. Paslay's research and I am aware of the goals and objectives of her research study.

With this letter, I give consent for Mrs. Paslay to conduct her research and to utilize the data collected, as it is appropriate for the design and method of her study. The authorization dates for this research study are July 2016 - April 2017. I know the district will benefit from Mrs. Paslay's research.

Sincerely,

Superintendent of Schools
bmurray@lakeland272.org

committed to academic excellence ...dedicated to student success

Appendix C
Requesting Focus-Group Participation

Dear Mrs.

My name is Lynn Paslay, and I am working on doctoral research at Northwest Nazarene University. My research is titled, "The Benefits and Challenges of Establishing a Professional Learning Community through the Lens of Tiered Instruction."

I received your name from …… . She recommended you as a valuable resource based on your work in RTI and PLCs at the building level. I hope that you will be willing to participate in a focus group interview at the district office on ……

All of your responses from the interview will remain confidential. All interviews will be recorded to ensure the researcher captures everything that is said. This process is voluntary, and you can select to suspend your involvement at any time. You can select to answer questions that are of comfort to you and are not obliged to answer all of the questions. I would like to thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Lynn Paslay
NNU Doctoral Student
mpaslay@nnu.edu

Appendix D

Permission Letter

Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
P.O. Box 43091
Lafayette, LA 70504-3091

January 30, 2016

Lynn Paslay
8515 Coeur d' Alene
Spirit Lake, Idaho 83869

Dear Ms. Paslay:

This correspondence is to grant permission to utilize the *Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised* (PLCA-R) as your instrument for data collection for your doctoral study through Northwest Nazarene University. I believe your research *examining specific characteristics and attributes based on the defined PLC dimensions and the level of implementation of the PLC process* will contribute to the PLC literature and provide valuable information related to overall development of the PLC process. I am pleased that you are interested in using the PLCA-R measure in your research.

This permission letter allows use of the PLCA-R through paper/pencil administration, as well as permission for the PLCA-R online version. For administration of the PLCA-R online version, services must be secured through our online host, SEDL in Austin, TX. Additional information for online administration can be found at www.sedl.org.

While this letter provides permission to use the measure in your study, authorship of the measure will remain as Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman (exact citation on the following page). This permission does not allow renaming the measure or claiming authorship.

Upon completion of your study, I would be interested in learning about your entire study and would welcome the opportunity to receive an electronic version of your completed dissertation research.

Thank you for your interest in our research and measure for assessing professional learning community attributes within schools. Should you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dianne F. Olivier

Dianne F. Olivier, Ph. D.

Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Doctoral Program
Joan D. and Alexander S. Haig/BORSF Professor
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
College of Education
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
P.O. Box 43091
Lafayette, LA 70504-3091
(337) 482-6408 (Office)   dolivier@louisiana.edu

Reference Citation for Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised measure:

Source: Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2010). Assessing and analyzing schools. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.). *Demystifying professional learning communities: School leadership at its Best.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Appendix E

Northwest Nazarene University
Educational Leadership Doctoral Studies Program
Informed Consent

Study: The Benefits and Challenges of Establishing a Professional Learning Community Through the Lens of Tiered Instruction

Lynn Paslay (lpaslay@lakeland272.org), a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Heidi Curtis (hlcurtis@nnu.edu), is requesting your participation in a research study entitled, *The Benefits and Challenges of Establishing a Professional learning Community through the Lens of Tiered Instruction*. The purpose of the study is to examine and gain insight into whether or not teachers and administrators view their participation in a professional learning community through the lens of tiered instruction as an opportunity that promotes and encourages professional development and student achievement.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:
1. Sign an Informed Consent Form, volunteering to participate in the study.
2. Participate in a district-wide confidential survey, on a volunteer basis.
3. Participate in a focus-group interview session.
4. Decline a response or stop the interview if at any time during the study you are uncomfortable answering any of the questions.

The design of this study has been created to minimize the risk to any participant. The findings of such a study would contribute to the field of education by creating a more effective and beneficial professional growth plan for teachers. The insight obtained through this research could also provide vital information addressing the need for continuous teacher education.

The results of the study will be published in my dissertation; however names of the participants, the school, and the school district will not be revealed in the study. For the purpose of the study, pseudo names will be assigned by the researcher to the school, school district, and all participants. Names will not be revealed by the researcher at any time. All transcripts and data collected will be kept in a secured area available only to the researcher.

Any questions about the study should be referred to Dr. Heidi Curtis. E-mail addresses are listed above.

