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# The Relationship Between Teacher Planning Time and Eighth Grade Reading Achievement in West Virginia Schools

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# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER PLANNING TIME AND EIGHTH GRADE READING ACHIEVEMENT IN WEST VIRGINIA SCHOOLS

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation study is dedicated to my children, Christina and Alexander Monterosso, and to my mother, Edna Yoak Robinson. Alex and Christina have graciously encouraged me throughout my graduate studies, which have encompassed their entire lifetime. Their gently sarcastic sense of humor has helped me to pick up my spirits on many difficult days. My mother, a lifelong educator, has shown by example a commitment to excellence and life-long learning and, most importantly, a determined commitment to at-risk children.

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**CONTENTS**

## LIST OF FIGURES

## ABSTRACT

Widespread educational research supports the implementation of collaborative teacher planning time or Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a means to increase student achievement. However, corresponding gains in student achievement are not always evident in schools where PLCs are implemented. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between student achievement and the amounts and types of teacher planning. The population for this study consisted of 174 West Virginia public schools housing 8th grade students. Individual and collaborative planning time were analyzed in comparison to reading achievement. Demographic information and principals' perspectives on the effectiveness of teacher collaborative teams were also examined as part of the study. No clear relationship between teacher planning times and reading achievement was found. This study provides information to help state-, district-, and school-level administrators determine the most effective utilization of the teacher work day in order to improve student achievement.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Since the days of the one-room schoolhouse, teachers have devoted part of their workday to planning and preparation for the school day. In the late 1800s, a teacher had many duties unrelated to academic instruction. The teacher had to fill lamps, whittle pens, clean chimneys, haul in water and coal, and complete basic maintenance and janitorial duties as well as prepare for instruction during his or her "planning" time.

Today, planning periods provide time for teachers to attend to many of the tasks necessary to manage an effective classroom. Teachers may utilize this time to plan for instruction, prepare and organize materials, review student work, complete routine tasks, and communicate with parents.

The composition of the teacher workday, including instructional activities, individual and collaborative planning time, and other miscellaneous activities should be considered a critical expenditure of the school resources. Typically, the majority of most school district budget expenditures are allocated to personnel. According to the publication *Public Education Finances: 2011 Governments Division Reports*, prepared by the United States Department of Commerce (Dixon, 2013) and based upon United States Census data, West Virginia school expenditures for instructional personnel and related benefits account for 59% of the total educational budget.

In many school systems, funding may be based upon multiple variables including economic factors; voter support; and federal, state, and local mandates. State, district, and local lobbying activities can have a strong influence on policy decisions and the subsequent distribution of resources.

In order to bring student achievement to the highest possible levels, the use of educational resources should be scrutinized according to what is in the best interest of students. Resources should be allocated based on the relationship between the resource and its effect on student achievement. It is essential that schools carefully review the utilization of the teacher workday, specifically the amount of time allocated to teacher planning in relationship to student academic growth and overall student achievement.

School districts have a responsibility to utilize available school resources effectively in order to provide students with an optimal learning environment. This study reviewed the relationship between teachers' instructional planning time, both common and individual, and eighth grade student reading achievement as measured on the West Virginia summative assessment.

Professional discussions surrounding the most effective utilization of planning periods have been going on for decades. In a 1952 article published in *Educational Leadership*, Nina Carey described planning periods as time to "analyze the problems and interests" (p. 176) of each specific group of students and make plans to meet those individual needs. Carey also discussed the benefits of teachers working with grade level peers and with peers from the same subject areas, as well as the benefits of vertical planning with teachers from different grade levels.

Most practitioners and researchers will agree that teacher planning time is an essential component of the teacher work day. In the state of West Virginia, state law requires all teachers to have a daily "duty free" planning period, which prohibits school administrators from assigning teachers any extra duties or assignments during their planning period (Duty free lunch and daily planning period for certain employees, 2013).

"Collaborative planning," "common planning," and "team planning" are frequently used as interchangeable terms when referring to activities when one or more teachers are working and planning together. Research suggests that common planning time has a positive effect on both teaching and learning (Mertens, Flowers, Anfara, & Caskey, 2010).

Many West Virginia schools provide teachers with additional time specifically designated for collaborative planning activities with other staff members. Common planning time is frequently referred to as a regularly scheduled planning time where teachers who share the same students meet to prepare for instruction, review student data or conference with parents (Kellough & Kellough, 2008). Common planning time is often a time for teachers to conduct data analysis, identify problems, set common goals, generate interventions, and develop action plans which often include an evaluative component. In instances where teachers are provided both individual and common planning times, the percentage of planning time in relation to the total school day can be relatively high in comparison to schools providing only the state mandated minimum planning period.

Common planning time can be structured in several different ways, most commonly by grade or by subject. At times, common planning time may include groups of teachers from vertical grade levels. In some instances, supplementary educators such as special educators, Title I teachers, and other providers are included in the collaborative planning activities.

In some school schedules, common planning time means that individual planning time is scheduled simultaneously with grade-level or subject-area peers. In other schools, teachers receive their individual planning time but are also allotted extra planning time designated as a collaborative planning time. In relation to this particular study, it is important to note that some West Virginia middle and high schools implementing block scheduling provide teachers with as

much as double the normal planning time in comparison to teachers working in a more traditional school schedule. Schools on block scheduling frequently designate specific planning times to be utilized as collaborative planning periods. In addition to the planning period West Virginia teachers must have by law and any additional common or collaborative planning periods, most West Virginia teachers also have time for planning both before and after the instructional day but still within the confines of the teacher work day.

Regardless of the grade, subject, or staff configuration, the ultimate goal of collaborative planning time is for educators to work together in order to increase student achievement (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). The creation of a school structure that provides time for teachers to meet and discuss student achievement is the first step toward creating effective collaboration among educators. In many schools, Professional Learning Community (PLC) is the term used to describe organized groups of teachers who work together to reach a common goal (Dufour, 2014). PLCs provide opportunities for teachers to build collegial relationships which in turn promote school improvement (Perkins & Reese, 2014). PLCs can be instrumental in the development of a positive and professional school culture. Schools with a healthy culture are more easily able to develop and implement curricular changes and meaningful staff development based on authentic use of student achievement data (Peterson, 2002).

Staff members must work together to facilitate school improvement and ultimately increase student achievement (West Virginia Department of Education [WVDE], 2013b). A school staff that collaborates effectively is essential to the creation and sustenance of a positive school culture. Collaboration periods provide teachers the opportunity to engage in reflective conversations about their practice on a regular basis. PLCs are built upon deep discussions about the important work teachers do every day (Barth, 2006).

The PLC concept suggests groups of educators working collaboratively are able to develop robust solutions to instructional challenges. The principles of collaboration are far from new. In the 1986 book *Collaborative Consultation*, Idol, Nevin, and Paolucci-Whitcomb suggested that educators with "diverse experience generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems" and that the outcome is "enhanced, altered, and produces solutions that are different" (p.1) than if one educator had searched independently for a solution or intervention to an academic concern.

When principals build in to the school schedule regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate, these sessions also create an opportunity for teachers to develop leadership skills within the context of school improvement. PLCs provide the opportunity for teachers to become more responsible for improving their practice than they would be in a more traditional school structure. In fact, Van Tassell (2014) recommended that instead of enhancing teacher leadership, the traditional top-down flow of expertise actually disempowers teachers from moving forward to improve their instructional practices. PLCs enable teachers to develop instructional programs, make positive changes in the school, share their areas of expertise, and positively shape the culture of the school (Zepeda, 2003). PLCs provide a mechanism which easily allows teachers to access and utilize input from other teachers (Dufour, 2014).

In the early 2000s, West Virginia school districts struggled to meet state and national academic standards. State and district level administrators supported the shared leadership movement through the implementation of collaborative teams as a means to increase student achievement. West Virginia State Schools Superintendent Steve Paine was confident in the benefits of increased teacher collaboration, suggesting that collaborative teams of teachers are an

essential mechanism in the quest to initiate and sustain positive changes in the learning environment (WVDE, 2008).

The annual WVDE sponsored leadership conference provided information to district administrative teams about school improvement initiatives. In the early 2000s, PLCs were one of the initiatives brought to the forefront during the state leadership team meetings. As a result of the state supported PLC initiative, district level educators looked for guidance as their interest in collaborative teams began to grow. Educators across the state, searching for a solution to sluggish student achievement, became captivated by the book *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Many school districts purchased this book and began organizing book study groups with administrators and teachers to review and discuss the implementation of professional learning communities as an avenue to increase student achievement. The book became a springboard for change as it offered step-by-step directions on how to transform schools into effective learning communities. As a result of this shared information, many West Virginia schools began to set expectations and parameters for the collaborative activities taking place during a scheduled common planning time.

By 2008, PLCs had become ingrained as a statewide initiative and were enthusiastically supported by West Virginia State Superintendent Steve Paine. In October 2008, Paine stated, "Professional learning communities allow educators to work collaboratively in teams to achieve better results. Continuous, job-embedded learning for educators is the key to improved student learning" (WVDE, "Professional Learning Communities," para. 8).

In 2013, the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) continued its support of PLCs, suggesting that highly functioning PLCs are an effective mechanism designed to meet the

needs of individual students by sharing resources, knowledge and determining the most effective use of staff (WVDE, 2013b). Collaborative discussions among teachers allow schools to create instructional goals at both the classroom and school levels.

In his 2013 State of the State address, West Virginia Governor Earl Tomblin discussed his concerns and initiatives for public education. His initiatives included implementing programs and practices to increase student reading achievement and also called for a review of West Virginia state codes regarding the provision of instructional time.

As a result of the Governor's education initiatives and the 2013 legislative session, the "Reimagining Time" committee was created for the purpose of reviewing the utilization of instructional time and the effectiveness of teacher planning time. Additionally, the West Virginia legislature directed a planning period study be undertaken pursuant to state code which dictates, "The state board shall conduct a study on planning periods. The study shall include, but not be limited to, the appropriate length for planning periods at the various grade levels and for the different types of class schedules" (Study on daily planning periods, 2013). The Governor also directed WVDE to specifically review the amount of time necessary for planning at various programmatic levels and the effect on student achievement as a result of increased planning time. Researchers at WVDE contacted the Regional Educational Laboratories (REL) for assistance with the study *Instructional planning time: A review of existing research and educator practice during the 2012-2013 school year* (WVDE, 2013a). REL, an organization sponsored by the United States Department of Education (USDE), works collaboratively with public education entities to provide data and research in an effort to increase student achievement. REL concluded that very few studies have directly assessed the relationship between the amount of planning time and student achievement (WVDE, 2013a).

In response to WVDE's request for assistance, REL was able to locate only one study which focused on many indicators of teacher satisfaction, including teacher planning time. Teacher departure rates were considered an indicator of satisfaction with their work environment and were examined in relation to student achievement. The study, conducted in North Carolina, revealed that schools where teachers reported having more than three hours of planning time per week exhibited higher math and reading scores (Ladd, 2009). Schools providing more time for planning and collaboration were associated with greater teacher retention and subsequently higher student achievement. Ladd (2009) found that teachers' perceptions of their work environment influenced student achievement; in fact, teachers' positive perceptions of their work environment appeared to have a modest influence on both math and reading scores with a greater influence on math achievement.

Two other studies examined the relationships between teacher planning and student achievement. A study of two North Texas school districts determined that no statistically significant differences existed in the scores of students attending a middle school where teachers received a common planning time (Smitt, 2006). The study reviewed the summative scores in reading and math of two student groups on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills and analyzed the findings by student ethnicity and gender. The study compared one school with individual planning times to another school with individual planning time and an additional collaborative planning time. Further data analysis reviewed outside the parameters of the study revealed that the school that achieved the higher mean scores in math was actually the school without the common planning time (Smitt, 2006). Limitations of the study included low levels of returned consent forms and the unequal return of these forms by gender and ethnicity.

Another study was conducted through Southern University in Louisiana to review the relationship between teacher planning time and student achievement. Twenty-one schools were selected through convenience sampling methods, and twenty-two teachers were selected to be interviewed. The Louisiana summative assessment scores for reading and math at the third grade level were reviewed for this study. The amount of weekly planning time was self-reported and collected via teacher survey. This study concluded the amount of weekly planning time had no correlation to math achievement, but a positive correlation to reading achievement (Griffin, 2010). Limitations for the study included the selection and number of school districts for review, the selection and number of teachers to interview, and the collection of planning period information through a teacher survey.

In 2001, the passage of No Child Left behind (NCLB) created a focus on increased rigor in academic achievement for all students (USDE, 2001). As a result, educators became increasingly diligent in their attempts to include all students in rigorous instruction. NCLB set high levels of accountability and mandated that educational goals be set at 100% proficiency for all students by the year 2014.

However, despite the federal push for increased accountability, West Virginia students continued to struggle with reading achievement. On the 2010 West Virginia Educational Standards Test 2 (WESTEST), West Virginia's eighth grade reading achievement levels hovered at 48% proficient. In comparison to a national sample, only 24% of students in West Virginia performed at or above the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) proficient level in 2011. Although these two summative assessments show markedly different levels of proficiency, both the NAEP and the WESTEST scores indicate a majority of West Virginia

students are not reading at acceptable levels (WVDE, 2013c; National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2011).

Additionally, West Virginia assessment scores continued to fall in national rankings in reading achievement (USDE, 2010). In 2003, West Virginia scored above the national average in eighth grade reading according to NAEP results. Since then, West Virginia has consistently dropped in its national ranking of eighth grade reading achievement scores according to NAEP (2011). West Virginia has steadily fallen in ranking from 20th in 1998 to 43rd in 2009. Conversely, the states contiguous to West Virginia (Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania) have seen their national ranking on eighth grade reading increase rather than decline (NAEP, 2011). If all states contiguous to West Virginia are able to maintain eighth grade reading assessment scores above the national average, it would seem likely West Virginia could reach the same levels of reading achievement with the implementation of effective instructional practices.

If students experience difficulty with reading, that deficiency ultimately carries over to other academic subjects. If a child cannot read grade-level texts, then the text-heavy content areas of social studies and science would most likely also be laborious, leading to decreased achievement and discouragement for the student. Poor reading skills would ultimately affect summative achievement data across all content areas at the individual student, school, district, and state levels.

State, district, and school initiatives have emphasized the importance of teacher teams planning and working together, setting clearly focused data-based goals, using data to improve, and placing a focus on results (Schmoker, 2004). Many West Virginia schools have initiated

PLCs, having embraced the connection between planning for instruction and improved student achievement. Significant gains in student reading achievement are not yet evident, however.

**Problem Statement**

The teacher work day, specifically planning times, must be utilized effectively in order to improve student achievement. This study will examine the relationship between amounts and types of teacher planning periods and student reading achievement as measured by West Virginia's summative assessment.

Over the last ten years, many schools across West Virginia, especially middle schools, have embraced collaborative planning practices, yet student achievement levels continue to be dismal across the state of West Virginia. Student reading levels are of particular concern. In order to increase student reading performance, educational resources need to be scrutinized and allocated in a manner most effective in increasing student achievement.

To ensure students are receiving a quality education, all school resources, including money, materials, equipment, and time, must be allocated in order to achieve maximum student learning. Many expenses are essential to the overall operation of the school and cannot be easily reduced, such as school bus transportation, breakfast and lunch programs, and facility maintenance; nevertheless, the state education department, school districts, schools, and teachers in West Virginia and across the United States must carefully scrutinize the use of resources in order to promote educational environments and instructional strategies that have been proven to be effective in relation to increased student achievement.

The teacher workday, specifically the allocation of teacher planning time, is one example of a resource that should be examined to identify ways to make the most efficient use of the teacher workforce to increase student reading achievement. Although many researchers have

promoted the utilization of both collaborative planning time and independent teacher planning time as a means to increase school effectiveness, few studies have focused on the relationship between teacher planning time and student achievement.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between the amount of collaborative teacher planning time and eighth grade student reading proficiency levels measured on the eighth grade summative assessment?
2. What is the relationship between the amount of individual teacher planning time and eighth grade student reading proficiency levels measured on the eighth grade summative assessment?
3. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of shared values and vision?
4. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of a collaborative culture?
5. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of a focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning?
6. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of supportive and shared leadership?

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to examine differences in mean WESTEST reading scores among eighth grade students in relation to the amount of individual and collaborative teacher planning time within the regular teacher workday over the course of the 2012-2013 school year.

The WESTEST is a state summative assessment and is one indicator used to measure how well students have mastered educational standards.

Collaborative teacher planning time and individual teacher planning time were examined in relation to overall student reading proficiency levels at the eighth grade level. The survey component of the study provided a mechanism to gather data and make determinations regarding collaborative planning practices that are in place and evaluate those procedures in relationship to best practices identified in the literature.

This study has provided information that will assist state-, district-, and school-level administrators in determining the most effective utilization of the teacher work day, specifically teacher planning periods, to achieve maximum levels of student reading achievement. Additionally, the study may offer guidance to school-, district-, and state-level administrators regarding specific needs for professional development.

## Operational Definitions

**Block scheduling.** Block scheduling normally offers fewer academic periods within the school day. Although students are enrolled in fewer subjects, the length of each class period is typically much longer in a block schedule than in a typical high school schedule. Gordon Cawelti (1994) indicated that block scheduling occurs when at least part of the school day is organized into large instructional blocks to allow for the flexibility necessary for a wide range of instructional activities to occur. As a result of the longer class periods, schools implementing block schedules frequently are able to provide teachers with greater amounts of individual teacher planning time and collaborative planning times.

**Collaborative planning.** A school principal may schedule an additional common planning period (in addition to the teacher's individual planning period) for the purpose of

providing a time for collaborative activities. Canady and Rettig (2008), leading researchers in the field of effective school scheduling practices, advised that common planning differs from an individual planning period by the organization of time and tasks. Collaborative planning practices include preparation of meeting agendas, development of meeting protocols, systemic assessment of student data, and planning for intervention and enrichment activities based on student data. Collaborative planning times for the purpose of this study will be defined as common planning times scheduled in addition to the teacher's daily planning time (whether or not the individual planning time is in alignment with teaching peers) that have been scheduled specifically for team planning according to principal directives.

**Common planning.** Common planning occurs when planning time is scheduled simultaneously with other educators in the school. The alignment of planning time among teachers provides a structure in the school schedule during which collaborative planning activities can occur. Individual planning periods may be scheduled to provide an alignment and opportunity for collaborative planning; however, in some states, including West Virginia, principals may not require collaborative planning activities or provide any other directives for the usage of time during the teacher's individual planning period. For the purposes of this study, "common planning" will be used to define the alignment of teachers' daily individual planning periods.

**Instructional day.** An instructional day is considered the time allotted for the teaching of content standards and objectives (School calendar, 2013). Additionally, WVDE policy further defines an instructional day is defined as the time allocated for student learning within the parameters of the teacher workday. The West Virginia Department of Education, Policy 2510, stipulates minimum time allotments for an instructional day based upon grade level, ranging

from 315 to 345 minutes (Assuring the quality of education: Regulations for education programs, 2014).

**Planning period.** A daily amount of time equal to the average class period, for a minimum of 40 minutes, provided to each teacher for the purpose of instructional planning. Individual planning periods are used according to teacher discretion and are protected from the assignment of other duties or assignments by the school principal (Duty free lunch and daily planning period for certain employees, 2013).

