The Role of School Leadership Teams in Elementary Schools Identified as Accreditation Denied in the Commonwealth of Virginia

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Dedication

I wish to dedicate this dissertation work to my family and critical friends. A special thanks is given to my wife, Tracy Hubbard, who has been my biggest cheerleader, best friend, and support system for 25 years. Without her, none of this journey would have been completed. My two children, Maqoi and Miller, who were always understanding and supportive whenever I needed an extra push to complete the journey. My hope is that I have shown them that a man who had two parents, Theodore and Thelma Hubbard, who never graduated from high school can achieve great things with love, support, and prayer.

I have to give thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because without him in my life, I could achieve nothing. I also give a special thanks to my sisters, Wanda and Yvette, and my brothers, Edwardo and Michael, who lent their support in many ways both seen and unseen.

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I would not have been able to complete this process without my awesome wife Tracy, and the best children in the world my daughter Maqoi and my son Miller. I am so grateful to have you guys in my life and I thank the Lord for you every day.

…

Abstract of Dissertation

The Role of School Leadership Teams in Elementary Schools Identified as Accreditation Denied in the Commonwealth of Virginia

As a result of federal legislation (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015) accreditation ratings of elementary schools are based on the performance of third through fifth grade students on the end of year assessments in the content subjects of reading and math. As a result of these requirements schools that fail to meet these standards are identified as Accreditation Denied in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Once a school receives this designation certain requirements are mandated by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to assist in the improvement efforts toward accreditation. Two of these requirements are the implementation of a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan and the formation of a School Leadership Team. Schools and School districts implement a variety of approaches to the responsibilities of team members and the required components of school improvement planning. As a result of these approaches, toward school improvement processes and distributed leadership responsibilities, research confirmed that when both are aligned with the needs of the school population improvement goals increase and accreditation ratings improve (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Benolieil, 2017; Bush & Glover, 2012; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995; DuFour, 2004; Elmore, 2014; Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004, 2008; Hauge, Norenes, & Vedoy, 2014; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Rigby, 2013; Smylie, 1992; Spillane, 2005; Wallace, 2002). This study determined, through an instrumental case study, what the role of the school leadership

team is in relation to the school improvement process in schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The theoretical framework of distributed leadership was used as the foundation for the conceptual framework for this study. This study provides a systematic approach to the development of the school leadership team through the distributed leadership framework and professional development for the School Leadership Team in the instructional leadership responsibilities in elementary schools denied accreditation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview

The onset of the 21st century marked the beginning of a transformational change in the application of standards-based testing determining the educational accountability of United States public schools. The introduction of a standards-based testing system, determining a school's accreditation ratings, is one of the primary catalysts for this reform movement. The accountability of schools based on student achievement, as measured by summative, end-of-the-year state tests, reshaped the manner in which superintendents, principals, and teachers engaged in their daily practice. School districts began to rethink instructional leadership practices, curriculum writing, testing procedures, and instructional delivery due to the implementation of the standards based testing reform.

The first Standard of Learning (SOL) assessment in the Commonwealth of Virginia occurred in 1995, and initially, only select grade levels administered the assessment. However, after the inception of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), testing and accountability in U.S. public schools became the standard for school and district accreditation ratings. As a result of NCLB, all public schools were mandated by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to assess students from third through eighth grades annually in reading and math. Because students' academic performance on end-of-year assessments determined a school's effectiveness in teaching the required curricula in math and reading, the focus of leadership reform efforts changed as well. Instructional leadership reform shifted from a unilateral approach (principal) to

multilateral approach (principals, instructional specialists, teacher-leaders) in response to student performance data determining accreditation ratings.

During the 1980s and early 1990s, the unilateral, principal-driven approach to school leadership was the norm. Principals were the primary source of knowledge and guidance for teachers in school reform efforts (Gronn, 2000; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Louis, 2015). Principal leadership in the unilateral approach places a greater emphasis on the individual as the observer, evaluator, trainer, and motivator for instructional staff within the school environment. In contrast, the multilateral approach involves the different tasks being distributed among many levels of personnel within the school environment. The impact of federal legislation (NCLB, 2002), shifted the responsibilities of instructional leadership to a collaborative (multilateral) approach in response to the standards-based testing accountability measures.