Your participation in the study is voluntary and will not be compensated. At any time during the study you are free to withdraw from the study.

Participant's Permission
I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____Date_____
Participant's Signature

I give my permission to participate in an audio recording _____
                                                                            Participant's Signature

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact **Heidi Curtis** at (208) 467-8250/ hlcurtis@nnu.edu.

Appendix F

Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised

Directions:
This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Shade the appropriate oval provided to the right of each statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement. Comments after each dimension section are optional.

Key Terms:
- Principal = Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal
- Staff/Staff Members = All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students
- Stakeholders = Parents and community members

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)
            2 = Disagree (D)
            3 = Agree (A)
            4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

	STATEMENTS	SCALE			
	Shared and Supportive Leadership	SD	D	A	SA
1.	Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0	0	0	0
2.	The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	0	0	0	0
3.	Staff members have accessibility to key information.	0	0	0	0
4.	The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0	0	0	0
5.	Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.	0	0	0	0
6.	The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0	0	0	0
7.	The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	0	0	0	0
8.	Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	0	0	0	0
9.	Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	0	0	0	0
10.	Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	0	0	0	0

		SD	D	A	SA
11.	Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

	STATEMENTS	**SCALE**			
	Shared Values and Vision	SD	D	A	SA
12.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	0	0	0	0
13.	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
14.	Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	0	0	0	0
15.	Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	0	0	0	0
16.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	0	0	0	0
17.	School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0	0	0	0
18.	Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	0	0	0	0
19.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
20.	Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

	Collective Learning and Application	SD	D	A	SA
21.	Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0	0	0	0
22.	Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	0	0	0
23.	Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0	0	0	0
24.	A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	0	0	0	0
25.	Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0	0	0	0

26.	Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
27.	School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	0	0	0	0
28.	School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	0	0	0	0
29.	Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
30.	Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0

COMMENTS:

	STATEMENTS	SCALE			
	Shared Personal Practice	SD	D	A	SA
31.	Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	0	0	0
32.	Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
33.	Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0	0	0	0
34.	Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
35.	Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0	0	0	0
36.	Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0	0	0	0
37.	Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.	0	0	0	0

COMMENTS:

	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	SD	D	A	SA
38.	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	0	0	0
39.	A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0	0	0	0
40.	Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	0	0	0	0
41.	School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0	0	0	0

		SD	D	A	SA
42.	Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

	Supportive Conditions - Structures	SD	D	A	SA
43.	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	0	0	0
44.	The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	0	0	0	0
45.	Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	0	0	0	0
46.	Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	0	0	0
	STATEMENTS	**SCALE**			
		SD	D	A	SA
47.	Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0	0	0	0
48.	The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	0	0	0	0
49.	The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	0	0	0	0
50.	Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	0	0	0	0
51.	Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	0	0	0	0
52.	Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

Source: Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2010). Assessing and analyzing schools. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.). *Demystifying professional learning communities: School leadership at its Best.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Appendix G

Member Checking E-mail

Date
Dear---

I hope this e-mail finds you and your students well. Thank you for your participation in the study entitled The *Benefits and Challenges of Establishing a Professional Learning Community Through the Lens of Tiered Instruction From Principals' and Teachers' Perspectives.* I wanted to share some of the themes that resulted from the survey and interviews in this particular study (see below). Please let me know if these accurately depicted our conversation. If you have any suggestions, modifications, or questions, please let me know by Monday, March 4, 2017.

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits and challenges of establishing a professional learning community through the lens of tiered instruction from principals' and teachers' perspective.

The central focus and questions being asked in this research study include the following:
1. How does implementing Professional Learning Communities and RTI support increased student achievement from principals' and teachers' perspective?

2. What benefits and challenges are identified in establishing a Professional Learning Community model and RTI within a school?

3. How does creating tiered instruction through a collaborative professional learning community and RTI model support continuous school improvement?

There were many themes that emerged from your participation in the interviews. After reading, rereading, and coding the transcripts, the results showed the following themes: The success of implementing Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention support increased student achievement is dependent on a successful community of collaborators focused on students. The evidence gathered from the researcher noted a benefit of a professional learning community was an increased focus on positive climate. According to Schmoker (2004)

successful schools craft conditions for teacher teams to continuously improve instruction through a collaborative group focused on a single purpose.

The concept of respect and building a positive community through the lens of PLC and RTI are essential to the underpinning of successful implementation in both systems. Strong school communities boost student and teacher learning (Borko, 2004) ignite passion for teaching (Owen, 2015) and transform instructional pedagogy (Owen, 2015; Tam, 2015).