**Proficiency level.** Scores which fall at or above a pre-determined benchmark on a criterion-referenced assessment are considered proficient or at mastery level. Proficient scores falling below the set score are considered not proficient or below mastery.

**Summative assessment.** Chappuis and Chappuis (2007) defined summative assessments as instruments administered to make a judgment or decision based on student performance. Results of summative assessments are frequently used to make decisions about individual students and also about the school's performance. Summative assessments are used to determine an individual student's grade and also to measure school performance on mandated accountability standards (Chappius & Chappius, 2007). These types of tests indicate whether or not standards are being met (Stiggins, 2002). Summative assessments are typically administered on an annual basis and are frequently used to assess students' progress on state standards. In West Virginia, students in grades 3-11 participate in a state summative assessment in the spring of each year.

**Teacher work day.** West Virginia Department of Education Policy 2510, defines a "work day" as no more than eight scheduled hours, including time for teachers to both plan and instruct students, and fulfill other duties such as supervising homeroom, lunch periods, and class

changes. Professional development activities may also be a part of the teacher workday (Assuring the quality of education: Regulations for education programs, 2014; Duty free lunch and daily planning period for certain employees, 2013).

**Methods**

A quantitative approach was chosen for this study in order to allow for an in-depth investigation into the length and use of collaborative and independent planning periods by eighth grade teachers and their relationship to eighth grade reading achievement as measured on West Virginia's summative assessment, the West Virginia Assessment of Skills, commonly referred to as WESTEST2. The population for this study included all West Virginia public schools housing eighth grade students.

All principals of West Virginia schools with an eighth grade student population were contacted and invited to participate in an online survey in order to determine instructional practices and procedures specifically related to instructional planning time. The survey component of the study allowed for the opportunity to probe more deeply into the total school environment and determine what common characteristics are evident in the utilization of planning periods as related to student achievement. Additional school-level publicly available information such as grade level configuration, scheduling practices, and specific information about teacher planning practices was collected via phone calls to the school. As necessary, a follow-up e-mail was sent to gather school-specific data.

Student WESTEST2 data were obtained through the West Virginia Department of Education website. On this site, WESTEST2 public data are available for student achievement as reported at the school, district, and state levels. Achievement data are available in all instances where the assessment group is large enough to ensure student confidentiality. If the

group of students or subgroup of students is so small that student privacy cannot be maintained, then that specific data is not available for public review. For this study, all grade-level group measurements were over the minimum student group size and were available for review.

Prior to the collection of any data, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Marshall University. All components of this study were in alignment with IRB practices and procedures. An introductory communication was initiated with all participants of the study prior to the beginning of the study. Participants were provided information about the importance of the study, and appreciation was expressed in advance of their contribution. The study thus moved forward with increased participant buy-in (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Online surveys, phone calls, follow-up e-mails, and assessment data retrieval were the methods for data collection. The principal of every school with an eighth grade student population was invited to participate in an online survey regarding teacher use of instructional planning time. Prior to and throughout data collection, attempts to ease anxiety and build rapport among participants included clear communication, specific information about the purpose of the study, and assurance of confidentiality and other measures in place to protect participants.

Databases of interview questions were reviewed and used as a tool for formatting appropriate interview questions; this practice ensured the inclusion of questions relating to multiple categories of instructional planning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Collected data were compared and contrasted among schools in order to use those similarities and differences that were helpful to develop conclusions and build theory (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The selection of the eighth grade reading scores for this study was designed to reduce the effect of many variables surrounding the use of WESTEST2 scores and statistics in isolation. In order to have a national data reference point, both fourth and eighth grade reading

achievement scores were initially considered due to the availability of NAEP assessment data for those specific grade levels. The study of reading achievement, rather than math, was selected because minimal accommodations or modifications to the assessment were permitted, thus providing an assessment administered in a consistent manner to all participating students.

All available WESTEST2 scores at eighth grade level were included in the quantitative portion of this study. The first set of analyses compared teacher planning time to the levels of student reading achievement upon exiting the eighth grade. Teacher planning time was analyzed as both collaborative teacher planning time and individual teacher planning time. Planning time for the purpose of this study was considered to be planning periods scheduled by the principal that occur within the instructional portion of the teacher workday. The overall levels of student achievement at or above the proficient or mastery level were examined in relation to each category of teacher planning time. The second set of analyses included a review of the survey data regarding school administrator perspectives regarding best practices in teacher collaboration.

Upon conclusion of the study, follow-up communications were disseminated to study participants. Communication included responses to individual participant requests and words of appreciation for participants' cooperation.

**Limitations**

This study is limited in several important respects. First, it identifies a correlation between the amount of time teachers spend planning and a change in student reading scores. It cannot be inferred, for example, that increased teacher planning time causes improved scores. The data is also limiting; the test data may not be stable over time due to changes in the test, and the study is limited to the eighth grade summative assessment. Care should be taken in

extrapolating the results of this study beyond West Virginia and the age group examined. The study is also limited to students' reading scores, and may or may not apply to other areas of the curriculum.

**Conclusion**

The overall purpose of this study was to identify instructional planning practices effective in increasing the achievement levels of students. The achievement levels of students in West Virginia are bleak in comparison to their peers, not only in relation to students in neighboring states but across the nation. The results of this study are critical to educators, students, and families across the state. The study provides information to help district- and school-level administrators develop and implement the most effective instructional planning period practices into their school schedules.

# CHAPTER 2

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

While the majority of a teacher's workday is typically spent on instructional activities, additional time is allotted in order to allow teachers to complete other tasks. Teachers are routinely provided a period of time specifically for instructional planning. Many schools have scheduled supplementary planning periods specifically for the purpose of collaborative activities. Most teachers have other preparation time before and after the instructional day but still within the confines of the teacher workday.

## The Need for Educational Planning

The primary purpose of providing daily planning periods has been to allow time for teachers to prepare for instruction. While today's teachers do not have to haul water, fill ink wells, or fire up the stove, the changing culture of the school environment has created new and different responsibilities and expectations of teachers. In order for schools to be effective, planning time must be made a priority for schools, and adequate time must be allotted for it within the school schedule (Thompson, 2004). In order for teachers to develop effective instructional strategies, schools must provide teachers with the necessary planning time (Carey, 1952).

Historically, teachers usually worked in isolation to attend to all of the tasks necessary to ensure effective instruction. Planning for instruction usually referred to the time teachers would spend independently reviewing the next day's lessons as outlined in the district-adopted textbook or other curriculum.

For today's teachers, preparation for instructional activities is not as simple as just reviewing the teacher's edition for the day's lessons. In today's schools, collaboration with the

larger community of the school is the norm. During planning periods, teachers engage in activities such as conferencing with students, collaborating with other teachers, meeting with the school principal, reviewing books and instructional materials, reviewing professional or student goals, assessing learning, and observing other classrooms. While certainly teachers must attend to many routine tasks, planning, developing, and organizing instruction is one of the most important parts of teaching (Kelly, n.d.). After all, the essential purpose of schools is to ensure optimal teaching and learning; all other tasks or activities are of far less significance (Hoy, Kottkamp, & Tarter, 2014).

**Changing Expectations for Education**

As the culture of our nation changes, so do the needs of our students. School systems must respond to both internal and external forces (Zepeda, 2003). At times, teachers struggle to address not only the academic needs, but also the changing social and emotional needs of their students. Stakeholder groups such as parents, families, communities, and businesses may have a strong influence on educational practices. In addition, local, state, and federal policies directly influence public education through directives and mandates.

Two of the most significant influences on recent educational culture are the increased accountability expectations and related guidance from state and national governments. The passage of the NCLB mandate in 2001 set unprecedented achievement goals of 100% academic proficiency for all students in both reading and math as demonstrated on each state's summative assessment measures (USDE, 2001).

NCLB was the "most sweeping reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) since it was enacted in 1965" (USDE, 2011, Introduction section, para. 1). Stronger accountability for increased student achievement was one of the main components of NCLB.

The first step in creating an accountability process was to create expectations or standards to specify what is it that every child should know and learn in the core academic subjects of reading and math (USDE, 2011). In turn, new assessments were designed for the purpose of measuring and subsequently reporting student achievement levels. More than ever before, schools began to utilize student achievement data as the springboard for school improvement efforts (National Association for Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2008).

This national directive caused state education agencies and school districts to rethink current educational practices in order to move student achievement to higher levels. Even though change is extremely difficult and school cultures are especially resistant to change (Barth, 2002), educational agencies began to reflect upon the necessary actions to promote school improvement. School communities began to collectively ask, "How would schools be organized if they organized teachers, time, and students for learning?" (Thompson, 2004, p. 78). Educators began to recognize that until the "members of the organization 'do' differently, there is no reason to anticipate different results," (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many 2010, p. 12). In other words, educators must continue to review and revise instructional practices in order to increase student achievement.

**Collaboration for School Improvement**

Prior to the accountability standards outlined in NCLB, schools typically provided teachers with a single planning period per day. The increased rigor of the NCLB mandate caused the educational community to reconsider the effectiveness of current instructional planning practices. As schools faced seemingly impossible academic achievement expectations, no longer did it seem appropriate for teachers to be working and planning in isolation. In order

to increase student achievement, school principals needed to learn to take advantage of the leadership skills of every teacher (NAESP, 2008).

As the importance of teacher collegiality began to emerge, principals began efforts to decrease the amount of time teachers were working in isolation. Principals began to take action to open up closed classroom doors and reduce feelings of despair among the teaching staff by taking steps to create a healthy school community (Wallace Foundation, 2011). Professional learning communities (PLCs) help schools get past what researcher Linda Darling-Hammond described as a "closed door culture" where teachers work independently and in isolation (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 18).

According to Dufour et al. (2010), one of the most important components of any successful improvement process or imitative is the development and implementation of collaborative teams. The role of teacher collaboration in relation to increased student achievement has been noted as far back as Nina Carey's 1952 article "Teachers Need Time to Plan," in which she advised schools are better able to reach educational goals when teachers are provided adequate planning time to engage in valuable discussions with other teachers, collaboratively plan for instruction, and examine the instructional needs of individual students as well as the needs of the school as a whole. In the early 1980s, the "effective schools" body of research widely emphasized the importance of teacher collaboration and collegiality (Little, 1981). It seems clear that for school improvement initiatives to be effective, teacher collaboration is an essential component of the school structure (Morse, 2000). In order for teachers to function in effective learning communities, two elements must be in place: (a) structural conditions such as organizational factors and (b) professional capacities among staff members (Hord, 2007).

One of the first steps to implementing effective collaborative practices is to ensure that the school structure provides space and time for regularly scheduled team meetings. School schedules must specifically include structures and regular opportunities for teachers to collaborate. In order to significantly improve instructional practices, teachers must have time to plan for instruction, reflect on their progress, and celebrate accomplishments (NAESP, 2008). The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) (2001) proposed that teams working together on a regular and frequent basis for the purpose of problem solving and/or planning for instruction are one of the most powerful forms of staff development.

Historically, planning periods were usually scheduled according to factors extraneous to student achievement. Partially in response to the increased accountability measures of NCLB, in many schools, planning periods were no longer scheduled simply according to the parameters of the school schedule but with the greater purpose of school improvement in mind. Many prominent school improvement initiatives included the development of a structure where teachers were routinely provided additional allotments of planning time specifically for the purpose of increasing collaborative discussion and activities. If schools are to improve, it is imperative teachers are provided both team-based and individual planning time (Thompson, 2004).

In the years following NCLB, supplemental planning time was often scheduled primarily to facilitate school-wide improvement efforts. Additional planning periods provided the necessary time for teachers to work collaboratively in the development and implementation of the continuous improvement process. The term "common planning period" was often used to differentiate between individual planning time and the additional time scheduled for the purpose of collaboration.

As schools moved toward a collaborative culture, it was important to ensure teacher teams provided opportunities for teachers to collaborate not only in teams with those teaching similar levels but also in vertical teams (Thompson, 2004). Collaborative teams work far more effectively when they have both vertical and horizontal attributes (Supovitz & Christman, 2003). Horizontal (or grade-level) teams allow teachers to discuss and plan instruction regarding similar students and curriculum (Supovitz & Christman, 2003). Thompson recommended that in order to raise achievement levels, teachers must have the time to review and link instructional practices and student achievement across grade levels and courses (2004). Schools began to purposefully schedule planning times so that specific groups of teachers, selected by grade or by subject according to the purpose of the proposed collaborative activity, could work together to promote student achievement.

An effective PLC does much more than simply provide the structure and the additional time for teachers to meet during a common planning period. The National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2008), in the publication *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for what Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* identified six core attributes of effective learning communities: "shared mission, vision, values and goals; commitment to results; continuous improvement; a culture of collaboration; collective inquiry; and supportive and shared leadership" ( p. 3). An effective PLC requires all of the collaborative teams within the school to work interdependently and that all members of all teams are accountable for the school's success in achieving common goals (Dufour et al., 2010).

The term PLC is commonplace in today's schools and has been "used so ambiguously to describe virtually any loose coupling of individuals who share a common interest in education that it is in danger of losing all meaning" (Dufour et al., 2010, p. 10). Unfortunately, many

schools believe they are implementing true PLCs, but their efforts fall far short of Dufour et al.'s (2010) characterization of a PLC as "an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" ( p. 11). Instead, many educators view PLCs as yet another ill-fated attempt to improve student outcomes (Dufour et al., 2010).

Since 1998, Dufour and his colleagues have published multiple resources on the topic of professional learning communities. As some of the most steadfast supporters of PLCs, they have sought to provide guidance for the implementation of PLCs, but perhaps most importantly, they have helped to convince educators that functioning as a professional learning community is indeed the "most promising strategy for meeting the challenge of helping all students learn at high levels" (Dufour et al., 2010, p. 9).

As teachers began to organize into teams and consider an appropriate mission and vision for their schools, it is important to consider the overarching and primary objectives of all PLCs as identified by Dufour et al. (2010):

- The purpose of our school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels.
- Helping all students learn requires a collaborative and collective effort.
- To assess our effectiveness in helping all students learn, we must focus on results evidence of student learning—and use results to inform and improve our professional practice and respond to students who need intervention and enrichment ( p. 14).

**Professional Learning Communities Best Practices**

Although many schools claim to have collaborative practices embedded within their environment, many do not have true PLCs—ones that are in alignment with the characteristics defined in the literature. This section will identify the essential elements of effective teacher

collaboration in relation to school improvement and, specifically, to increased student achievement. The literature suggests that the following elements are critical components to the successful implementation of PLCs: shared values and vision, collaborative culture, focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, and a supportive and shared leadership.

**Shared values and vision.** The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), a nonprofit group comprised of the top education leaders from every state, works to support and build educational systems that prepare every child for post-secondary education or employment. As part of its work, the CCSSO (2008) developed a guide that identified six standards for strong instructional leadership. The first standard, "An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders," focuses exclusively on building a vision and mission for each school (p.14). The CCSSO recommends that the school's vision and mission be developed through a collaborative process, involving all stakeholder groups, including students. As part of this process, demographic and assessment data along with other data are collected, analyzed, and reviewed, and potential barriers to school improvement are identified. After consideration of all collected information, the vision, mission, and action steps are developed. An implementation plan includes clearly articulated objectives and strategies necessary to achieve the agreed-upon vision (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008).

The development of a school's vision and mission statements is an initial step in many school improvement initiatives. Vision and mission statements clearly articulate the desired outcome of school improvement efforts as agreed upon through stakeholder collaboration.

In the pursuit of school improvement, the

> "…vision serves three important purposes. First, by clarifying general direction for change, it simplifies hundreds of more detailed decisions. People can figure out for themselves what to do without constantly checking with bosses. Second, it motivates people to take action in the right direction. Third, it helps coordinate the actions of different people in an efficient way. One question—"Is this in line with our vision?"—can help eliminate hours of torturous discussion" (Kotter, 1996, p. 68).

Dufour et al. (2010) proposed that the foundation of an effective PLC rests upon the development of the school's mission, vision, values, and goals achieved through the collaborative work of teachers and principals. A solid foundation is built when consensus is achieved on probing questions specifically designed to form a common purpose (Dufour et al., 2010). In healthy school cultures, a clear vision and mission are collaboratively developed among stakeholders in consideration of the individual needs of the school, and these statements become the basis for all decisions. Questions such as, "Why do we exist?," "What must our school become to accomplish our purpose?," "How must we behave to achieve our vision?," "How will we mark our progress?" assist in the development of agreed-upon guiding principles (Dufour et al., 2010, p. 31).

The vision statement should be short and easy to remember; however, a more detailed mission statement includes an overview of the steps planned to achieve the proposed outcome identified in the vision (Gabriel & Farmer, 2009). Although vision statements are designed to be short and to the point, such statements should be so meaningful that all school resources are distributed in direct alignment with the school's ultimate vision (Zepeda, 2003). If teachers cannot remember the vision statement, then this statement is not likely to be very effective in keeping all staff on the same page.

Ultimately the mission prioritizes and sharpens focus, the vision should give direction, commonly developed values should guide behavior, and goals should establish priorities within

the school. "The mission is the totality of the vision" (Zepeda, 2003, p. 32). Vision and mission statements are similar to a destination on a road map: if you do not know where you are headed, how will you know if you get there? Vision and mission must not become trite terms and as such simply refer to an eye catching sign or a bulletin board display near the school's main office (Isaacson & Bamburg, 1992). Instead, vision statements must be fluid and flexible. "Creating a vision is more than a product; creating the vision is a multifaceted process that requires careful attention to such areas as values, beliefs and the school culture" (Zepeda, 2003, p. 21). Vision statements should be revisited and refined through multiple periods of collaborative time spent in reflective activities (Hong, 1996).

Effective school leaders must learn to not only consider their own ideas and beliefs through frequent reflection but also carefully consider the opinions of all stakeholders within the school community in the quest for school improvement (Zepeda, 2003). The process of developing these statements of school philosophy must be a collaborative effort among all staff members and ideally should include input from all stakeholder groups.

"Effective principals are responsible for establishing a school wide vision of commitment to high standards and the success of all students" (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 5). The primary purpose for developing vision and mission statements is to promote a common understanding regarding the expectations and hopes for the school. A clear vision helps to unify people within the school, keep staff focused on the future, promote teacher growth, and empower both the people and the organization (Zepeda, 2003). It is important for schools to develop a culture where all opinions are valued. "The vision guides, gives direction, brings comfort and stability in times of rapid change, and inspires people to connect to the work needed to improve learning for both students and teachers" (Zepeda, 2003, p. 21).

As schools participated in improvement activities designed to reach NCLBs accountability standards, many new initiatives surfaced; including the development of a vision and mission statement. In the quest for increased academic achievement, many schools made changes in the typical staff meeting format, moving from a principal led lecture style presentation to a collaborative discussion among peers, perhaps still facilitated by the school administrator. A traditional first day back at school for teachers included an opening staff meeting where the principal introduced any new staff, reviewed district policies and procedures, and distributed information such as school schedules or room assignments, materials, and other items. As PLCs started to take hold across the nation, a new element was added to the standard opening day staff meetings, that of collaboratively developing a school vision and mission statement.

Dufour et al. (2010), some of the leading proponents of Professional Learning Communities, advocated "even the most promising strategies must be customized for the specific context of each district and school" ( p. 5). Although schools must develop an individualized, "clear and compelling" mission and vision and provide directives for "what the organization must become in order to help all students learn," ultimately all PLCs are dedicated to not simply teaching but also ensuring that all children learn "essential knowledge, skills and dispositions" (Dufour et al., 2010, p. 11).