The multilateral approach derived from the work of several theorists and their interpretation of collaborative or shared leadership in the school environment where multiple individuals work collectively on specific instructional goals (Day, 2000; DuFour, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Spillane, 2005). The distributed leadership process serves to improve the organization's capacity to implement and sustain change through the collective efforts of specific specialists within the educational environment. However, the primary source of instructional leadership, the principal, is responsible for establishing an environment where the multilateral sources of instructional leadership are empowered to achieve the instructional goals in the school improvement process (Day, 2010; DuFour, 2004; Hauge, Norenes, & Vedoy, 2014; Heck

& Hallinger, 2010; Kaufman, Grimm, & Miller, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Spillane, 2005).

Instructional leadership in the elementary school environment is the primary responsibility of the building principal. The distributed model of instructional leadership includes the assistant principal and the School Leadership Team (SLT) in the observation and feedback, professional development, and data disaggregation cycle with assigned teachers and staff (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2004; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2004; Mitchell & Castle, 2005). The SLT is an organization within the school environment structured to distribute the responsibility for school improvement across multiple levels of staff members. The SLT consists of teacher leaders, instructional specialist, resource teachers, and in some cases members of the community (Fernandez, 2011; Rigby, 2013). However, as with any organization, a central figure is in charge of the organization. Within the SLT, the building principal assumes this role. The principal's leadership skills, experiences, and professional development play a key role in the success of the SLT (Benoliel, 2017; Rigby, 2013). A lack of depth of knowledge in these areas can impact the principal's ability to formulate the structures and processes necessary for the SLT to acknowledge, accept, and act on their purpose on the team toward school improvement (Blase & Blase, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Rigby, 2013).

Traditionally, the building principal in elementary schools assumes the responsibility of managing the daily organizational and operational procedures in the school environment (Cain & Gunter, 2012). Subsequently, the primary operational responsibilities of the principal are the instructional leadership of the faculty and staff,

and comprehensive school improvement as measured by student achievement on end-of-year, standards-based tests (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Elmore, 2014; Kaniuka, 2012; Mitchell & Castle, 2005). However, over the past two decades, the importance of school improvement has increased to new levels due to standards-based testing and achievement measured by subgroups of students and not just all students collectively. As a result, the distributed model of instructional leadership in elementary schools has become a common practice to lead school improvement efforts (Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2004; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2004).

The distribution of instructional responsibilities is commonly referred to as distributed, collaborative, and even shared leadership (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Ruebling, Stow, Kayona, & Clarke, 2004). The distributed process is characterized by the instructional leader's establishing a system wherein members are empowered and equipped with the tools necessary to lead others in the school improvement continuum (Bush & Glover, 2012; Goldstein, 2004; Hallinger, 2003; Harris, 2004, 2008; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Kaufman et al., 2012; Knapp, Honig, Plecki, Portin, & Copland, 2014; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Rigby, 2013; Spillane, 2005). Proponents of distributed leadership cite the need for schools to look at the impact of collaborative structures for student achievement and teacher development (Elmore, 2014; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

Furthermore, several researchers subscribe to the theory that implementation of the following components facilitates collaborative reform: (a) developing normative organizational and operational structures for daily practice, (b) establishing the

environment that creates structures that promote learning of new practices, and (c) identifying the reality of the problem while creating intentional practices to resolve the problem (Day, 2010; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Huber & Conway, 2015; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). The School Improvement Planning (SIP) process and the distributed leadership efforts of school leadership teams positively impact student achievement (Benoliel, 2017; Fernandez, 2011; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Murphy, 2015). The previous research examined these two practices independently, and the missing component was the research on how the SIP and SLT work together to improve school accreditation ratings.

Therefore, the goal of this study was to develop a deep understanding of the role of SLT in the school improvement process in elementary schools denied accreditation within the Commonwealth of Virginia. This study took place in an urban school district where a majority of the schools have been denied accreditation. However, the findings from the study will be applicable to any school within the Commonwealth of Virginia having the designation of accreditation denied.

Statement of the Problem

Current researchers explore the impact of SLTs and SIP on student achievement. However, research is limited regarding the collective impact of the two phenomena on student achievement. School leadership teams (SLT) and school improvement plans (SIP) are required by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE; 2017) for every school denied accreditation in the Commonwealth and receiving federal funding (ESSA, 2015).