Teams in a PLC relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results. Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of each team's decision-making process (Berckemeyer, 2013; DuFour et al., 2010). A focus on learning and shared responsibility is one of the foundational premises of professional learning communities and response to intervention.

Schools starting with an overarching look at data to drive monthly collaborations with grade level teams, ensures teacher teams are looking at all kids and making sure tier one supports are strong, this includes building a better understanding of tier two supports that can be provided through the lens of PLC and RTI (DuFour et al., 2010).

The structure of the school is aligned to ensure teams are provided the time and support essential to teacher learning. Collaboration is a systematic process in which we work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results (Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean, 2000; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).Schools working together to unite home and school, create a sense of community that positively impacts the culture of the school, and increases academic improvement (Hord, 2009; Oliver & Hipp, 2010).

The consensus from the survey comments was that too much data was collected without intentionality that did not directly influence instruction and student learning. However, most teachers consistently looked at student results as a way to improve instruction within their own classroom.

Time for staff to meet and collaborate was a crucial physical structure of a successful PLC team. Time for teams to meet was important for successful the studied PLC implementation. It is critical this time was used to focus on improving student learning, Lack of time became another theme that emerged from this study. From the comments it appears focus from leaders seems to be mostly focused on data rather than how to support teachers and improve teaching and learning.

Appendix H

Debrief Statement

Thank you for your participation in this study.

After we have an opportunity to analyze the data, we will e-mail you the results and ask for feedback. Mainly, we want to ensure that we captured the essence of our discussion, accurately portraying our discussion and your thoughts. This study will conclude by March 31, 2017.

Questions
In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns, Lynn Paslay can be contacted via e-mail at mpaslay@nnu.edu and via telephone at (661) 332-6463.

Thank you for your participation!

Lynn Paslay
Doctoral Student
Northwest Nazarene University

Appendix I

Focus-Group Interview Questions

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to talk to me about RTI and PLCs. My name is ……, and I am conducting this interview for a researcher from NNU. You were invited because of your role in RTI at the building level and participation in a PLC. The results from the survey and interview will be used to determine further steps needed in bridging PLCs and RTI.

You have probably noticed the recording devices. I am recording the session because I don't want to miss any comments. Because we are recording this session, it will be helpful to have only one person speak at a time. People often say very helpful things in these discussions, and we can't write fast enough to get them all down. Everything recorded will remain confidential.

Your name will not be used in the report—only pseudonyms in place of your name. I encourage you all to keep today's discussion confidential, and please do not feel pressured to speak. Please take a moment to read and sign the consent form. Are there any questions? (Turn recorder on and test it)

1. Please describe your understanding of the RTI process in your school?
   Probe: What is the process of RTI trying to accomplish in your opinion?
2. What challenges have you experienced in implementing and sustaining RTI in your schools?
3. Please explain the benefits you have experienced in implementing and sustaining RTI in your schools?
4. Please explain what part of the RTI process has been the hardest to implement?
   Probe: Please explain how you are sustaining that part of RTI in your schools?
5. How would you define the most successful RTI process?
6. How can the RTI process in your schools be improved?
7. How does your school evaluate the effectiveness of core instruction?
8. How does your school evaluate the effectiveness of evidenced based curricula in tiered instruction?
9. What is your school's criterion for fluidly moving back and forth between RTI tiers?
10. How are the following assessments used in the RTI process:
    Universal screeners/benchmarks
    Diagnostic
    Formative
    Summative
11. How has implementing tiered instruction impacted student achievement?
12. Are there other comments, questions, and or concerns regarding RTI that I have not asked, but you would like to share?

Thank you again for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Your responses will remain confidential. I remind you not to share what was discusses today, in order to maintain confidentiality with this group.