Once developed, the school vision, mission, and action plan should be communicated to all stakeholder groups, including students. Multiple means of communicating the vision and mission should be employed through the use of symbols, ceremonies, and stories (CCSSO, 2008). Individual and group contributions for actions in conjunction with the mission should be recognized and celebrated. All members of school community should be invited and encouraged

to work in school improvement efforts. Progress towards the vision should be communicated to stakeholder groups (CCSSO, 2008).

All school resources should be distributed in support of school improvement, specifically increased student achievement, as identified in the mission and vision statements (CCSSO, 2008). Resources including outside professional expertise, commitment of school staff time and efforts, technology, and instructional supplies and materials should be allocated according to the action steps outlined in the school's mission and vision. Due to the critical importance of the school vision and mission, both new and existing resources must be sought and obtained to support the school's objective.

**Collaborative Culture**. The Wallace Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides funding for projects designed to improve education for disadvantaged children, proposed that school principals must work to create a positive school climate that is conducive to school improvement activities (2011). The principal, as the instructional leader in the school, must work to increase a unified team among all facets of the school community (Zepeda, 2003). While school administrators can greatly influence the culture of the school, a principal cannot "single-handedly construct the school culture" (Lane, 1992, p. 92). Schools must welcome a culture that values collaboration and begin to create a learning environment that is "flexible, collaborative, innovative and supportive" (NAESP, 2008, p. 6) in order to move toward increased student achievement. "Teachers who work in schools with strong collaborative cultures behave differently from those who depend on administrators to create the conditions of their work. In collaborative cultures, teachers exercise creative leadership together and take responsibility for helping all students learn" (Kohm & Nance, 2009, p.67).

Since teachers have long been accustomed to working autonomously in their individual classrooms, working as a team can be challenging for some teachers. Teachers need to appreciate the value of shared decision making, as well as shared responsibility. Schools must move beyond just taking care of business and completing routine tasks so that teachers have time to "develop the instructional program, make positive changes in the school, share their expertise with others, [and] shape the culture of the school" (Zepeda, 2003, p. 9).

Educators must understand the value of the viewpoints and perspectives of their peers. Schools must work to build a learning community founded on trust in order to create positive and effective relationships among teachers and administrators (Wallace Foundation, 2011). Even though teachers will naturally have differences of opinion, successful collaboration not only promotes respect but also promotes divergent thinking. Collaborative team members should practice acknowledging, clarifying, elaborating, summarizing, or other active listening strategies at points during discussion to facilitate an atmosphere of respect (West, Idol, & Cannon, 1986). The collaboration process must ensure feedback is included in team discussions. Objective feedback is essential in order to move toward improved student achievement (West et al., 1986).

Collaboration promotes the concept of "team ownership" and a collective responsibility for student learning (West et al., 1986, p. 1). Dufour et al. (2010) define collaboration as a "systemic process in which teachers work together interdependently in order to impact their classroom practice in ways that will lead to better results for their students, for their team, and for their school" (p. 12). For PLCs to work effectively, the school culture must be such that teachers and school administrators respect and value each other as professional educators.

Although collaborative skill development has been left out of most teacher education programs, teaching and planning in isolation have often been viewed as one of the greatest

barriers to school improvement (Rosenholtz, 1989). "Working together to build shared knowledge on the best way to achieve goals and meet the needs of clients is exactly what professionals in any field are expected to do, whether it is curing the patient, winning the lawsuit or helping all students learn" (Dufour et al., 2010, p. 12). Collaborative planning time allows teachers to have the opportunity to share ideas, develop and test new approaches, and then ultimately study and analyze student performance data (NAESP, 2008). Teachers, through collaborative discussions and activities, are able to contribute valuable information in the decision-making process. In collaborative planning activities, teachers are able to collectively share their experiences and knowledge and help to make decisions that increase effectiveness of the school, far beyond the confines of their individual classrooms.

While collaboration techniques have typically not been a focus of many college and university general education teacher preparation programs, conversely, special education teacher preparation programs frequently do address the importance of working in a collaborative fashion, specifically with general educators. In 1986, *Collaboration in the Schools*, an intensive curriculum unit devoted exclusively to the collaboration responsibilities of special education teachers, was created in order to prepare in-service and pre-service special education teachers for successful collaboration. The curriculum included such topics as collaborative problem solving, interactive communication, and systems change (West et al., 1986).

Kruse, Louis, and Kruse (1994) identified human resources and structural conditions as the two basic elements for a successful professional school community. The human resource component includes "openness to improvement, trust and respect, teachers having knowledge and skills, supportive leadership and socialization" (p. 6). Structural conditions include scheduled times for meetings, physical proximity, communication procedures, and teacher

empowerment. Kruse et al. advised that undoubtedly the human element is a much more critical factor in the development of a school professional community than structural conditions. Kruse et al. (1994) noted that "if a school lacks the social and human resources to make use of those structural conditions, it's unlikely that a strong professional community can develop" (p. 6).

Lieberman and Miller (1999) discussed the importance of interdependency in the collaborative school environment. Leadership should be shared on a rotating basis. All tasks should be assigned and shared equitably among all team members to promote a cohesive and interdependent team (Lieberman & Miller, 1999). Saphier and King (1985) identified involvement in decision making as one of the most important norms of a healthy school culture.

**Focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning.** The Wallace Foundation (2011) supports the development of school leadership as one of its five funding priorities. In its publication *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning*, one of the recommended key functions of a school leader is to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to create a vision of high academic expectations for all students.

NAESP (2008) defined the concept of the school as a learning community as "places in which adults and students work collaboratively and demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement of performance" (p. 3). NAESP proposed that effective principals must "create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals" (p. 8). Teachers who systemically study and utilize student data are able to learn how to differentiate instruction. As teachers learn to use student data, they are able to more effectively meet individual student needs. Although data analysis had long been a part of many school-based staff development sessions and teacher meetings, the implementation of a thorough and continuous analysis of student achievement data became a renewed area of interest for many

schools after the passage of NCLB. It is one task which gained increased attention during collaborative planning activities.

Dufour et al. (2010) advocated that the ultimate goal is to create a school environment where adult learning never ceases. Student achievement gains are more apt to occur in a school environment that welcomes new ideas and experimentation. Schools need to move past the notion that status quo is acceptable, and understand that authentic school improvement is contingent on a constant monitoring and adjustment of instructional practice (Dufour, 2010). Continuous improvement refers to a process that occurs when leaders understand the organization as a system of integrated components. Student learning or other concerns must not be looked at in isolation, but in relation to all other factors in the environment. In 1990, Peter Senge (1990) renewed educators' interest in the systems thinking concept when he described the process as "a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots" (p. 68).

Though many schools and school districts claimed to be involved in a continuous improvement framework, routine school practices and procedures indicated otherwise. For example, school strategic plans were often developed on an annual basis and not reviewed until the next "due date," and data analysis typically consisted of a review of the prior year's summative assessment data at the beginning of the school year.

Although teachers were not always trained on the specific components of the business-based continuous improvement process, teachers were expected to follow a similar cycle of actions within their collaborative discussions. The Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) cycle outlines the steps for continuous improvement and includes the processes of reviewing data, implementing a

strategy to address a concern, observing the outcome of the strategy, and then reviewing and acting upon the results.

Dufour et al. (2010) stated that

> "systemic processes should engage each member or the organization in an ongoing cycle of gathering evidence of current levels of student learning, developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning, implementing those strategies and ideas, analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not, and, finally, applying new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement" (p.13).

In order to promote purposeful results, school improvement initiatives must be linked to a process of ongoing assessment (Dufour et al.). Past practices of reviewing student summative assessment data on an annual basis began to diminish as educators began to value the process of utilizing multiple pieces of data on a more frequent basis to evaluate skill development in individual students or in groups of students in order to design instruction to address identified skill deficiencies (NAESP, 2008).

In alignment with continuous improvement practices, instruction should be based upon a systemic collection and analysis of multiple types of data. Goals and objectives for both individual students and for the classroom as a whole should be developed according to trends in collected data. Teachers must use their planning time to review data and make results-driven decisions (Thompson, 2004).

Data are utilized as diagnostic tools to assess, identify, and design instruction to optimize student growth (Zepeda, 2003). Schools with a renewed focus on student achievement began to develop goals focused on the "evidence of what the student will learn" rather than on "what the teacher will do" (Dufour et al., 2010, p. 159). Through collaborative efforts, teachers often work to identify the instructional needs of their students through the review of student data collected through a systemic process. Teachers design and adjust instructional activities according to

information gleaned from multiple data sources such as informal assessments, teacher observations, tests, and quizzes. In order to maximize results, collaborative teams must maintain their attention on a small number of agreed-upon essential goals. Team members must support each other as the group works together to achieve these priority goals. (National Staff Development Council [NSDC], 2001).

In order to promote consistency and clear expectations, many schools develop goals through the SMART goal structure, a framework designed to assist in the development of appropriate goals (O'Neil & Conzemius, 2005). SMART goals are defined as meeting the following characteristics:

- S - strategic and specific in language—goals are clearly articulated and related to the overall goal or vision.
- M - measureable—the degree to which the goal has been met can be measured,
- A - attainable—goals are realistic and can be met within a specified amount of time,
- R - results-oriented—goals are in alignment with overall goals and objectives, are focused on a single area or topic and include desired results, and
- T - time-bound—goals have a specific timeline or date for completion (O'Neil & Conzemius, 2005).

During collaborative planning time, teachers frequently work together to develop a plan for data collection, determine a process for data analysis, plan for subsequent instruction based upon data analysis by specifically differentiating instruction according to individual student needs, and schedule regular evaluative activities to determine needed revisions in order to deliver appropriate yet rigorous instruction to all students.

"The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student" (Dufour et al., 2010, p. 11). In order for schools to facilitate high levels of student learning, PLC members must work collaboratively to clarify each student's learning expectations, determine a systemic and timely monitoring process, and implement both individualized interventions and enrichment activities (Dufour et al., 2010).

As increased accountability measures were put into place following NCLB, an increased focus was placed on measureable results, as documented through assessment data. According to West, Idol, and Cannon (1986), the effort to improve student achievement should involve collaborative teams which determine, develop, and implement plans for multiple pieces of data to be collected. "Although PLCs have specific purposes, a continuous analysis of data should ultimately be the focus of almost all PLCs" (West et al., 1986, p. 167).

In the *Collaboration in the Schools* curriculum, six stages, which are in direct alignment with the continuous improvement cycle, are described and recommended for increased student achievement: goal setting, identification of the problem, recommendation for interventions, implementation of interventions, evaluation, and follow-up activities (West et al., 1986). Instructional goal setting is a key factor in increasing student achievement. Marzano (2003) reviewed multiple studies regarding the relationship between goal setting and student achievement and determined that in classes where clear learning goals were exhibited, achievement scores were 21% higher than in classes where clear learning goals were not established. Teachers must establish agreed-upon criteria or expectations to measure progress toward the group's goal. At the evaluation point, or when warranted, teachers must make data-based decisions to continue or redesign instructional interventions according to assessment results or other data (West et al., 1986).

**Supportive and Shared Leadership.** As organizational changes take place and schools begin to share leadership among all staff members, one of the most important leadership functions of the school principal will become that of creating a cohesive school community founded on shared values (Lezotte, 1991). Principals who are most effective in school improvement initiatives are able to distribute meaningful leadership roles to teachers (Zepeda, 2003). Principals are able to share leadership through their support of professional development or other activities targeted to improve teacher leadership skills. For the principal, leadership is not about simply assigning jobs and duties just to just to get things done; real collaboration requires the principal to trust, support and advocate for shared leadership practices (Zepeda, 2003).

"Traditionally, the principal resembled the middle manager described in William Whyte's 1956 classic The Organization Man—an overseer of buses, boilers and books" (as cited in *The School Principal as Leader,* Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 4). In order to promote school improvement, today's principals must blend and balance management and leadership tasks. A cohesive school environment begins with an understanding of the importance of instruction as related to the obligation to complete routine school management tasks (Zepeda, 2003). The principal's role is to ensure the effective management of "people, data, and processes to foster school improvement" (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2).

Effective school leaders should rarely make instructional decisions independent of teacher input. Marzano (2003) proposed that "leadership for change is most effective when carried out by a small group of educators with the principal functioning as a strong cohesive force" (p. 174). Principals must understand the importance of "cultivating leadership in others" (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2). Principals who are successful in promoting shared leadership

practices are skilled in building trust and open communication, able to take risks, proficient in collaborative problem solving skills, and committed to change (Short, 1997). Principals should be building teams of teachers able to serve in leadership capacities and make sound educational decisions through collaborative efforts (Zepeda, 2003). Collegiality should be evident through respectful daily interactions among teachers and administrators.

"Connected leadership" is defined when staff members form a collegial relationship and become collectively focused on a common vision (Lipman-Bluemen, 1997). One of the most important roles of PLCs is to provide a mechanism for teachers and other school staff to participate in decision-making discussions. Decisions made through a collaborative effort are more likely to have increased commitment from teachers than decisions issued in a top-down manner. If schools are going to become places where all children are learning, all teachers must have leadership responsibilities (Barth, 2013). "A school should be a community of leaders—not just a principal and a lot of followers. Our business ought to be to promote profound levels of learning in school—and teacher leadership is one of our most powerful assets for doing so" (Barth, 2013, p.16).

**Special Types of Collaboration**

One of the earliest efforts promoting the importance of teacher collaboration was grounded in the special education field. As early as 1986, educators began to place an increased emphasis on "providing appropriate, well-coordinated educational support services" for students with special needs when placed in the regular education classroom (West et al., 1986, p. 1).

As students with disabilities were mainstreamed into regular classrooms and exposed to a more challenging curriculum, a need emerged for special educators and regular educators to

work together to implement supplementary aids and modifications in order to allow the students to be successful in their least restrictive environment.

The structure and culture of a middle school can be vastly different than those found in an elementary school setting. Middle schools typically have a much larger student body. It is common for multiple elementary school populations to feed into a single middle school, creating an enrollment much larger than a typical elementary school.

The administration staffing at the middle school level can also be quite different. Elementary schools typically have a single school administrator, but due in part to the larger student enrollment, often a principal leads a team of one or more assistant principals at the middle school level. As the result of the different school configuration, teachers at the middle school level are less likely than their elementary counterparts to have daily contact with the school principal (Hoy, Kottkamp, & Tarter, 2014). Instead of working directly with the principal, middle school teachers might find themselves on teacher teams led by department chairs or assistant principals.

The middle school "movement" as summarized in the Association for Middle Level Education's *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (2010) promoted the "teaming" concept as an avenue to increase collegiality among staff and improve student achievement. In middle schools, multiple collaborative teams would be organized simultaneously: teachers at grade level, teachers across subject matter, school leadership teams, curriculum teams, and data teams.

Team structures in middle schools are often different from those in elementary schools due in part to the specificity of content areas; middle school teachers are more likely to be considered as experts in a specific content area, while elementary teachers are commonly viewed

as generalists. Certification standards set forth by NCLB demanded the employment of Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT), those who are certified by grade level and by content area at the secondary level. Conversely, HQT certification for elementary schools typically requires an age-appropriate "generalist" certification.

The middle school concept supported the implementation of a block schedule for students. Block scheduling may occur in different configurations, but most commonly, these schedule feature half as many periods in the school day as would be in a traditional school schedule. The intent of block scheduling is to decrease the scope of academic content per semester while increasing the depth of specific content knowledge. As the number of instructional periods was reduced and the length of each period increased, a school schedule was created which allowed extended teacher planning time to naturally occur.

While the middle schools, especially those on block schedules, were typically able to provide "common planning" time, above and beyond the required individual planning time, elementary schools typically struggled to find collaboration time within the confines of the traditional elementary school schedule.

**Professional Learning Communities and Student Achievement**

Many researchers claim an academic achievement gain is evident in schools where teachers work collaboratively in teams and build their "collective knowledge and collective capacity" (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 19). In addition, as principals become more willing to share leadership, student achievement tests scores will increase (Wallace Foundation, 2011). However, the Wallace Foundation is quick to point out the relationship between principal leadership and achievement scores is "strong albeit indirect" (2011, p. 7).

Although Dufour et al. (2010) noted that they "have seen the evidence of improved learning and heard the testimonials of teachers and principals who have been renewed by establishing common ground, clear purpose, effective monitoring, and collaborative process" (p. 7) leading to better results, few studies have attempted to test the prediction that with effective collaboration practices comes increased student achievement.

School based management (SBM) is a school structure focused on the value and implementation of collaborative decision-making involving all staff members. Fullan (1993) found that "school-based management, in its present form, does not impact teaching and learning" (p. 454). In 1998, Leithwood and Menzies examined over 80 empirical studies which focused on the relationship between SBM and student achievement and found "there is virtually no rigorous, scientifically based research about the direct or indirect effects of SBM on students . . . the little research-based evidence that does exist suggests that the effects on students are just as likely to be negative as positive" (p. 34).

While few quantitative studies on this topic have been completed, educational reformists almost unanimously agree that educators must have the time and school structures in place to allow staff to participate in collaborative activities based upon a model of continuous improvement. The number of studies suggesting the importance of collaborative planning and PLCs in schools is vast, yet the attempts to measure student achievement against these claims are minimal.

One such study on the relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement occurred in two school districts in two different states. A long-term study of the Cincinnati and Philadelphia school districts which reviewed the implementation of PLCs as a means to improve student achievement was the basis for the 2003 policy brief *Developing*

*Communities of Instructional Practice: Lessons from Cincinnati and Philadelphia* distributed by The Consortium for Policy Research in Education, a nonprofit organization comprised of multiple universities that seeks to contribute new knowledge to inform education policy and practice (Suppovitz & Christman, 2003).

The policy brief reported that although teachers reported positive changes in the educational climate, only in specific instances were academic achievement gains attributable to the implementation of a PLC. Suppovitz and Christman (2003) pointed out that even though these initiatives seemingly were effective in the development of a collaborative culture, the PLCs in the study did not include the implementation of all of the elements of an effective PLC described in the literature, namely, shared values and vision, focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, and a supportive and shared leadership.

Although vast differences existed in the reform models and the contexts of the schools in the study, the types of PLCs which led to increased academic achievement were "those that are focused on improving the instructional core of schooling and provided with the necessary strategies, structures, and supports" (Supovitz & Christman, 2003, p. 1). Both the Philadelphia and Cincinnati studies demonstrated that when professional learning communities are engaged in "structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions and investigate the relationships between instructional practices and student work" (Supovitz & Christman, 2003, p. 5), student achievement levels increased; in other words, measureable improvements in student learning were found only in those PLCs that emphasized changing the instructional practices of their members.

In another study on the relationship of teacher collaboration and student achievement, researchers came to a different conclusion. Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran described

their study as "the first study linking teacher collaboration for school improvement to student achievement on large-stakes assessment" (2007, p. 892). In Goddard et al.'s study, elementary schools in a large Midwestern school district were examined. Teacher survey data were reviewed to determine the extent of collaborative activities. The "Teacher Collaboration Scale" asked teachers to rate the extent to which teachers worked collectively to influence decisions in the areas of planning school improvement, selecting instructional materials, evaluating curriculum and programs, and determining and planning for professional development needs. Levels of collaboration were determined from the survey data, analyzed at the school level, and then compared against student academic achievement at the fourth grade level. Although the study found the utilization of collaborative practices was a significant positive predictor of student achievement, the authors also noted that the increased achievement levels were moderate and the generalizability of the findings was limited (Goddard et al., 2007).

While the purpose of Goddard et al.'s (2007) research investigating student outcomes in relation to collaborative planning practices is similar to the one proposed in this study, the scale and methods are quite different. In fact, the researchers noted the limitations of their study as restricted to the elementary schools in a single school district and recommended that further study of a broader nature was warranted. This study will help to fill that gap.

**Summary**

Dufour et al. (2010) emphasized that "collaboration does not lead to improved results unless people are focused on the right issues" (p. 11). Although educators may assert that their school is a professional learning community, these educators may not be working in true alignment with best practices as identified in the literature. Quite possibly, many educators have a superficial understanding rather than an in-depth working knowledge of educational initiatives.

At times, “terms travel easily…but the meaning of the underlying concepts does not” (Fullan, 2005, p. 67). Although schools and districts may have prepared to implement PLCs through book studies, workshops, and other professional development activities, Dufour et al. (2010) proposed that schools which simply “begin doing the work of a PLC develop their capacity to help all students learn at higher levels far more effectively than schools that spend years preparing to become PLCs through reading or even training” ( p. 17).

In order for school improvement efforts to be successful, teacher time must be examined. “The one commodity that teachers and administrators say they do not have enough of, even more than money, is time; time to teach, time to converse, time to think, time to plan, time to talk” (Schlechty, 1990, p. 73). Cambone (1995) advised that “without a fundamental change in the ways we conceptualize time, especially for teachers, our best efforts at teacher participation in school reform will probably wither” (p. 512).

# CHAPTER 3

# RESEARCH METHODS

This study examined the amount of individual teacher planning sessions and collaborative teacher planning times allotted per eighth grade teacher per school in relation to corresponding student cohorts' reading achievement levels. School administrator perspectives regarding best practices in teacher collaboration were reviewed in relation to the corresponding school cohort reading achievement data.

## Purpose of the study

Even though a wealth of literature supports the best practices of teacher collaboration (Dufour, 2014), very few studies categorize, quantify, and review teacher planning time and practices in relation to student achievement. The utilization of quantitative measures provided for a review of both school administrator perspectives and reading achievement data with regard to the types and amounts of teacher planning time.

Information concerning the relationship between student reading achievement and teacher planning practices will be useful to school principals with regard to the allotment and scheduling of teacher planning time and types during the teacher workday. Principals' perspectives concerning the alignment of current school practices and collaborative best practices will be beneficial to school-, district-, and state-level administrators when designing and implementing professional development initiatives for teachers and principals.

## Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between the amount of collaborative teacher planning time and eighth grade student reading proficiency levels measured on the eighth grade summative assessment?

2. What is the relationship between the amount of individual teacher planning time and eighth grade student reading proficiency levels measured on the eighth grade summative assessment?
3. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of shared values and vision?
4. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of a collaborative culture?
5. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of a focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning?
6. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of supportive and shared leadership?

**Population**

The population for this study was inclusive of the principals from all West Virginia public schools housing eighth grade and the corresponding eighth grade students who were assessed on West Virginia's standard summative assessment (WESTEST2) in spring 2013. Assessment data from 20,348 students were included in the study. Information about each school's scheduling structure, specifically information about individual and collaborative planning times, was collected through phone calls made to all 174 West Virginia schools. Follow-up phone calls were made as needed, ultimately yielding a sample size of 100. In order to align principal perspectives with the collected assessment data, only eighth grade principals employed during the 2012-2013 school year were eligible to participate in the principals'

perspectives survey. Out of the 174 schools, 127 of the principals had been employed since the 2012-2013 school year and thus were able to provide information on 2012-2013 school year planning practices, nevertheless, a total of 60 responses was collected from principals.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

In order to study the effectiveness of teacher planning time in relation to student achievement, the study incorporated both quantitative and descriptive or qualitative type data. Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, and Namey (2005) proposed that "when used along with quantitative methods, qualitative research can help us to interpret and better understand the complex reality of a given situation and the implications of quantitative data" (p. 2). Quantitative methods may be viewed as an "inquiry from the outside" and qualitative research as "inquiry from the inside" (Evered & Louis, 1981, pp. 385-395). The utilization of both types of research in this study allowed for a review of the relationship between teacher planning types and amounts and student reading achievement. The application of multiple methods allowed for a triangulation of the data and thus a better understanding of the relationship (Ospina, 2004; Mack et al., 2005). Triangulation techniques include the collection of data from multiple sources, the opportunity to gather different perspectives and the use of varied types of collection instruments.

Three instruments were used to collect data for the study. First, West Virginia's summative assessment, the WESTEST2, was used to obtain eighth grade students' reading achievement scores. Test scores were obtained from West Virginia's state website (WVDE, 2013d). Next, the *Principals' Perspectives on Teacher Planning and Collaboration Survey* was employed to gather principals' perspectives on the effectiveness of collaborative planning. The survey was developed specifically for this study and was administered in an online format. Survey Monkey was the (online) survey provider. Additionally, school information regarding

time and type of eighth grade teachers' planning periods was collected via phone call to the school principal or designee.

The West Virginia Department of Education (2013c) described the WESTEST2 as an assessment custom designed for West Virginia students (WVDE, 2013c). The WESTEST2 assesses students in grades 3-11 across four content areas: English/ language arts, math, science and social studies. The WESTEST2 was first implemented in school year 2009-2010 as an updated version of the state's previous summative assessment. The WESTEST2 was developed in order to be in closer alignment with the state's newly revised, more rigorous 21st Century content standards. As required by federal law, the technical adequacy of the test has been established through a peer review. A state advisory committee made up of experts in assessment practices provided recommendations to WVDE to ensure federal requirements for state accountability assessment programs were met.

Student proficiency levels are measured based on responses to assessment items aligned with clearly defined standards, objectives, and skills. Scores reflect the students' performance against a set of criteria, rather than in relation to a national sample of peers.

There are three subsections of the English/Language Arts assessment: two reading sections, which are in a traditional test booklet format, and one section of writing administered through an online format. The reading sections of the WESTEST2 emphasize high-interest text and assess students on vocabulary and reading comprehension. The writing section of the WESTEST2 assesses both content and structure of student written responses to a given prompt. The writing section is administered on a separate testing date via computer. Scores from all three sections are merged into a single proficiency-level ranking for English/Language Arts.

Students and parents receive a WESTEST2 score report at the beginning of each school year that identifies the student's score by performance level from the previous spring's assessment. Performance levels of Novice, Partial Mastery, Mastery, Above Mastery, or Distinguished are assigned for each content area. In conjunction with the English/Language Arts score, a Lexile score is also reported for each student as a way to provide specific information about a student's reading ability (MetaMetrics, 2014).

Ultimately, the purpose of an educational assessment is to determine appropriate instruction and increase student achievement (Stiggins, 2002). Teachers are able to use the student Lexile scores to identify student levels of reading ability in order to differentiate instruction. Schools receive an abundance of detailed reports including information aggregated at the individual student, grade, school, district, and state levels to assist teachers with planning and implementing appropriate instruction.

Both quantitative and descriptive data were gathered through an online survey. Both types of data were necessary to examine the relationship between principal perspectives and the types and allotment of teacher planning periods. Survey questions included both open- and closed-ended questions. Questions were designed to collect principal perspectives regarding his or her school's collaborative practices. As recommended by Mack et al. (2005), the open-ended questions regarding school planning practices were designed to "evoke responses that are meaningful and salient to the participant" and "rich and explanatory in nature" (p.4). The survey was utilized as a mechanism to gather information to complement the collected numerical data, specifically planning period amounts and assessment data as utilized in this study (Ospina, 2004).

Databases of survey questions (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2010) were reviewed during the literature review, but a survey instrument in alignment with the design of this study was not located. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education developed a "*Common Planning Time Self Assessment Toolkit*" which includes multiple resources designed to help schools improve the effectiveness of collaborative planning time through self-assessment activities. Although the survey instruments found in the "Common Planning Time Self Assessment Toolkit" from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education did not meet the specific needs of this study, the database of survey questions was helpful in the development of the survey instrument.

Therefore, a new survey instrument was created for this study. The "Teacher Planning and Collaboration: Principal Perspectives*"* survey was designed based upon the identification of best practices in teacher collaboration as compiled through a review of the literature. Survey questions were developed utilizing a coding process to select the most critical elements of effective collaborative planning practices as identified in the literature—those which ultimately are reported to yield increased student achievement. Throughout the literature review, short phrases or words which were found repeatedly were identified as codes. The codes which were used most frequently in the literature review were identified as elements relevant to the implementation of effective PLCs. These essential elements were the basis for the design of the survey instrument. The survey collected information about the principal's perspectives regarding the collaborative practices in place in the school, specially the components identified in the literature review: shared values and vision, collaborative culture, focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, and shared and supportive leadership. The survey consisted of 21 items separated into five distinct sections. The first four sections of the survey, each containing

four questions, were in alignment with the elements of effective PLCs as identified in the literature: shared vision and values, collaborative culture, focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, and supportive and shared leadership. In these first four sections, school principals were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their school's alignment with indicators of effective collaborative practices as identified in the literature. The final section of the survey provided principals the opportunity to provide general information about the organization of collaborative teams and to provide additional comments.

Prior to administering the survey to West Virginia principals, the survey was tested on a small sample of Ohio principals. Comments and responses from the Ohio principals were reviewed to determine if revisions were necessary. Based on the Ohio principal responses, the researcher determined that adjusting the structure or the content of the survey was not necessary.

A web-based survey provider, SurveyMonkey, was the instrument selected to distribute the survey. Principals were notified of the study and survey request through an introductory e-mail which included a web link to the instrument. The survey was completed via web link to protect principal confidentiality. In the e-mail, principals were notified that participation was optional and that their identification would be kept confidential.

Questions designed to collect school demographic data, specifically quantitative information relating to the school planning practices during the 2012-2013 school year, were the focus of the school phone calls. The questions solicited numerical data such as the types and amounts of teacher planning times. During the phone calls, the following questions were asked: (a) "What was the number of minutes scheduled per week for individual planning per eighth grade teacher for school year 2012-2013?" and (b) "What was the number of additional planning minutes scheduled per week for eighth grade teachers specifically for the purpose of

collaborative planning for school year 2012-2013?" Principals were asked to provide a weekly average and include all planning times, including planning that might not occur on a weekly basis such as those provided during an early school dismissal or substitute day.

An initial contact with the WVDE research department was made to discuss briefly the proposed research and the data needed to complete the study. This discussion determined the assessment data and school demographic data reviewed for this study were available in the public domain, and thus no internal WVDE Institutional Review Board (IRB) review was necessary for the data collection process.

For the purposes of Marshall University, however, IRB approval was required. Prior to the collection of the survey data, a review and subsequent approval was obtained from the Marshall University IRB. The first priority of the research study was to ensure the wellbeing of all study participants. Throughout the entire study, all procedures were in alignment with IRB standards.

District and school contact information such as principal name, school address, e-mail address, and phone number were collected via the WVDE website. An introductory letter describing the study was sent via the e-mail to all eighth grade school principals that accompanied the survey. Additionally principals were notified that a phone call would be made to the school requesting information about the school's planning period practices, including the amount of time allotted for individual teacher planning periods per week and the amount of time allotted to collaborative teacher planning. The survey included questions inquiring about their perspectives on the alignment of eighth grade teachers' collaborative planning activities with identified best practices. Principal letters also included words of appreciation and researcher

contact information. In addition, e-mail reminders were sent to increase principal participation in the online survey.

The following student cohort assessment data from each school housing eighth grade students was collected via the WVDE website:

- Percent of eighth grade students at or above proficiency level; (mastery, above mastery and distinguished levels) on the spring 2013 WESTEST.
- Number of students tested per each eighth grade school cohort.

**Data Analysis**

Achievement data were reviewed according to summative reading assessment results at the eighth grade level. Summative reading achievement was identified by a proficiency percent that includes all students scoring at the mastery, above mastery, and distinguished levels as reported on the West Virginia Department of Education (2014) website.

Reading proficiency levels were examined with respect to each category of teacher planning time, individual and collaborative. Planning time for the purpose of this study was considered to be planning periods scheduled by the principal and occurring within the instructional portion of the teacher workday. Teacher planning time was analyzed as two categories, individual planning time and collaborative planning time. Planning amounts and types scheduled for each school were collected via phone calls to the school principal or designee. As needed, subsequent attempts were made to gain information about each school's planning period practices.

The Pearson correlation was selected as the statistical measure to review the relationship between the numerical value of both individual and collaborative planning time to student reading achievement. The first set of analyses utilizing a Pearson correlation compared the

numerical amounts of individual teacher planning time in relation to summative student reading achievement upon exiting the eighth grade. The second set of analyses utilizing a Pearson correlation compared amounts of collaborative teacher planning time to summative student reading achievement upon exiting the eighth grade.

In addition to the analysis of achievement scores and planning times, information from the principal survey was analyzed. The survey included responses which reflected principals' perspectives regarding the effectiveness of and the alignment to best practices of collaborative planning as identified in the literature. Each survey question was analyzed as an individual question and also according to the specific PLC component: shared values and vision, collaborative culture, focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, and a supportive and shared leadership. The remaining three survey questions permitted respondents to select multiple answers and also included a comment field. In addition, principal perspectives were examined in relationship to the collected WESTEST2 assessment data. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses to the survey questions.

**Summary**

Throughout the data analysis, a constant review and comparison of survey response data, summative assessment data, and school specific planning period information was conducted as part of an ongoing attempt to identify corroborating information and possible relationships in the data. Since the online survey included questions of both quantitative and open-ended measures, descriptive and analytical statistics were utilized to analyze survey data.

# CHAPTER 4

# FINDINGS

This chapter provides a description and analysis of data collected for the study, including West Virginia eighth grade reading achievement proficiency levels, information about the types and amounts of eighth grade teacher planning periods during school year 2012-2013, and principals' perspectives on the effectiveness of collaborative planning.

## Data Collection

The purpose of this study was to investigate eighth grade student reading achievement in relation to types and amounts of teacher planning time. The study also examined principals' perspectives about the effectiveness of collaborative planning practices as a means to increase student achievement. The population for this study consisted of 174 West Virginia schools housing eighth grade students. Spring 2013 reading proficiency levels for each eighth grade school cohort were collected via the West Virginia Department of Education (2014) website.

Information about planning period types and amounts for eighth grade teachers during the 2012-2013 school year were collected via a phone call to each school. Data were collected from 100 of the 174 public schools housing eighth grades for a response rate of 58%. The data collection period coincided with the end of the 2013-2014 school year, and this factor made connecting with school principals difficult; therefore, subsequent phone calls, in-person discussions and e-mails were needed to obtain an adequate response rate.

An anonymous online survey was administered to gather principal perspectives regarding the effectiveness of collaborative planning in relation to the 2013 eighth grade reading achievement data. School administrators were asked to reflect on teacher planning practices in effect for the 2012-2013 school year in order to align with the 2013 achievement results.

Therefore, only those principals employed as the school administrator for the 2012-2013 school year were eligible to participate in the online survey. At the time of the survey, 127 of the 174 schools had the same school administrator for both the 2013-2014 school year and the 2012-2013 school year. Sixty of the 127 eligible principals participated in the online survey for a 47.2% response rate.

Several respondents opted to skip questions as permitted by survey design. Additionally, an answer choice indicating the question was not applicable was available for all survey questions. Six respondents answered the majority of the survey questions with the "not applicable" type choice.

**Data Analysis**

Separate data analyses were used to investigate each research question. Data collected for questions 1 and 2 were analyzed using quantitative measures. A Pearson correlation was selected as the statistical measure to review the relationship between the numerical values of individual and collaborative planning time and student reading achievement proficiency levels. Questions 3 through 6 were analyzed using both quantitative and open-ended measures. Survey questions utilizing a Likert scale were analyzed by the relationship between expected and observed responses as well as through descriptive statistics. Response choices "not at all satisfied," "somewhat satisfied," "very satisfied," and "extremely satisfied" were assigned a value from zero to three, respectively. Additionally each question had a not applicable type response, specifically "we do not have eighth grade collaborative teams." The remaining three questions were general questions about collaborative teams and provided principals the option of selecting multiple answers and/or entering additional comments. These questions were analyzed

and reported through the use of descriptive statistics. Findings from the study are described under each research question below.

**Research Question 1**

*1. What is the relationship between the amount of collaborative teacher planning time and eighth grade student reading proficiency levels measured on the eighth grade summative assessment?*

Data collection for questions 1 and 2 was conducted simultaneously utilizing the same procedures. Assessment data were collected by obtaining achievement reports available online through the West Virginia Department of Education. Planning period information was collected via phone calls to each school.

Reading achievement levels were analyzed according to each school's eighth grade student cohort's 2013 proficiency levels and the corresponding types and amounts of eighth grade teacher planning in place for school year 2012-2013.

Even though West Virginia reading achievement data were available for all 174 schools housing eighth grade, data regarding planning period information was available from only 100 of the schools. Therefore, the complete data set of reading achievement and planning period information for these 100 schools were analyzed for research question 1 and 2. In order to protect confidentiality, individual school names were converted to numerical identifiers and were assigned a numerical identifier of 1 to 100.

Collaborative planning time for eighth grade teachers in school year 2012-2013 ranged from 0 to 265 minutes per week. Individual planning times ranged from 150 to 450 minutes per week. Collaborative planning periods averaged just less than 100 minutes per week as compared to an average of 230 minutes of individual planning time. Of course, not all schools have

collaborative planning time in place; in fact, 7.3% of the principals reported that their schools had no collaborative teams at the eighth grade level. However, most of the respondents (69.1%) reported that grade-level collaborative teams were in place for the 2012-2013 school year. Other types of collaborative teams reported include subject-area (49.1%), interdisciplinary (36.4%), student-specific (4.4%) and other types of teams (9.1%). School cohort reading achievement ranged from a low of just under 18% proficiency to a high of 76.3% proficiency. Of these 100 schools, 56 schools scored above the state average of 49.7% for reading achievement.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the amount of collaborative planning time for eighth grade teachers and the proficiency levels of eighth grade student cohorts. A minimal correlation was found between the two variables, $r = 0.079591$, $n = 100$, $p = .1946$. Overall, a slight correlation was found between collaborative teacher planning and eighth grade reading proficiency.

**Research Question 2**

*2. What is the relationship between the amount of individual teacher planning time and eighth grade student reading proficiency levels measured on the eighth grade summative assessment?*

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the amount of individual planning time for eighth grade teachers and the proficiency levels of eighth grade student cohorts. A weak negative correlation was found between the two variables, $r = -0.22305$, $n = 100$, $p = .1946$. In other words, more individual teacher planning time was associated with lower student reading proficiency.

For the remaining research questions, principal perspectives were collected using the Teacher Planning and Collaboration: Principals' Perspectives, a survey instrument designed by the researcher. The survey was developed based upon a review of the literature and piloted prior to

data collection for this study. Survey data were collected from 60 of the eligible 127 school principals.