Questions	Literature
Please describe your understanding of the RTI process in your school.? Probe: What is the process of RTI trying to accomplish in your opinion?	Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L. (2006) DuFour & Mattos, 2013 DuFour et al., 2010
What challenges have you experienced in implementing and sustaining RTI in your schools?	Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L. (2006) DuFour et al., 2010 Batsche (2005, 2006)
Please explain the benefits you have experienced in implementing and sustaining RTI in your schools?	DuFour & Mattos, 2013 DuFour et al., 2010
Please explain what part of the RTI process has been the hardest to implement? Probe: Please explain how you are sustaining that part of RTI in your schools?	DuFour & Mattos, 2013
How would you define the most successful RTI process?	Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L. (2006) DuFour et al., 2010
How can the RTI process in your schools be improved?	DuFour & Mattos, 2013 Batsche (2005, 2006)
How does your school evaluate the effectiveness of core instruction?	Batsche (2005, 2006) Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L. (2006) DuFour et al., 2010
How does your school evaluate the effectiveness of evidenced-based curricula in tiered instruction?	DuFour et al., 2010 DuFour & Mattos, 2013 Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L. (2006)
What is your school's criterion for fluidly moving back and forth between RTI tiers?	DuFour et al., 2010 Fuchs, D. & Fuchs, L. (2006)
How are the following assessments used in the RTI process Universal screeners/benchmarks Diagnostic Formative Summative	DuFour & Mattos, 2013 DuFour et al., 2010 Batsche (2005, 2006)
How has implementing tiered instruction impacted student achievement?	DuFour et al., 2010 DuFour & Mattos, 2013 Batsche (2005, 2006)
Are there other comments, questions, and or concerns regarding RTI that I have not asked, but you would like to share?	

Appendix J

Pilot Rubric

Directions: Please read the questions and then indicate your opinion of its clarity by checking the Likert Scale. The term "clearly formatted" means the question is immediately understood without the need for further explanation and encourages a response.

Please provide feedback regarding the quality of the questions and any additional questions that should be included.

All information collected is confidential and will only be used by the researcher for dissertation purposes. Thank you for taking the time to provide your input.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Question #1 is clearly formatted. Please describe your understanding of the RTI process in your school? Probe: What is the process of RTI trying to accomplish in your opinion?				
Question #2 is clearly formatted. What challenges have you experienced in implementing and sustaining RTI in your schools?				
Question #3 is clearly formatted. Please explain the benefits you have experienced in implementing and sustaining RTI in your schools?				
Question #4 is clearly formatted. Please explain what part of the RTI process has been the hardest to implement? Probe: Please explain how you are sustaining that part of RTI in your schools?				
Question #5 is clearly formatted. How would you define the most successful RTI process?				
Question #6 is clearly formatted. How can the RTI process in your schools be improved?				
Question #7 is clearly formatted. How does your school evaluate the effectiveness of core instruction?				
Question #8 is clearly formatted.				

How does your school evaluate the effectiveness of evidenced-based curricula in tiered instruction?				
Question #9 is clearly formatted. What is your school's criterion for fluidly moving back and forth between RTI tiers?				
Question #10 is clearly formatted. How are the following assessments used in the RTI process Universal screeners/benchmarks Diagnostic Formative Summative				
Question #11 is clearly formatted. How has implementing tiered instruction impacted student achievement?				
Question #12 is clearly formatted. Are there other comments, questions, and or concerns regarding RTI that I have not asked, but you would like to share?				

The following questions need revisions:

Comments:

The following questions should be added to your focust group interview (please explain why):

Appendix K

PLCA-R Introductory E-mail Letter

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to participate in a survey related to professional learning communities (PLC). The purpose of the survey is to glean a greater depth of understanding regarding benefits and barriers of implementing and sustaining a PLC. The survey is called the Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised, and it will take approximately 5–10 minutes to complete.

The survey is available online at:
enter the password: to log on

All survey responses will remain confidential and only known to the researcher.

Appendix L

Human Research Review Committee Approval

Joseph Bankard- (HRRC@ NNU)

Aug 24, 2016

You have full approval. You may begin your research.

Appendix M

Surrogate Résumé

Education

MA Education, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID December 2014
Educational Leadership
BA Psychology, University of Montana, Missoula, MT May 2005
Montana Standard Teaching License in Psychology & Special Education, December 2005
University High School, June 2001
Spokane, Washington September 1998- June 2001

Teaching Experience
Consulting Teacher
School District, Rathdrum, Idaho 2016-Present
- Provide support and assistance including consultation regarding effective teaching techniques, materials, assessment procedures, programming and assistance with the development of the IEP

Instructional Coach
Elementary, Athol, Idaho September 2013-Present
- Works in partnership with classroom teachers, building principal and specialist to Support and promote educational excellence and effectiveness
- 5th grade District Team Leader/Facilitator

Special Education Teacher
Elementary, Athol, Idaho September 2006-Present
- Grades 4th-6th Resource room
- Taught: English, Reading, Writing, Spelling, Math, Behavior Skills, Social Skills and various interventions

Committees
Core Teacher
School District, Rathdrum, ID 2016-2017
- Working to build greater capacity among teachers by providing rich professional development and implementing constructivist principles of instructional design.