Survey respondents were asked to rate each statement according to their satisfaction level using a Likert scale. In addition, each question had a "does not apply" answer choice available. Each survey question was analyzed through a comparison of observed versus expected responses via a frequency count and a review of Likert rating percentages. Additionally, response choices were converted to a numerical value in order to compute a rating average per question based on a four-point scale, with "not at all satisfied" type responses being assigned a value of 0, through the "extremely satisfied" type responses assigned a value of 3.

The final section included questions designed to collect general information regarding types of collaborative teams present in school year 2012-2013 and also provided principals with the opportunity to submit additional comments through open-ended responses.

Data were examined according to survey responses from the corresponding section of the survey: shared values and vision, collaborative culture, focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, and shared and supportive leadership.

**Research Question 3**

*3. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of shared values and vision?*

The following survey questions asked principals to reflect on indicators relating to the development and implementation of shared values and vision in relation to eighth grade teacher teams:

1. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team participants have a shared understanding of how common planning time ought to be used?

2. How satisfied are you that 8th grade teachers have not only participated in the development of the mission and vision, but that they also have regularly reviewed the mission and vision for your school?

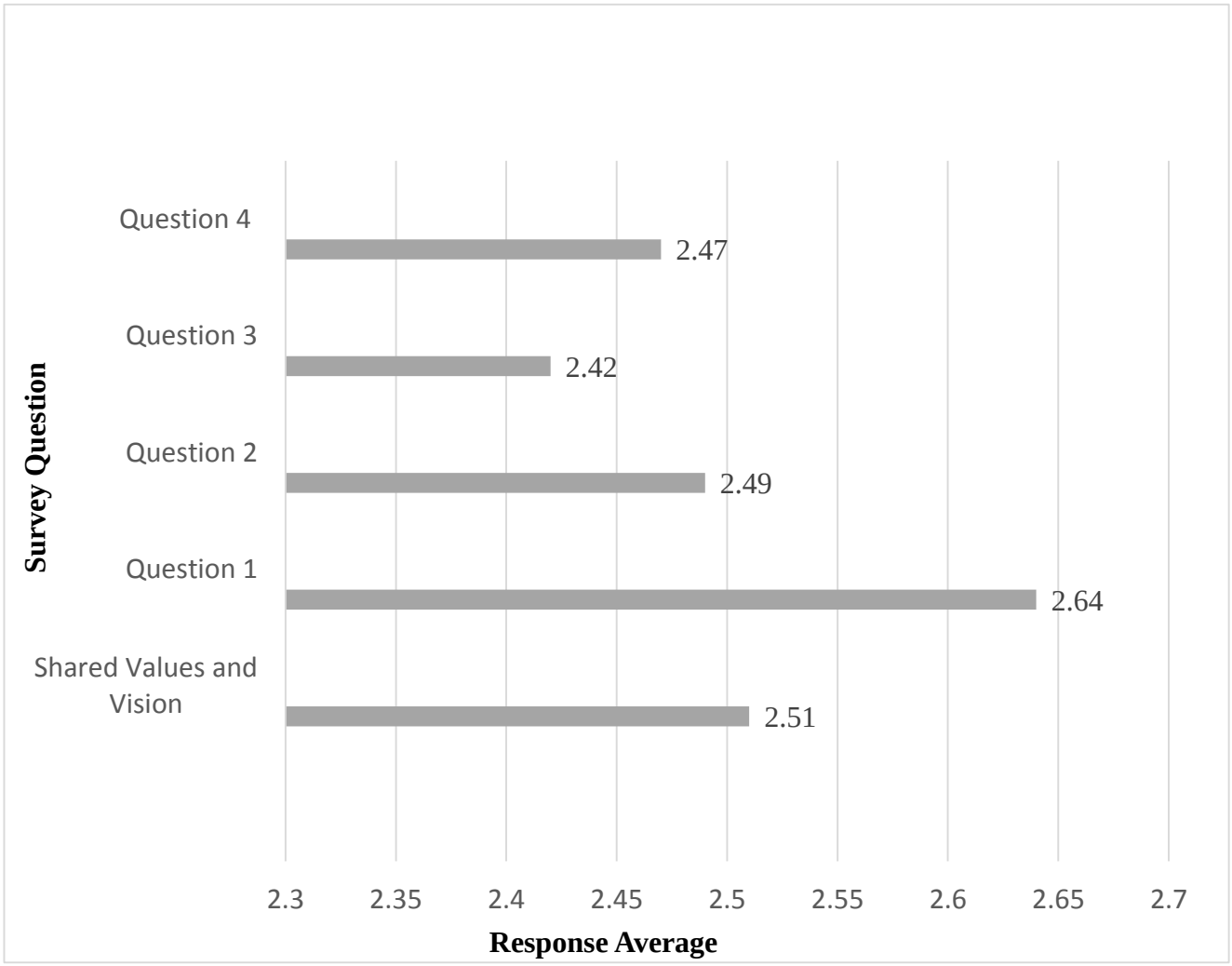
3. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have developed long term priorities and short term goals with accompanying timelines for reaching those targets?

4. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams work interdependently to not only work toward but to "live" the school's mission on a daily basis?

Principals overwhelmingly reported some degree of satisfaction with the implementation of shared values and vision within their eighth grade teacher teams. On each of the questions in this section, 23-31 respondents (42%-53%) reported themselves to be "very satisfied" or "extremely satisfied." Only 2-5 principals (3%-9%) selected the "not at all" satisfied answer choice for each of shared values and vision questions.

While the results for this section of the survey were skewed to the positive end of a four-point Likert scale, when reviewed in comparison to all other sections of the survey, the response averages of 2.49, 2.42 and 2.47 for Questions 2, 3, and 4, respectively, were ranked as three of the six lowest-scoring survey questions (Figure 1). Additionally, principal responses indicated that a much larger percentage of principals (9%) were very dissatisfied and reported "not at all" satisfied levels on both questions 3 and 4, in comparison to 3% and 5% on questions 1 and 2.

*Figure 1.* Principal Satisfaction Levels Regarding Shared Values and Vision (2013).




Of particular interest are questions 3 and 4. Question 3 asked, "How satisfied are you that eighth grade collaborative teams have developed long term priorities and short term goals with accompanying timelines for reaching those targets?" It was ranked as the second lowest rating average of all survey questions, showing that principals do not believe their teacher teams are managing goals and timelines well. The responses to this indicator raise the concern as to whether or not teacher teams are revisiting the school's goals and objectives on a regular basis. One of the most important characteristics of a school's mission and vision is that it includes short term priority goals and objectives that are measureable (NSDC, 2001). According to the

SMART goal framework developed by O'Neil and Conzemius (2005), goals should be realistic, results-oriented and time-bound.

Question 4, which asked, "How satisfied are you that eighth grade collaborative teams work interdependently to not only work toward but to "live" the school's mission on a daily basis?" was ranked as the fourth lowest rating average. The responses on this item cause concern that perhaps as teachers go about their busy day, they may not be staying focused on the vision and mission outside of their collaborative meeting times. In order for school improvement efforts to be successful, collaborative teams must remain focused on their identified goals throughout the routine work and day-to-day activities during the course of each school day (NSDC, 2001).

Question 2, which asked, "How satisfied are you that eighth grade teachers have not only participated in the development of the mission and vision, but that they also have regularly reviewed the mission and vision for your school?" was a concern as well, falling at the sixth lowest rating average of all survey items. The responses to this question raise concerns similar to question 3's topic of short-term goals. School leaders must come to the understanding that the mission and vision must be revised and altered as teachers spend time reflecting on collected data (Hong, 1996).

Responses for all questions in this section of the survey clearly indicated widespread differences in satisfaction levels as reported by school principals regarding shared values and vision. Specifically, question 1 "How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team participants have a shared understanding of how common planning time ought to be used?" had a much higher rating average of 2.64 when compared to the ratings scores of 2.49, 2.42, and 2.47 for Questions 2, 3, and 4, respectively. Based upon the observed frequencies, most principals

reported satisfaction levels of "somewhat" and "very" and significantly fewer principals reported their satisfaction levels as "not at all" or "extreme" on the survey questions in this section.

**Research Question 4**

*4. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of a collaborative culture?*

In section 2, survey questions 5 through 8, principals were asked to rate their level of satisfaction on indicators relating to the development and implementation of a collaborative culture in relation to eighth grade teacher teams. Questions in section 2 included:

5. How satisfied are you that through collaborative activities 8th grade teams have been able to build a foundation of trust where divergent ideas are welcomed?

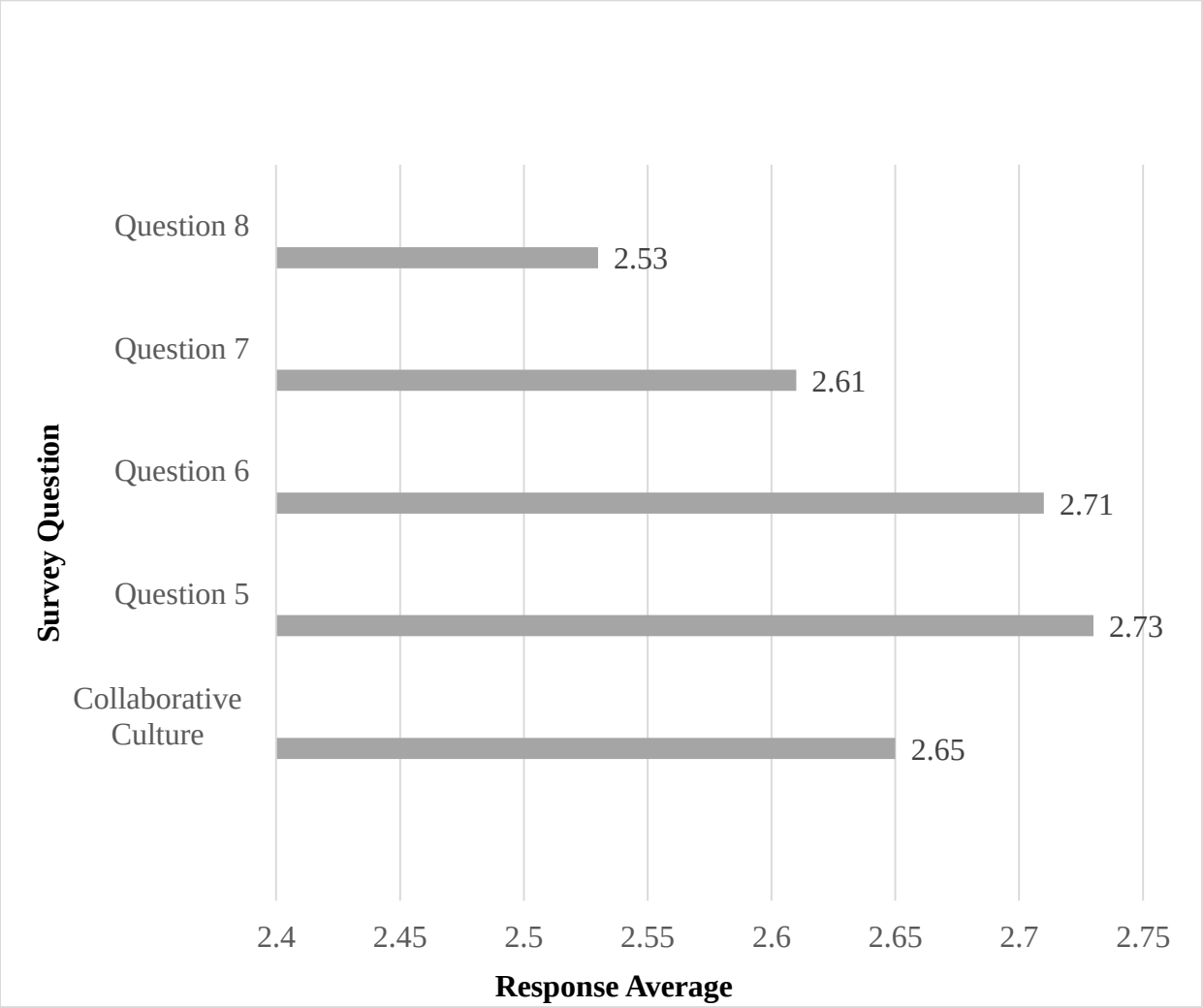
6. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team activities have promoted the idea of a team responsibility for all student results?

7. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team meetings have improved responsiveness not only to student weaknesses but also to student strengths?

8. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams regularly celebrate successes?

As noted in research question 3, principals again reported a high degree of satisfaction with the implementation of this PLC element, collaborative culture. Figure 2 depicts response averages of 2.73, 2.71, 2.61, and 2.53 that were calculated for questions 5, 6, 7, and 8, respectively. On each of the questions, 24-31 respondents (47%-61%) described themselves as "very satisfied" and "extremely satisfied." In fact, only 0-4 principals (0%-8%) selected the "not at all" satisfied answer choice for each of the collaborative culture questions.

*Figure 2.* Principal Satisfaction Levels regarding a Collaborative Culture (2013).




The response averages for questions 5 and 6 were much higher than many of the other survey questions and were ranked 3rd and 5th highest, respectively, out of a total of 18 questions. Question 5, "How satisfied are you that through collaborative activities eighth grade teams have been able to build a foundation of trust where divergent ideas are welcomed?", showed a rating average of 2.73, the highest score of any question on the survey. Additionally, question 5 had the highest percentage (61%) of principals rating their satisfaction at the "very" or "extremely" satisfied levels. Answers to question 5 are encouraging, as it is critical that educators are able to build a strong foundation of trust, and thus begin to not only respect and value, but to encourage

divergent thinking and creative solutions to instructional dilemmas (Wallace Foundation, 2011). Question 6, "How satisfied are you that eighth grade collaborative team activities have promoted the idea of a team responsibility for all student results?" also received high marks, as it had the second highest percentage of principals responding as "very" or "extremely" satisfied at 59%. Responses to question 6 seem to indicate that principals and teachers alike have grasped the understanding that a team approach to learning is a powerful change mechanism (WVDE, 2008).

Although question 8 "How satisfied are you that eighth grade collaborative teams regularly celebrate successes?" ranks near the midpoint in comparison to all survey questions with a 2.53 response average, it is the lowest score for the collaborative culture section. Only 47% of the principals responded at the "very" or "extremely" satisfied levels for question 8; in comparison, questions 5, 6, and 7 were at 61%, 59%, and 50%, respectively.

In the same manner as the first section, responses for all questions in this section of the survey clearly indicate differences in satisfaction levels as reported by school principals regarding a collaborative culture. Specifically, question 8 "How satisfied are you that eighth grade collaborative teams regularly celebrate successes?" had a much lower rating average of 2.53 when compared to the ratings scores of 2.73, 2.71, 2.61 for Questions 5, 6, and 7, respectively. Based upon the observed frequencies, it appears most principals reported satisfaction levels of "somewhat" and "very," and significantly fewer principals reported their satisfaction levels as "not at all" or "extreme" on the questions in the collaborative culture section of the survey.

**Research Question 5**

*What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of a focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning?*

In section 3 of the survey, questions 9 through 12 asked principals to reflect on indicators relating to the development and implementation of a focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning in relation to their school's eighth grade teacher teams. Section 3 questions included the following:

9. How satisfied are you that student performance data are the primary driver of 8th grade collaborative team discussions?

10. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have utilized data to generate creative solutions or interventions?

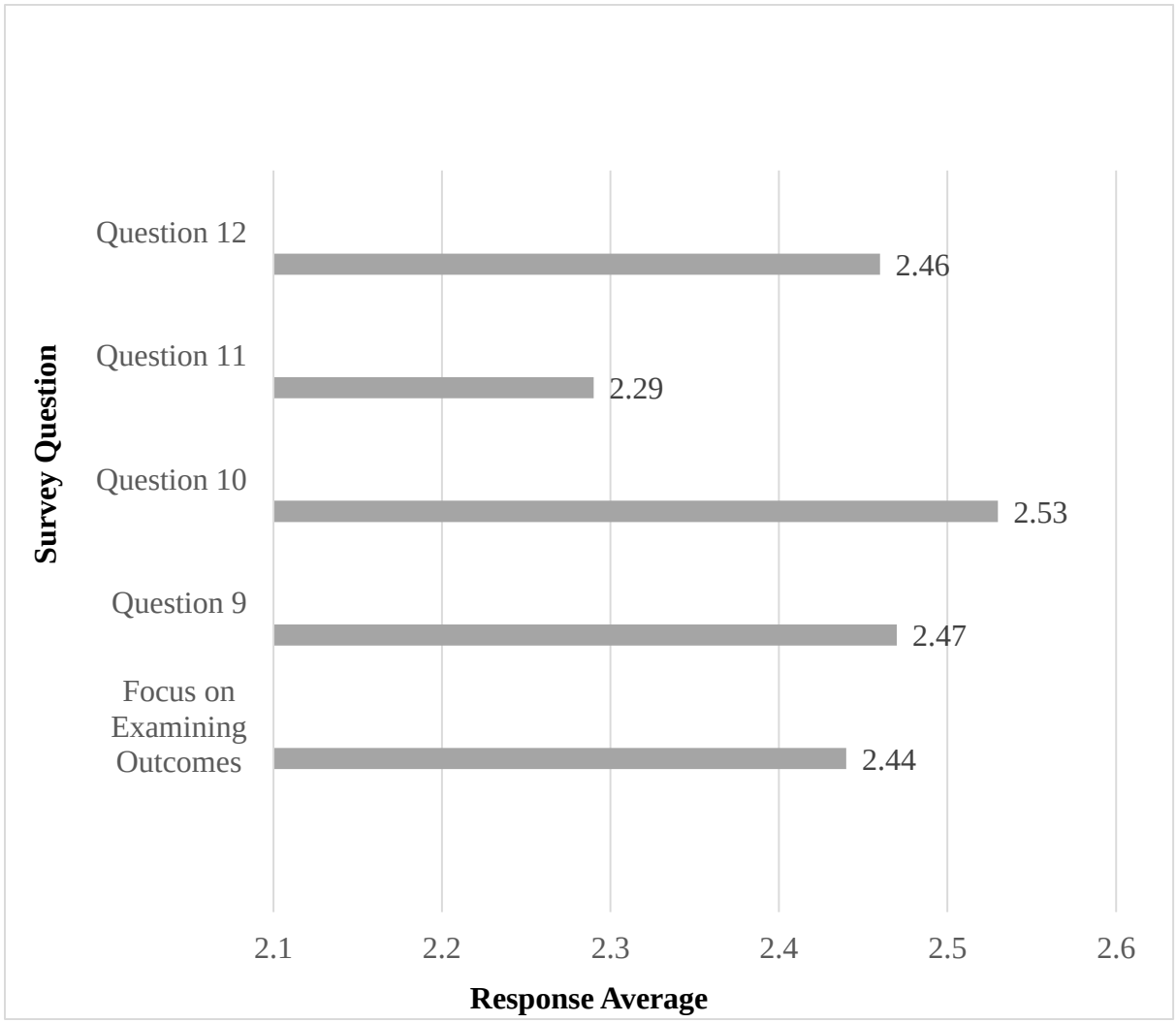
11. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have successfully included an evaluative component for the purpose of monitoring the effectiveness of action plans?

12. Based on the 2012-2013 school year, how satisfied are you that your school's 8th grade collaborative teams have had a positive impact on student achievement, specifically in the area of Reading/Language Arts?

Rating averages were calculated as 2.47, 2.53, 2.29, and 2.46 for questions 9, 10, 11, and 12, respectively (Figure 4). In alignment with the previous two survey sections, principals continued to report a high degree of satisfaction with the implementation of PLCs in their schools. This section provided principals with the opportunity to share their perspectives regarding the PLC element focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning in relation to their eighth grade teacher teams. On each of the questions in this section, 19-22 respondents

(37%-44%) reported themselves as being "very satisfied" or "extremely satisfied." Only 3-10 principals (6%-20%) selected the "not at all" satisfied answer choice for each of the questions in the focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning section.

*Figure 3.* Principal Satisfaction Levels regarding a Focus on Examining Results to Improve Student Learning (2013).




While all of the rating scales for each of the questions in this section fell within the bottom half in comparison to all survey items, the number of negative responses to questions 9, 11, and 12 raises particular concern. In comparison to the high degree of principal satisfaction noted in the collaborative culture section of the survey, the lower response averages and higher

numbers of unsatisfied principals indicate a concern for the continuous improvement process component of PLCs.

Five principals reported being "not at all" satisfied on both question 9 ("How satisfied are you that student performance data are the primary driver of eighth grade collaborative team discussions?") and question 12 ("Based on the 2012-2013 school year, how satisfied are you that your school's eighth grade collaborative teams have had a positive impact on student achievement, specifically in the area of Reading/Language Arts?"). These responses are cause for concern because they reflect a lack of data-driven decision making in the schools. Teachers' development of instructional goals and objectives according to a substantive data analysis in order to increase student achievement is critically important. In order to gain increased achievement, teachers must take time to review data and make results-driven decisions (Thompson, 2004).

Question 11 ("How satisfied are you that eighth grade collaborative teams have successfully included an evaluative component for the purpose of monitoring the effectiveness of action plans?") earned a 2.29 response average, the lowest overall response average of any question on the survey instrument. Question 11 also boasted the largest number of principals (10) rating their level of satisfaction at the "not at all" level, representing 20% of the survey respondents. These responses indicate that the critically important evaluative component of the improvement process may be the most likely to be overlooked by teacher teams. Making progress toward improvement is difficult without an evaluative or monitoring process in place. Teachers must work in collaboration to determine their expectations while at the same time developing a monitoring process (Dufour et al., 2010) to gauge success and provide the opportunity to revise instruction as needed.

Responses for all questions in this section of the survey clearly indicate differences in satisfaction levels as reported by school principals regarding the topic of a focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning in relation to the other sections of the survey. The overall response average for this section was 2.44 in relation to the response averages of 2.66, 2.65, and 2.51 for shared leadership, collaborative culture and shared values, and vision sections, respectively. Nevertheless, as with all other sections, and based upon the observed frequencies, most principals apparently reported satisfaction levels of "somewhat" and "very," and significantly fewer principals reported their satisfaction levels as "not at all" or "extreme" on questions regarding a focus on examining results to improve student learning.

**Research Question 6**

*What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of supportive and shared leadership?*

Survey questions 13 through 16 asked principals to reflect on indicators relating to the development and implementation of supportive and shared leadership in relation to eighth grade teacher teams. Questions in this section included the following:

13. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative teams has helped to develop leadership skills in teachers?

14. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams understand and apply the concept of continuous improvement?

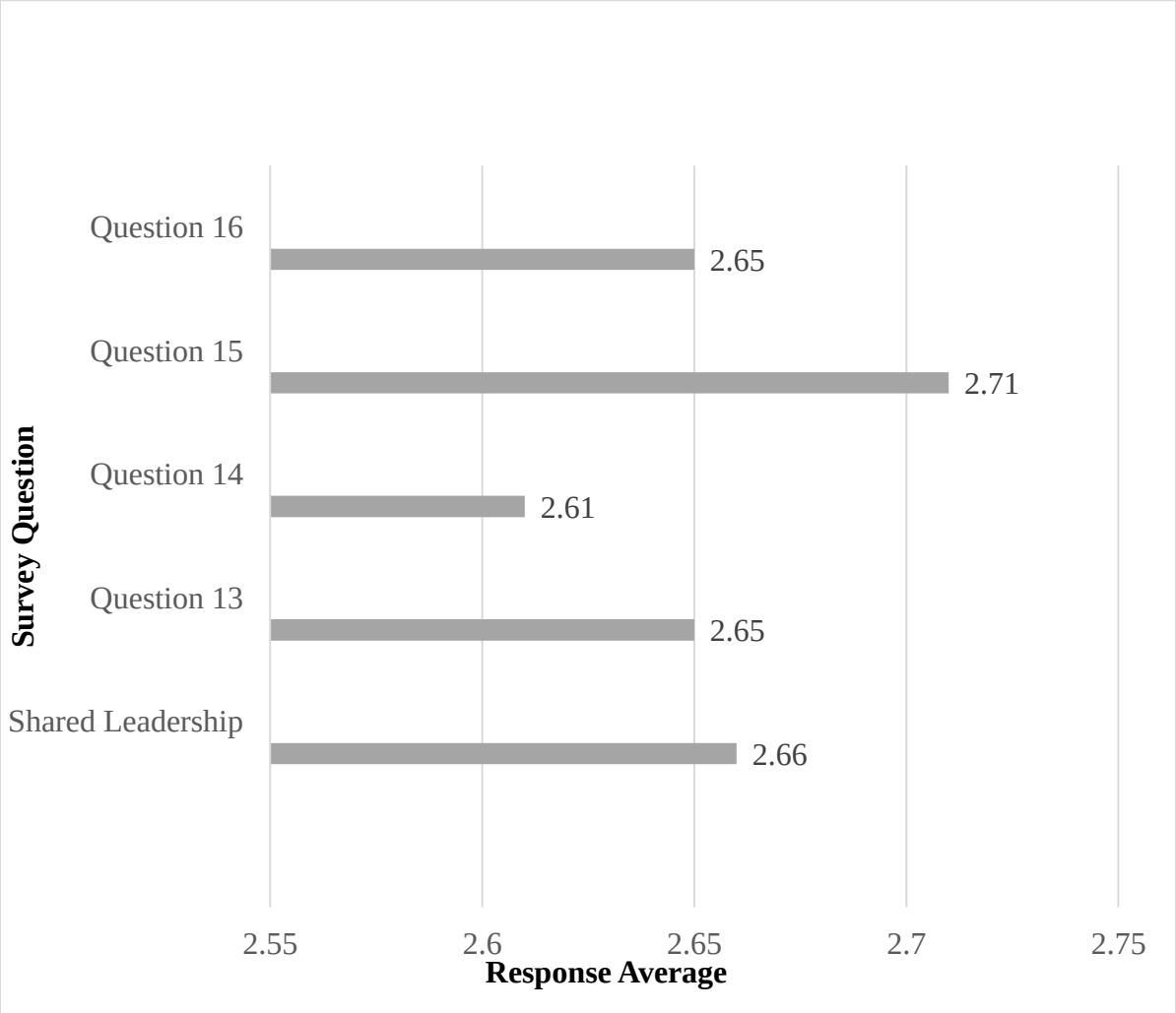
15. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative activities has helped to develop strong teams of teachers?

16. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative teams has helped you to share leadership and decision making specifically related to instructional improvement?

Principals overwhelmingly reported some degree of satisfaction with the implementation of supportive and shared leadership within their eighth grade teacher teams. On each of the questions, between 25 and 28 respondents (49%-55%) reported themselves as being "very satisfied" or "extremely satisfied." In fact, only 1-2 principals (2%-4%) selected the "not at all" satisfied answer choice for each of the supportive and shared leadership questions.

Response averages of 2.65, 2.61, 2.71, and 2.65 were calculated for questions 13, 14, 15, and 16, respectively (Figure 4). All response averages for the questions in this section fell within the top half in comparison to all survey items.

*Figure 4.* Principal Satisfaction Levels regarding a Supportive a Shared Leadership (2013).




Question 15 ("How satisfied are you that the implementation of eighth grade collaborative activities has helped to develop strong teams of teachers?") was of particular interest; with a rating average of 2.71, it was the second highest-scoring indicator out of all four PLC element items. The response to question 15 suggests that schools that are able to form strong teacher teams are essential to creating the environment that provides support to initiate and sustain change (WVDE, 2008).

Question 13 ("How satisfied are you that the implementation of eighth grade collaborative teams has helped to develop leadership skills in teachers?") and question 16

("How satisfied are you that the implementation of eighth grade collaborative teams has helped you to share leadership and decision making specifically related to instructional improvement?") were tied in their ranking as the fourth highest-scoring indicators. The National Association for Elementary School Principals (2008) suggests that "principals can longer simply be administrators and managers" (p. 1), and the responses to these questions indicate that West Virginia principals are moving away from adherence to traditional school administrative practices and toward the implementation of shared leadership practices. In order for change to be successful, principals need to consider teachers as equal partners in school leadership since "Collective leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership" (Louis. Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010, p. 19). Although the questions in this section might be slightly skewed--because to an extent, principals were asked to reflect on their own practices--principal perspectives nevertheless reflect an encouraging recognition of the importance of sharing leadership in order to promote both cohesive and independent teacher teams (Lieberman & Miller, 1999).

**Summary**

Figures 5 and 6 depict the lowest-scoring PLC elements as well as the lowest-scoring survey questions. As shown in Figure 5, overall principal satisfaction levels were the lowest for the PLC elements of (a) shared values and vision and (b) focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning.

*Figure 5.* Principal Satisfaction Levels regarding PLC elements (2013*).*

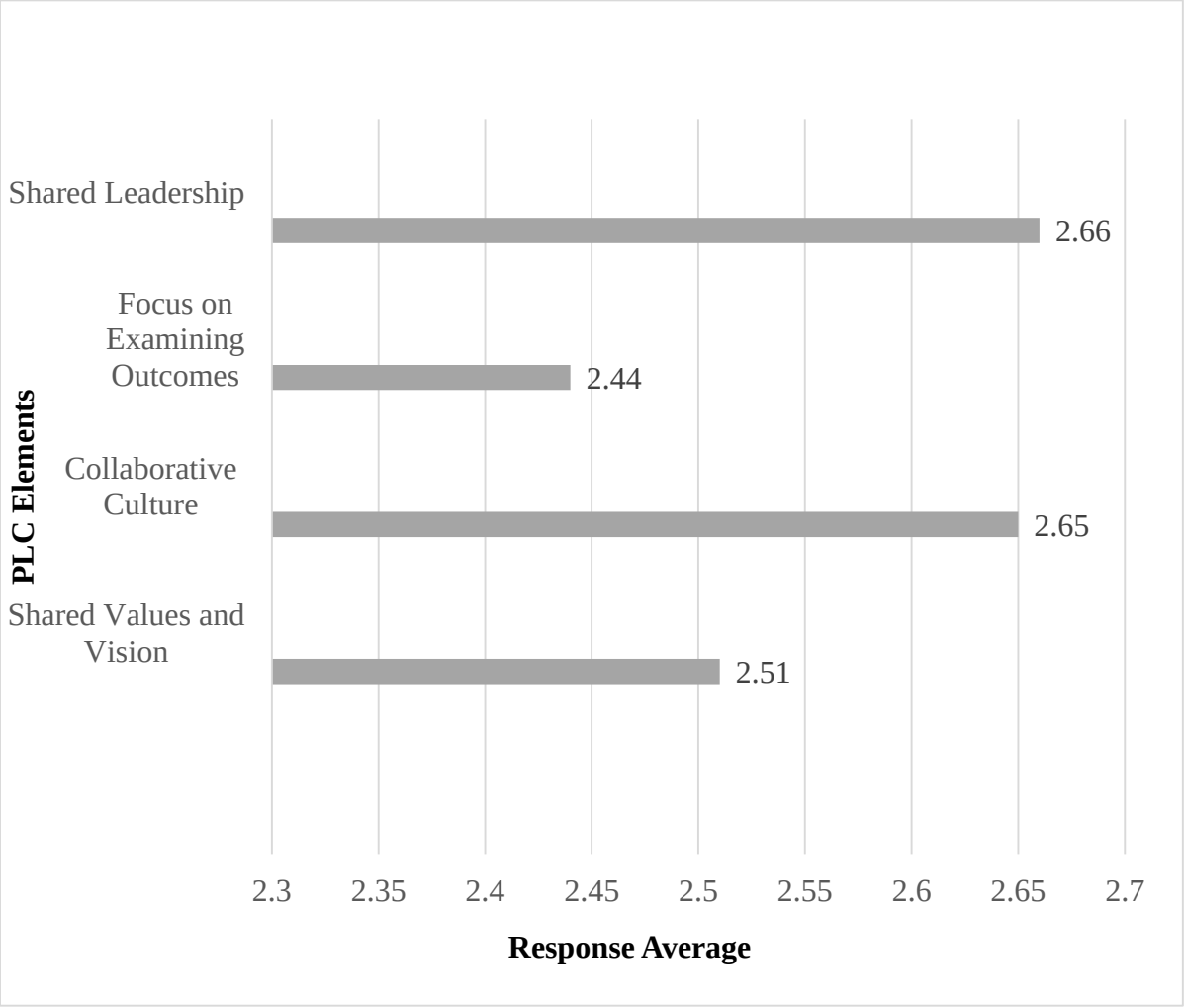
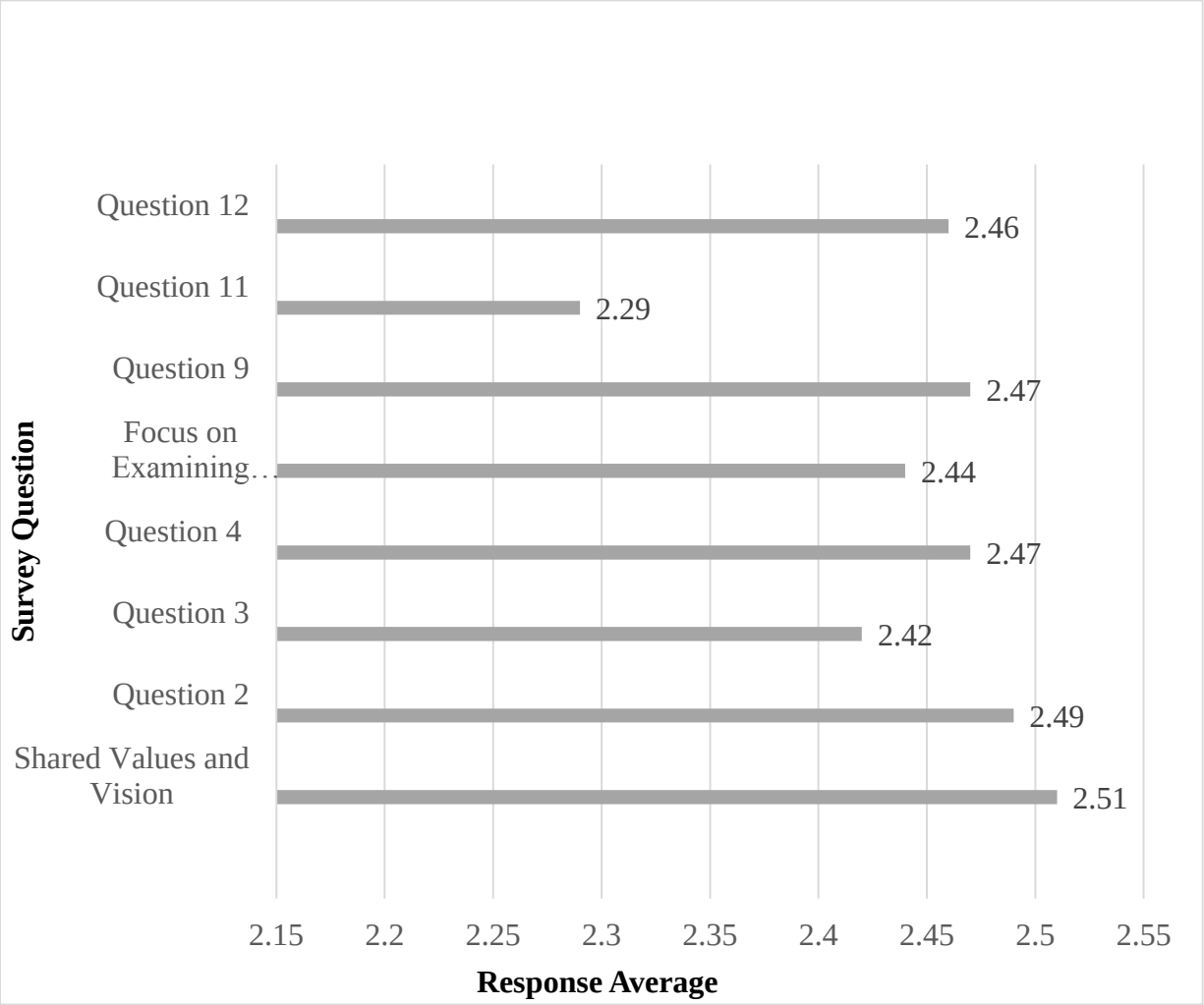



Figure 6 displays the lowest scoring survey questions. Six questions posted a response average of below 2.5: questions 2, 3, and 4 and questions 9, 11, and 12 in the sections (a) shared values and vision and (b) focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, respectively (Figure 6).

*Figure 6.* Principal Perspectives: Lowest Scoring PLC Elements and Survey Questions (2013).



# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSIONS

This chapter contains a description of the study, including a summary of purpose, procedures, and findings; the conclusion and implications; recommendations for further study; and a final summary.

## Summary of Purpose

Teacher collaboration has occurred informally for many years as teachers met and discussed issues and concerns over lunch, before and after school, or during their individual planning periods. However, since 2008, the West Virginia Department of Education has enthusiastically touted the importance of collaboration and has organized teacher teams as a mechanism for school improvement. As a result of this West Virginia state initiative, many school administrators have begun to spearhead efforts to revamp traditional school schedules in order to allow time for formal collaboration to occur on a regular basis. West Virginia educators have hoped that with regularly scheduled collaboration, many of the critical components for school improvement will be in place, such as teams planning and working together, the development of data-based goals, and the effective use of data (Schmoker, 2000). Collaborative sessions will provide the time needed for teachers to collect data, conduct data analysis, identity instructional needs, and develop action plans to include instructional interventions.

In order to improve student achievement, schools must prioritize schedules to match needs, "not for teaching convenience, not for administrative convenience, but for learning convenience" (Thompson, 2004, p. 9). With guidance and support from the West Virginia Department of Education, many West Virginia schools have restructured schedules to allow for common planning time.

Schools have developed structures to allow for the implementation of PLCs in an effort to increase student achievement (WVDE, 2013b). Although time for collaboration could be scheduled in many different configurations, common ways to add collaborative time include the addition of a "common planning" period, regularly scheduled (monthly) delayed start times to the instructional day, the hiring of daily substitutes to provide additional planning time for teachers on targeted days, provision of an early release for students to gain additional teacher planning time, and the inclusion of planned non-instructional days. Regardless of the method, the purpose remained the same, to provide time for educators to work together to plan for school improvement.

This study investigated the relationship between reading achievement and the types and amounts of teacher planning time in West Virginia's schools. Planning time was examined according to two categories: individual planning time and collaborative planning time. Reading achievement was analyzed according to the proficiency level of each school's eighth grade student cohort. Demographic information as well as principals' perspectives on the effectiveness of teacher collaborative teams in relation to student achievement were also examined as part of the study. The following questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between the amount of collaborative teacher planning time and eighth grade student reading proficiency levels measured on the eighth grade summative assessment?
2. What is the relationship between the amount of individual teacher planning time and eighth grade student reading proficiency levels measured on the eighth grade summative assessment?

3. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of shared values and vision?
4. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of a collaborative culture?
5. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of a focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning?
6. What are the perceptions of school principals concerning collaborative activities within their schools which promote the development and implementation of supportive and shared leadership?

**Summary of Procedures**

The study utilized several methods of data collection, including an online collection of eighth grade reading proficiency scores reported by school cohort, phone calls to schools to gather planning period information, and the administration of an online survey to gather principal perspectives regarding collaborative planning practices.

The first undertaking of the study was to obtain the spring 2013 reading proficiency levels. Test data were collected for each of the 174 West Virginia schools housing eighth grade via the West Virginia Department of Education website.

The next two study procedures, school phone calls and the online principal perspectives survey, occurred simultaneously and were initiated near the end of the 2013-2014 academic year. Attempts were made to call all 174 schools in order to obtain information about types and amounts of planning periods for eighth grade teachers during the 2012-2013 school year.

Follow-up phone calls, e-mails, and in-person discussions yielded data from 100 of the 174 schools housing eighth grade for a response rate of 58%.

An anonymous online survey was administered to gather principal perspectives regarding the effectiveness of collaborative planning in relation to the 2013 eighth grade reading achievement data. In order to align with the 2013 achievement results, school administrators were asked to reflect on teacher planning practices in effect for the 2012-2013 school year; therefore, only those principals employed as the school administrator for the 2012-2013 school year were eligible to participate in the online survey. Sixty of the 127 eligible principals participated in the online survey for a 47.2% response rate.

**Summary of Findings**

An analysis of the school planning period information and reading achievement data collected in this study yielded a minimal correlation between collaborative teacher planning and eighth grade reading proficiency. However, surprisingly, a weak negative correlation was found between eighth grade reading proficiency and teachers' individual planning time. In general, principals reported high levels of satisfaction with the implementation of PLCs in their schools. The principal perspectives survey data revealed that of the four PLC elements surveyed, shared values and vision, collaborative culture, focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, and supportive and shared leadership, principals are the most satisfied with the development of their schools' collaborative culture and of their supportive and shared leadership; likewise, principals are least satisfied with their school's focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning and with the development of a shared values and vision.

## Conclusions and Implications

Examining a single factor in the realm of student achievement is difficult, if not impossible. Many factors, including class size, teacher quality, and the availability of instructional resources, play a role in student achievement, and thus isolating the effect one factor may have on student achievement is challenging.

Many studies link a number of conditions and practices that promote increased student achievement, including collaborative planning time (White, 1997; Gunn & King, 2003). Researcher Darling-Hammond advocated, "There's much greater gain in student achievement in a school when people work collaboratively in teams and when teams of teachers stay together over a period of time and build their collective knowledge and collective capacity. The whole can be greater than the sum of the parts" (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 19). However, many researchers aren't as confident that the current body of research provides a strong enough case to recommend collaborative planning as a best practice.

Although only a minimal correlation was found between collaborative planning time and reading proficiency, many educators would agree that PLCs are perceived to be one of the most influential yet cost-effective strategies to simultaneously improve school culture and student achievement (Buffum et al., 2008). Schmoker (2004) refers to PLCs as "simple, proven affordable structures that exist right now" (p.1) and notes that if PLCs are implemented effectively, they could have an incredible impact on student achievement in virtually any type of school environment.

The weak negative correlation between individual teacher planning time and student achievement suggests that as teacher planning time increases, student achievement decreases. Although the correlation is a weak one that may have possibly been skewed by just a few schools

that had larger amounts of individual planning time coupled with lower student achievement, schools must still carefully examine the relationship between increased teacher planning time and its effect on the amount and quality of student instruction. Schools must ensure as teacher planning time increases, the amount of time students are actively engaged in rigorous learning does not proportionately decrease.

Practitioners and researchers can agree that teachers need time to plan and prepare for instruction. Teachers struggle to find time to complete many routine tasks in addition to planning for instruction. Tasks such as phone calls to parents, IEP meetings, grading papers, and so on are all part of the activities a teacher may undertake during daily planning periods. Almost all educators can agree that the one commodity in short supply is time; time for instruction, time to plan, and time to engage in collaborative discussions with other teachers (Schlechty, 1990).

As bound by the state legislature, West Virginia Governor Tomblin directed WVDE to conduct a research study to examine teacher planning time across the state. A primary component of the study was a teacher interview. Many teachers commented about the new demands being placed on planning time, including the need for additional preparation as instruction shifts to the newly adopted Common Core Standards, the new teacher evaluation system that requires the completion of additional tasks and increased demands to meaningfully incorporate technology (WVDE, 2013a). A striking 40% of the teacher commenters indicated that other types of duties, such as administrative tasks, must be completed during the daily planning time.

Perhaps the negative correlation suggests that in-depth instructional planning is not able to occur during individual planning periods simply due to the many demands placed on teachers.

One principal commented, "Our state must recognize that teachers need time to talk, and if they are not willing to give it to them, then student achievement is going to remain the same."

Due to the long standing West Virginia initiative regarding the implementation of collaborative planning and organized PLCs, the finding that many school principals would be very knowledgeable about collaboration and teacher teams was not unexpected. As one principal noted, PLCs "can be beneficial for students and meaningful for teachers when implemented correctly." In fact, for every survey item, the majority of principals selected "somewhat satisfied" or "very satisfied" as their response to questions framed from effective indicators of PLCs as found in the literature. Although principals expressed high levels of satisfaction with the implementation of PLCs, they expressed lower levels of confidence regarding the positive effect PLCs might have on student achievement

Likewise, principals expressed satisfaction with the utilization of the structural conditions in place at their schools. Principals' responses indicated that teachers have a good understanding regarding how collaborative planning time should be utilized in order to improve student achievement. Principals also believed that teachers meet consistently during scheduled collaborative times.

In addition to changing the structure of the school schedule, creating a school environment conducive to collaboration was important for principals and teachers. A positive climate and school culture is essential for PLCs to flourish. West Virginia principals reported that many indicators of effective PLCs were present in their schools. Schools must continue to work to build a solid foundation of trust in order to create effective collaborative relationships (Wallace Foundation, 2011). Principal responses indicated that trust had been developed among teacher teams, allowing for open and honest discussion regarding ideas to improve student

learning. One principal commented, “They are willing to try different approaches; however, the team is made of strong personalities that clash from time to time but work through the clashing for the students' sake.” When high levels of trust are present, teachers tend to be more comfortable in sharing creative solutions. Welcoming and encouraging divergent thinking in collaborative teams is important.

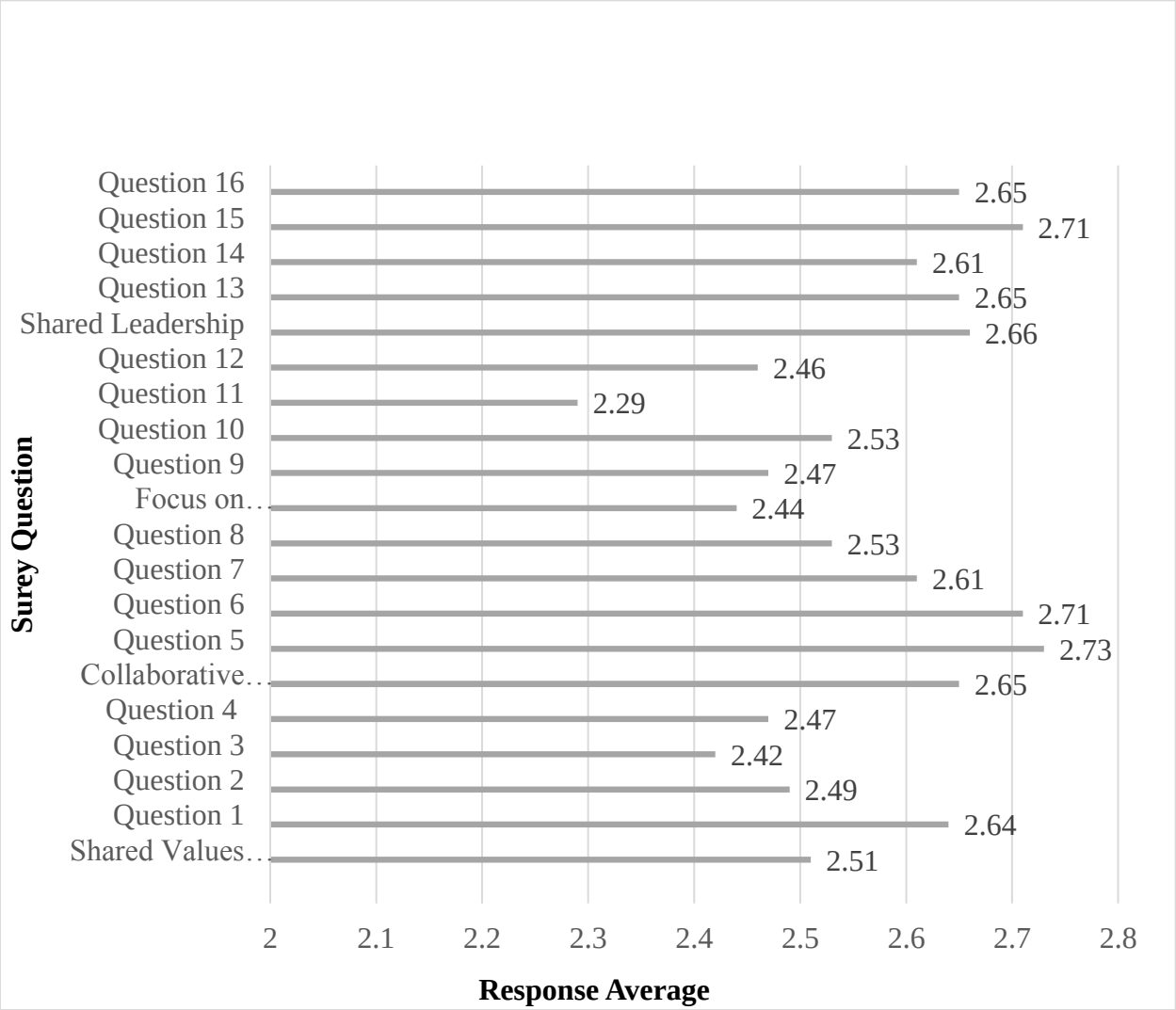
Principals also indicated that they felt confident in their teachers as the teachers began to assume responsibility for student learning as a team. One principal noted that in addition to the general education teachers, the ancillary staff also was actively involved in the collaborative teams; “Our Special Ed and Title I staff play an integral role in working with the staff to analyze data and plan skill groups based upon student needs.” Another principal noted that having specialists as part of the collaborative team is also very beneficial: “The key to our success is a learning skills strategist who can quickly ascertain the needs of struggling students. She is integral in team and SAT meetings.” School Assistance Team (SAT) meetings are part of a process to ensure that individual students’ instructional needs are met. According to principals, teacher leadership skills are enhanced when effective collaborative teams are in place. Leadership must be shared and distributed among all team members to promote an interdependent team (Lieberman and Miller, 1999).

Respondents also felt that collaborative planning had been an important step toward developing strong teams of teachers, although one principal indicated that the development of effective teacher teams would take some time: “This is a journey that will take several years to implement fully.” A highly functioning PLC works as a team and holds itself mutually accountable for common goals (Dufour et al., 2010, p. 11).

Many principals felt that the creation of collaborative teams had helped them to be more comfortable sharing decision-making responsibility. "We are blessed with strong academic teachers who care about the success of students. Because of the block schedule, our middle school collaborative teams can easily meet regarding student concerns and get those issues on the table quickly."

Even though principals' responses were generally positive, important insights can be gleaned from the shift in frequency counts and average rating scores which were calculated for each question. Response averages ranged from a low of 2.29 on Question 11 "How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have successfully included an evaluative component for the purpose of monitoring the effectiveness of action plans?" to a high of 2.73 on Question 5 "How satisfied are you that through collaborative activities 8th grade teams have been able to build a foundation of trust where divergent ideas are welcomed?" Figure 7 displays the rating averages for each survey question as well as the rating average for each PLC component. These differences in frequency and rating averages may provide a glimpse into reasons why no correlation existed between collaborative planning time and reading achievement.

*Figure 7.* Principal Perspectives: Response Averages by Question (2013).




The principals were least satisfied with topics related to the PLC elements of shared values and vision and of focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, as identified by the lowest response averages. Questions 2, 3, 4, 9, 11, and 12 in these sections were the lowest scoring questions on the survey (Figure 7). Specifically, principals expressed lower levels of satisfaction on questions regarding whether or not collaborative teams not only regularly reviewed the school's mission and vision but "lived" the school's mission on a daily basis, ensured student performance data are the primary driver of team discussions, and

developed both long and short term goals with accompanying timelines and an evaluative component for monitoring progress.

Although data from the principal perspectives survey indicated a great deal of satisfaction with the implementation of PLCs in West Virginia schools, effective implementation did not appear consistent across all of the essential PLC components: shared values and vision, collaborative culture, focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning, and supportive and shared leadership.

Principals were most satisfied with the implementation of a shared and supportive leadership and with the development of a collaborative culture within their schools. Principals were least satisfied that their schools were able to focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning and on the development of shared values and vision.

The PLC elements of the development of a shared values and vision and the ability to maintain a focus on examining outcomes to improve student learning are critical factors in the quest for increased student achievement. Educators must understand that school improvement is a process, not a program; although it is important to develop a repertoire of available instructional materials, the ultimate tool for school improvement is the unified and collective data-based work of educators. A deep, thorough, and consistent implementation of each of the PLC components will directly determine a school's ability to increase student achievement (Buffum et al., 2008).

As school administrators began to learn about the PLC process, some components were seemingly easier to implement than others, and in some instances educators believed that a true PLC was in place, when in reality, only one or two PLC characteristics were present (Buffum et al., 2008). Typically, schools have embraced the PLC process, yet they are not demonstrating

gains in student achievement and have failed to implement all of the essential components of an effective PLC (Buffum et al., 2008).

In comparison to other PLC indicators, principals expressed lower levels of satisfaction on two of the four survey items regarding the development of shared values and vision. Because the development and submission of an online strategic plan that includes a vision and mission has been a statewide practice for schools, the deeper dimension of the survey items that asked if the eighth grade teams had "regularly reviewed the mission and vision for the school" was probably the factor that caused principals to score this item at a lower level of satisfaction.

According to the literature, the design of vision and mission statements as flexible statements that are reviewed and revised as dictated by the needs of the students and the school is essential. Hong (1996) coined the phrase "purposeful tinkering" to describe the process of refining vision statements. Teachers must come together in a collaborative fashion to assess their current situation and develop new goals and objectives in order to move student achievement to higher levels.

Teachers must also work cooperatively outside of collaborative planning time and remain focused on the school's mission and vision; all decisions and actions must be centered on the agreed-upon mission and vision. One principal noted, "Some teachers (especially in eighth grade Language Arts in my school) do not always want to collaborate. Often the teachers will agree to collaborate with PLC and then do something different."

Continuous improvement practices, including the utilization of data as the primary driver of collaborative discussions, were also items that scored at a relatively lower level. Just as the vision and mission must be revised, the adjustment of both long- and short-term goals should occur on a regular basis. One principal noted that an obstacle to effective teams was the

teachers' "lack of knowing what to do with the data results and which data results are important." Teachers need training to understand and implement the continuous improvement process. Teachers need time to collect and review data collaboratively with their teams. With continued practice, teachers will be better able to make collaborative decisions that center on collected data.

As goals and objectives are developed, making sure they are attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound is important (O'Neil & Conzemius, 2005). Effective teacher teams work interdependently to achieve the agreed-upon goals, and all members are held accountable according to predetermined monitoring and evaluative components. Each PLC team must determine a systemic and regular monitoring process (Dufour et al., 2010).

The lowest-scoring question on the principal survey centered on the implementation of a monitoring component (Figure 7). Monitoring and evaluative components must be in place in order for collaborative teams to make frequent checks on the progress toward their identified goals.

Each PLC component is not an isolated event; rather, the totality of the components is a fluid and never-ending process. For example, an effective vision and mission statement is not written during a single staff meeting, placed in the front of the student and teacher handbooks, and never reviewed again. As Buffum et al. (2008) suggest, this constant review "is the difference between 'doing' PLC practices and 'being' a PLC." (p. 17).

West Virginia schools began to implement Professional Learning Communities as the mechanism for encouraging shared decision making among school staff. Although the early focus of West Virginia PLCs was primarily on increased student achievement, collaborative

and/or distributive leadership frameworks may also be utilized to engage teachers in discussion about avenues for improvement across all areas of the school environment.

Granted all PLC components must be in place to facilitate school improvement, educators' understanding that this process should become pervasive in all aspects of the school environment is also important. For schools to experience significant improvement, the entire school environment must be reviewed, and change must include "patterns of thinking, culture entrenched by past practices, and the climate in which the school's culture rests" (Zepeda, 2003, p. 11).

The results of this study indicated in general, that principals perceived that many of the critical elements of effective PLCs were present in their eighth grade teams. However, when asked about whether they thought PLCs were having a positive effect on student achievement, almost half (43%) of the respondents revealed that they were only "somewhat" satisfied with increased achievement as a result of collaborative teams, and an additional 10% reported being "not at all" satisfied regarding increased student achievement. These findings point to the need for continued research on the potential of collaborative planning as a means to improve student achievement and for continued efforts in the implementation of PLCs. Particular attention should be given to the continuous improvement cycle, specifically in regard to the development and implementation of timelines and to monitoring and evaluative components.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This study examined only reading proficiency and eighth grade teacher planning practices; reviewing data from other grades and subject areas might reveal additional relationships. The survey was conducted during the last few weeks of the school year, which made it more difficult to gather information from school administrators. Additionally, this study

reviewed assessment data that was nine months old and teacher planning practices from the previous school year. In an effort to avoid such a data lag of one year's time, replicating this study for subsequent years with data collection activities taking place in the beginning months of school would be beneficial. If subsequent studies were initiated in September or October, advantages would include a more timely examination of test data and teacher planning practices.

Since this study revealed a very high rate of principal turnover, another recommendation for a follow-up study would be to investigate the relationship between principal turnover and the implementation of sustained collaborative planning. Additionally, it would be beneficial to conduct the study from a teacher perspective and compare teacher to principal responses.

**Summary**

Since the mid-2000s, many West Virginia schools have sought to implement collaborative planning and PLCs as a means to increase student achievement. However, test data do not indicate increasing levels of student achievement in the area of reading. Limitless variables affect student achievement, so that proving or disproving that a certain factor is the sole reason for change in achievement levels is difficult.

Schools become more effective when they practice a specific cycle of activities: development of a vision, gathering and analyzing data in relation to the vision, planning for instruction to move the school and students toward the vision, implementing the plan, and evaluating the effectiveness of the plan according to progress toward achievement of the vision (Cushman, 1999). In consideration of fiscal responsibility, school improvement efforts must focus on rethinking how to use existing resources and specifically, how to use teachers, the most valuable instructional resource (Miles & Darling-Hammond, 1997). In order to increase student achievement, continuous improvement practices must become standard operating procedures in

West Virginia schools, and as found in this study, continuous improvement practices are in direct alignment with the standards for professional learning communities. If schools allocate a sufficient amount of resources, most importantly teachers' time, for a comprehensive implementation of PLCs then increases in student achievement should follow.