Response to Intervention (RtI)
Elementary, Athol, ID September 2006-Present
- Facilitator of weekly RtI meeting where we review student progress, change educational goals based on need, and write I-Plans as needed
- Teach intervention groups, including data collection and reporting

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Task Force
School District, Rathdrum, ID January 2013-Present
- Facilitate a 5th grade team as we create framework for moving district from previous State Standards to CCSS

- Leading team to increase student achievement by ensuring educators understand specifically what the new standards mean a student must know, understand and be able to do
- Supporting teachers in curriculum alignment from CCSS to tools, materials and resources

Standards Based Report Card Committee
School District, Rathdrum, ID September 2015-Present September 2010-June 2010
- Committee focused on creating new standards based report card
- Producing common assessments to report out on

Tier 2 and Tier 3 Math
Elementary, Athol, ID September 2011-Present
- Instructional coach leading team of 5 teachers to develop systems to identifying, monitoring and instructing struggling learners in the area of math

Positive Behavior Supports
Elementary, Athol, ID September2009- Ongoing
- Attend meetings as a teacher to create behavior plans, monitor effectiveness of plan, and make decisions based on data

Professional development topics I have led
Poverty
Close Reading
Document Based Inquiry
Verbal De-escalation
Non-Violent Crisis Intervention
Mindset
Charlotte Danielson
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Additional Certifications, Trainings or Coursework
Teachscape- May 2016
- Passed required test to provide educators with consistent, meaningful feedback about classroom observations to support professional growth and accurate teacher evaluations

Idaho Core Teacher 2015-Present
- Idaho State Department of Education has offered an opportunity to gain further experience and expertise in the development of Idaho Core State Standards (CCSS) lessons, units, and assessments in a supported and sustainable manner

Danielson Framework for Instructional Coaching 2015-2016
- Small group learning on an Instructional Coach's role in supporting and fostering professional growth as it relates to the Charlotte Danielson Framework for teaching.

Professional Learning Communities- June 2013
- Four days focused on school structures and system to enhance PLCs within a building or district with an emphasis on closing the gap, RtI, data collection and much more.

Idaho Leads- 2013-2015
- Professional Development focused on capacity building through innovative professional learning experiences

Nonviolent Crisis Intervention- Spring 2010, CPI
- A program focused on the safe management of disruptive and assaultive behavior.

*Tier 2 Mathmatics-*2012-2013, Boise State University SESTA
- Provide direction for prioritizing, diagnosing, and planning Tier 2 math instruction

Mathematical Thinking for Instruction- Summer 2012, Idaho State Department of Education
- Instruction on developing a deep understanding of topics in numbers and operations and an understanding of how students build a procedural and conceptual understating of mathematics over time.

*AIMSWEB Training-*Spring 2008, Idaho State Department of Education
- Training on AIMSAWEB, a computer-based benchmark testing system as well as an assessment and progress monitoring tool.

*Understanding How Poverty Impacts Students-*Spring 2008, Northwest Nazarene University
- An understating of poverty and addressing its impacts on today's students and their families.

*Aligning IEPs to the Idaho Content Standards-*Spring 2008
- A study in alignment between the written, taught and tested curriculum to a student's IEP.

Study of the Idaho Special Education Manual- Spring 2007, Northwest Nazarene University
- A study in understanding the provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act and meet the guidelines contained within the law

*Developing Principles to Increase Achievement-*Winter 2007, Northwest Nazarene University
- A study in using data, summative and formative assessment to increase student performance.

Response to Intervention- Fall 2007, University of Idaho
- A study of framework for continuous improvement that provides high-quality, standard-based instruction and research-based systematic interventions for all student needs, using learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational decisions.

Appendix N

Surrogate Confidentiality Agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

Surrogate Research Interviewer

I, ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓ , Surrogate Research Interviewer, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all interviews and documentations received Lynn Paslay regarding her research study titled "The Benefits and Challenges of Establishing a Professional Learning Community through the Lens of Tiered Instruction thought the Principals and Teachers' Perspective".

I have provided Lynn Paslay with my professional resume as evidence that I am qualified to act as a Surrogate Research Interviewer.

I agree to:

1. Complete training conducted by Lynn Paslay to assure I understand the Interview Protocols.

2. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.

3. Not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the interviews and/or files to which I will have access.

Surrogate's name (printed) ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Surrogate's signature ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓

Date 7-28-16