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# APPENDIX A

w w w . m a r s h a l l . e d u

**Office of Research Integrity**
Institutional Review Board
401 11th St., Suite 1300
Huntington, WV 25701

FWA 00002704

IRB1 #00002205
IRB2 #00003206

June 2, 2014

Dennis Anderson, Ed.D.
Leadership Studies, MUGC

RE: IRBNet ID# 609435-1
**At:** Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Dr. Anderson:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Protocol Title:** | [609435-1] THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER PLANNING TIME AND EIGHTH GRADE READING ACHIEVEMENT IN WEST VIRGINIA SCHOOLS |
| **Expiration Date:** | June 2, 2015 |
| **Site Location:** | MUGC |
| **Submission Type:** | New Project APPROVED |
| **Review Type:** | Exempt Review |

In accordance with 45CFR46.101(b)(2), the above study and informed consent were granted Exempted approval today by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee for the period of 12 months. The approval will expire June 2, 2015. A continuing review request for this study must be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

This study is for student Anne Monterosso.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/ Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, PhD, CIP at 304-696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Marshall University IRB

| | |
|---|---|
| Approved on: | 6/2/14 |
| Expires on: | 6/2/15 |
| Study number: | 609435 |

Thank you for participating in this anonymous online survey as part of a research study. The survey is being conducted in order to investigate the relationship between teacher planning time and eighth grade reading achievement in West Virginia schools.

There are no risks or benefits to you in participating in this survey. Your participation in this survey is entirely voluntary, and you may terminate your participation at any time by clicking the "cancel" button. It is hoped, however, that you will take the time to share your perceptions on this important subject. The entire survey should take no more than 10 to 15 minutes.

All data collected through this survey will be kept entirely anonymous and will be reported only in aggregate form. This means that no information will be reported that publicly links any individual or school name or other identifying information with any research results.

By clicking the "next" below and the "done" button at the end of the survey, you affirm that you are at least 22 years of age and are giving your consent to participate in this survey. Thank you for your help in providing this valuable information. If you have any questions about this survey, you may contact the principal investigator, Dr. Dennis Anderson, at 304-746-8989. or at andersond@marshall.edu. If you have concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact Dr. Stephen Cooper, Chairman of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2, at 304-696-4303.

Please print a copy of this consent for your records.

## APPENDIX B

READING PROFICIENCY AND TYPE AND AMOUNTS OF TEACHER PLANNING

| School | 8th grade reading proficiency levels (%) | Amount of time allotted per week for individual teacher planning time (minutes) | Amount of time allotted per week for collaborative planning time (minutes) | Total amount of time allotted per week for teachers (both individual and collaborative planning time, minutes) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 76.29 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 2. | 75.00 | 235 | 0 | 235 |
| 3. | 72.00 | 225 | 11 | 236 |
| 4. | 68.96 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 5. | 68.86 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 6. | 68.86 | 200 | 175 | 375 |
| 7. | 68.53 | 200 | 200 | 400 |
| 8. | 66.66 | 225 | 40 | 265 |
| 9. | 66.66 | 225 | 150 | 375 |
| 10. | 65.85 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 11. | 65.16 | 225 | 135 | 360 |
| 12. | 64.92 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 13. | 64.91 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 14. | 62.87 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 15. | 62.50 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 16. | 62.16 | 175 | 0 | 175 |
| 17. | 61.90 | 245 | 205 | 450 |
| 18. | 61.71 | 210 | 60 | 270 |
| 19. | 61.53 | 210 | 210 | 420 |
| 20. | 60.15 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 21. | 59.72 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 22. | 59.54 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 23. | 59.52 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 24. | 59.17 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 25. | 57.83 | 165 | 30 | 195 |
| 26. | 57.42 | 210 | 60 | 270 |
| 27. | 57.14 | 225 | 90 | 315 |
| 28. | 57.14 | 225 | 60 | 285 |
| 29. | 57.14 | 210 | 0 | 210 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30. | 56.86 | 225 | 30 | 255 |
| 31. | 56.70 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 32. | 56.15 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 33. | 55.79 | 215 | 0 | 215 |
| 34. | 55.73 | 200 | 75 | 275 |
| 35. | 55.26 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 36. | 54.89 | 240 | 240 | 480 |
| 37. | 54.83 | 246 | 164 | 410 |
| 38. | 54.83 | 235 | 90 | 325 |
| 39. | 54.54 | 210 | 60 | 270 |
| 40. | 54.18 | 225 | 20 | 245 |
| 41. | 53.84 | 230 | 230 | 460 |
| 42. | 53.81 | 260 | 265 | 525 |
| 43. | 53.71 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 44. | 53.58 | 215 | 0 | 215 |
| 45. | 53.57 | 200 | 0 | 200 |
| 46. | 53.17 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 47. | 53.09 | 220 | 19 | 239 |
| 48. | 52.17 | 225 | 13 | 238 |
| 49. | 52.13 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 50. | 52.10 | 250 | 0 | 250 |
| 51. | 51.76 | 200 | 120 | 320 |
| 52. | 51.61 | 215 | 0 | 215 |
| 53. | 51.25 | 150 | 150 | 300 |
| 54. | 50.92 | 200 | 100 | 300 |
| 55. | 50.00 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 56. | 50.00 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 57. | 49.65 | 420 | 45 | 465 |
| 58. | 49.53 | 215 | 30 | 245 |
| 59. | 49.38 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 60. | 49.23 | 300 | 0 | 300 |
| 61. | 48.94 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 62. | 48.64 | 225 | 135 | 360 |
| 63. | 47.95 | 230 | 230 | 460 |
| 64. | 47.95 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 65. | 47.59 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 66. | 47.52 | 260 | 30 | 290 |
| 67. | 47.40 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 68. | 47.25 | 240 | 60 | 300 |
| 69. | 47.12 | 220 | 0 | 220 |
| 70. | 46.44 | 215 | 43 | 258 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 71. | 45.45 | 225 | 30 | 255 |
| 72. | 45.23 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 73. | 45.00 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 74. | 44.89 | 240 | 96 | 336 |
| 75. | 44.73 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 76. | 44.44 | 450 | 100 | 550 |
| 77. | 44.36 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 78. | 43.47 | 225 | 25 | 250 |
| 79. | 43.28 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 80. | 42.50 | 200 | 30 | 230 |
| 81. | 42.06 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 82. | 41.62 | 200 | 200 | 400 |
| 83. | 41.60 | 210 | 60 | 270 |
| 84. | 41.08 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 85. | 40.96 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 86. | 37.74 | 225 | 23 | 248 |
| 87. | 37.50 | 205 | 50 | 255 |
| 88. | 36.48 | 450 | 0 | 450 |
| 89. | 36.41 | 225 | 225 | 450 |
| 90. | 35.08 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 91. | 34.88 | 225 | 30 | 255 |
| 92. | 34.48 | 225 | 11 | 236 |
| 93. | 34.14 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 94. | 33.33 | 200 | 200 | 400 |
| 95. | 33.33 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 96. | 30.66 | 225 | 30 | 255 |
| 97. | 29.16 | 450 | 0 | 450 |
| 98. | 26,00 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 99. | 22.22 | 225 | 0 | 225 |
| 100. | 17.94 | 250 | 250 | 500 |

## APPENDIX C

INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Dear Principals,

As a former principal, I do know and appreciate just how busy you all are, especially at this time of the year. I hope you will consider taking a few minutes of your time to participate in this study which will review 8th grade reading achievement (spring 2013 results) in relation to the 2012-2013 8th grade teacher planning practices. I believe the results of this study will be of interest to you.

I would like to ask you to participate in two components of the study:

1. In the next few days, I will be calling your school to gather 2012-2013 planning time minutes for 8th grade teachers. Your personal identification will not be included in this study.

**If it is easier, you may provide the requested information by calling me on my cell 304-488-6186 or at home 428-7612 or you may leave the requested information on a "post it" note by your school secretary's phone. (if you leave a phone message, please indicate the name of your school)*

- Number of **minutes** scheduled **per week** for **individual planning** per eighth grade teacher for school year **2012-2013.**
- Number of **additional** planning minutes scheduled **per week** specifically for **collaborative planning** per eighth grade teacher for school year **2012-2013.** (*Please try to provide a weekly average and include all additional planning times, such as early dismissals, substitute days, etc.)*

2. Please complete the corresponding survey which should take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/wvprincipalsurvey

Again, thank you for taking the time to participate in this study.

Anne Monterosso

## APPENDIX D

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

*Teacher Planning and Collaboration: Principals' Perspectives*

| | Not at all satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Very Satisfied | Extremely Satisfied | Does not apply |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Shared Values and Vision** | | | | | |
| 1. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team participants have a shared understanding of how common planning time ought to be used? | | | | | |
| 2. How satisfied are you that 8th grade teachers have not only participated in the development of the mission and vision, but that they also have regularly reviewed the mission and vision for your school? | | | | | |
| 3. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have developed long term priorities and short term goals with accompanying timelines for reaching those targets? | | | | | |
| 4. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams work interdependently to not only work toward but to "live" the school's mission on a daily basis? | | | | | |
| **Collaborative Culture** | | | | | |
| 5. How satisfied are you that through collaborative activities 8th grade teams have been able to build a foundation of trust where divergent ideas are welcomed? | | | | | |
| 6. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team activities have promoted the idea of a team responsibility for all student results? | | | | | |
| 7. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team meetings have improved responsiveness not only to student weaknesses but also to student strengths? | | | | | |
| 8. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams regularly celebrate successes? | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Focus on Examining Outcomes to Improve Student Learning** | | | | | |
| 9. How satisfied are you that student performance data are the primary driver of 8th grade collaborative team discussions? | | | | | |
| 10. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have utilized data to generate creative solutions or interventions? | | | | | |
| 11. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have successfully included an evaluative component for the purpose of monitoring the effectiveness of action plans? | | | | | |
| 12. Based on the 2012-2013 school year, how satisfied are you that your school's 8th grade collaborative teams have had a positive impact on student achievement, specifically in the area of Reading/Language Arts? | | | | | |
| **Supportive and Shared Leadership** | | | | | |
| 13. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative teams has helped to develop leadership skills in teachers? | | | | | |
| 14. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams understand and apply the concept of continuous improvement? | | | | | |
| 15. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative activities has helped to develop strong teams of teachers? | | | | | |
| 16. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative teams has helped you to share leadership and decision making specifically related to instructional improvement? | | | | | |
| **Miscellaneous** | | | | | |
| 17. What types of teams does your school have in place at the 8th grade level? Check all that apply. | Grade level<br><br>Subject area<br><br>Interdisciplinary teams<br><br>By type of student<br><br>Other<br><br>We do not have 8th grade collaborative teams. | | | | |
| 18. How satisfied are you that there is adequate time in your school schedule for 8th grade collaborative teams to meet? | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams meet consistently during scheduled times? | | | | | |
| 20. What are the biggest obstacles 8th grade collaborative teams face (if any) in meeting their goals? (pick up to three) | Poor meeting dynamics<br><br>Team dynamics<br><br>Time constraints<br><br>Confusion about purpose<br><br>Lack of teacher expertise in creating interventions<br><br>Lack of teacher expertise in the continuous improvement process<br><br>Lack of data/assessment results | | | | |
| 21. What actions or initiatives (if any) contribute most to the effective performance of your 8th grade collaborative teams? Check all that apply. | Availability of multiple pieces of data<br><br>Availability of school staff to provide additional planning periods<br><br>Extra time provided by the district, such as delayed start of early release<br><br>Substitutes provided to allow time to collaborate<br><br>Staff development on data analysis and continuous improvement practices<br><br>Staff development on Support for Personalized Learning<br><br>Staff development on effective collaboration practices<br><br>Staff development on effective instructional strategies to address academic deficits<br><br>Staff development on effective instructional strategies to | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | accelerate the middle/higher level students<br><br>We do not have collaborative teams. |

## APPENDIX E

DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONSES

*Teacher Planning and Collaboration: Principals' Perspectives*

| | Not at all satisfied | Somewhat Satisfied | Very Satisfied | Extremely Satisfied | Does not apply | Rating Average | Response Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team participants have a shared understanding of how common planning time ought to be used? | 2 | 26 | 22 | 9 | 0 | 2.64 | 59 |
| | 3.4% | 44.1% | 37.3% | 15.3% | 0.0% | | |
| 2. How satisfied are you that 8th grade teachers have not only participated in the development of the mission and vision, but that they also have regularly reviewed the mission and vision for your school? | 3 | 26 | 28 | 2 | 0 | 2.49 | 59 |
| | 5.1% | 44.1% | 47.5% | 3.4% | 0.0% | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have developed long term priorities and short term goals with accompanying timelines for reaching those targets? | 5 | 27 | 18 | 5 | 5 | 2.63 | 60 |
| | 8.3% | 45.0% | 30.0% | 8.3% | 8.3% | | |
| 4. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams work interdependently to not only work toward but to "live" the school's mission on a daily basis? | 3 | 29 | 17 | 6 | 5 | 2.68 | 60 |
| | 5.0% | 48.3% | 28.3% | 10.0% | 8.3% | | |
| 5. How satisfied are you that through collaborative activities 8th grade teams have been able to build a foundation of trust where divergent ideas are welcomed? | 2 | 18 | 23 | 8 | 6 | 2.95 | 57 |
| | 3.5% | 31.6% | 40.4% | 14.0% | 10.5% | | |
| 6. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team activities have promoted the idea of a team responsibility for all student results? | 0 | 21 | 24 | 6 | 6 | 2.95 | 57 |
| | 0.0% | 36.8% | 42.1% | 10.5% | 10.5% | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative team meetings have improved responsiveness not only to student weaknesses but also to student strengths? | 2 | 23 | 19 | 7 | 6 | 2.86 | 57 |
| | 3.5% | 40.4% | 33.3% | 12.3% | 10.5% | | |
| 8. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams regularly celebrate successes? | 4 | 23 | 17 | 7 | 6 | 2.79 | 57 |
| | 7.0% | 40.4% | 29.8% | 12.3% | 10.5% | | |
| 9. How satisfied are you that student performance data are the primary driver of 8th grade collaborative team discussions? | 5 | 24 | 15 | 7 | 6 | 2.74 | 57 |
| | 8.8% | 42.1% | 26.3% | 12.3% | 10.5% | | |
| 10. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have utilized data to generate creative solutions or interventions? | 3 | 26 | 14 | 8 | 6 | 2.79 | 57 |
| | 5.3% | 45.6% | 24.6% | 14.0% | 10.5% | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams have successfully included an evaluative component for the purpose of monitoring the effectiveness of action plans? | 10 | 22 | 13 | 6 | 6 | 2.58 | 57 |
| | 17.5% | 38.6% | 22.8% | 10.5% | 10.5% | | |
| 12. Based on the 2012-2013 school year, how satisfied are you that your school's 8th grade collaborative teams have had a positive impact on student achievement, specifically in the area of Reading/Language Arts? | 5 | 23 | 16 | 6 | 6 | 2.73 | 56 |
| | 8.9% | 41.1% | 28.6% | 10.7% | 10.7% | | |
| 13. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative teams has helped to develop leadership skills in teachers? | 1 | 22 | 22 | 6 | 6 | 2.89 | 57 |
| | 1.8% | 38.6% | 38.6% | 10.5% | 10.5% | | |
| 14. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams understand and apply the concept of continuous improvement? | 1 | 24 | 20 | 6 | 6 | 2.86 | 57 |
| | 1.8% | 42.1% | 35.1% | 10.5% | 10.5% | | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative activities has helped to develop strong teams of teachers? | 1<br>1.8% | 25<br>43.9% | 13<br>22.8% | 12<br>21.1% | 6<br>10.5% | 2.95 | 57 |
| 16. How satisfied are you that the implementation of 8th grade collaborative teams has helped you to share leadership and decision making specifically related to instructional improvement? | 2<br>3.5% | 21<br>36.8% | 21<br>36.8% | 7<br>12.3% | 6<br>10.5% | 2.89 | 57 |
| 17. What types of teams does your school have in place at the 8th grade level? Check all that apply. | 69.09% Grade level<br>49.09% Subject area<br>36.36% Interdisciplinary teams<br>5.45% By type of student<br>9.09% Other<br>7.27% We do not have 8th grade collaborative teams. | | | | | | |
| 18. How satisfied are you that there is adequate time in your school schedule for 8th grade collaborative teams to meet? | 9<br>15.8% | 12<br>21.1% | 15<br>28.1% | 15<br>28.1% | 6<br>10.5% | 2.95 | 57 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 19. How satisfied are you that 8th grade collaborative teams meet consistently during scheduled times? | 6<br>10.7% | 12<br>21.4% | 21<br>36.8% | 11<br>19.6% | 6<br>0.11% | 2.98 | 56 |
| 20. What are the biggest obstacles 8th grade collaborative teams face (if any) in meeting their goals? (pick up to three) | 20.00% Poor meeting dynamics<br><br>34.00% Team dynamics<br><br>44.00% Time constraints<br><br>22.00% Confusion about purpose<br><br>28.00% Lack of teacher expertise in creating interventions<br><br>40.00% Lack of teacher expertise in the continuous improvement process<br><br>12.00% Lack of data/assessment results | | | | | | |
| 21. What actions or initiatives (if any) contribute most to the effective performance of your 8th grade collaborative teams? Check all that apply. | 59.62% Availability of multiple pieces of data<br><br>21.15% Availability of school staff to provide additional planning periods<br><br>28.85 Extra time provided by the district, such as delayed start of early release<br><br>11.54% Substitutes provided to allow time to collaborate<br><br>57.69% Staff development on data analysis and continuous improvement practices<br><br>40.38% Staff development on Support for Personalized Learning<br><br>32.69% Staff development on effective collaboration practices<br><br>36.54% Staff development on effective instructional strategies to address academic deficits<br><br>13.46% Staff development on effective instructional strategies to accelerate the middle/higher level students<br><br>13.46% We do not have collaborative teams. | | | | | | |

# VITAE

ANNE M. MONTEROSSO

Education

Ed.D. Educational Leadership (2014)
Marshall University
Huntington, WV

Ed.S. Educational Leadership (2013
Marshall University
Huntington, WV

M.A. Educational Leadership (2000)
Marshall University
Huntington, WV

M.A. Special Education (1990)
West Virginia University
Morgantown, WV

B.A. Early Childhood Education (1984)
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Charlotte, NC

Work Experience

West Virginia Department of Education
Charleston, WV
2009 to present
Special Education Coordinator

Wood County Schools
Parkersburg, WV
2005-2009, 1986-1998
Elementary Principal
Elementary Gifted Teacher

Monroe County Board of Education
Union, WV
2004-2005
Student Services Director

Belpre City Schools
Belpre, OH
1998-2004
Coordinator, Gifted and Talented Program
Elementary School Principal

General Skills

Extensive public education experience; teacher, principal, district and state level administration,

Strong knowledge base in current educational practices and policies,

Expert knowledge level in the field of Special Education, Early Childhood Education, Reading, School Administration and Secondary Transition for At Risk Youth,

Hands on experience with data analysis and implementation of continuous improvement practices,

Ability to coordinate tasks and resources with positive outcomes for students and families.