The SLT is the source of instructional leadership and decision making in the instructional goals of elementary schools (DuFour, 2004; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Any organization features a primary source of leadership (Morgan, 2006), and in the case of the SLT, that responsibility belongs to the building principal (Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004; Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015). Therefore, the principal has to establish an environment wherein the members of the team can achieve the main goals of student improvement and teacher development through the creation of intentional practices and structures for SLT members' involvement in all phases of the school improvement process (Kaniuka, 2012; Rigby, 2013).

The use of distributed leadership as a strategy to improve student achievement is not having the desired results in elementary schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. According to data from state report cards, the number of schools that received the *accreditation denied* designation has steadily increased from 82 schools in 2013 to 212 schools in 2015 (VDOE, 2017). The researchers on distributed leadership promoted this practice as effective in the sharing of instructional responsibilities within the school environment. However, because school accreditation ratings of denied have steadily increased across the Commonwealth where the use of an SLT was mandated by the VDOE, it is necessary to investigate the impact of SLTs on the instructional improvement within these designated schools.

Schools in the Commonwealth are reported to the general public in accreditation designations. The 2017-2018 accreditation matrix included seven different designations on the schools' report card. The new system of implementation in the 2018-19 school

year reduced the designations from seven to three (Appendix A). Whenever a school in the commonwealth is denied accreditation, specific accountability measures required by the VDOE (Appendix B) must be implemented by the school and district. Schools that receive federal funds (Title I schools) have additional federal accountability requirements to be eligible to receive the allocated resources. Schools denied accreditation and receiving funds from the federal government have the largest number of requirements to remain in compliance.

A school is rated *accreditation denied* if it fails to meet the requirements for full or provisional accreditation for four consecutive years. Any school denied accreditation must provide parents and other interested parties the following: (a) written notice of the school's accreditation rating within 30 calendar days of the announcement of the rating by the VDOE, (b) a copy of the school division's proposed corrective action plan describing the steps to be taken to raise achievement to state standards, including a timeline for implementation, and (c) an opportunity to comment on the division's proposed corrective action plan prior to its adoption and the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the local school board and the Board of Education (VDOE, 2017). The accreditation rating of a school influences the manner in which stakeholders (students, teachers, parents, and community members) view the school. Therefore, if a school fails to meet the accreditation benchmarks on the academic assessments, the public scrutinizes and questions the effectiveness of the school in the educational preparation of the students they serve.

The dilemma of denied accreditation leads to speculation regarding the effectiveness of the SIP and the SLT in the process of improving schools' accreditation

statuses. However, the presence of a SLT and a SIP does not impact the achievement of students in elementary schools without certain norms and procedures in place to guide their daily work and implementation (Benoliel, 2017; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009). The SIP is a strategic plan aimed at school improvement as measured by student achievement. Quality SIPs consist of components that enhance the plan's success rate (Ahearn, 1998; Doud, 1995; Fernandez, 2011; Freeman, Bresciani, & Bresciani, 2004; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009). Additionally, the SLT is an organization designed to assist in the improvement efforts through a distributed approach to instructional leadership. Strategies such as defining roles, establishing systematic procedures, and offering professional development in instructional leadership enhance the SLT's effectiveness (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; DuFour, 2004; Hallinger, 2003; Hauge et al., 2014).

The SIP is a strategic planning process implemented in lower performing schools designed to accelerate the turnaround efforts of the particular schools. The process itself is characterized by setting goals specific to underperforming subgroups, identifying research-based strategies to improve the classroom instruction toward meeting the identified goals, and having an identified structure that monitors progress and adjust strategies by responding to the results from interval data derived from formative daily assessments and benchmark or unit assessments (Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Huber & Conway, 2015, Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Murphy, 2015; Wallace, 2002). School improvement planning is a fluid process that requires multiple levels of data sources analyzed by multiple levels of personnel (Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009). School improvement is not the sole

responsibility of a building principal and credit for improvement does not rest with them, nor does failure to meet goals (DuFour, 2004; Dunaway, Bird, Wang, & Hancock, 2013; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Murphy, 2015).

Numerous studies have addressed school leadership teams and school improvement planning in the United States and in other countries (Benoliel, 2017; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Harris, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Strunk Marsh, Bush-Mecenas, & Duque, 2015). School improvement is a multi-dimensional, collaborative approach to improving student achievement. The SIP serves as a guide toward student achievement, teacher development, and community involvement (Ahearn, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Kaufman et al., 2012; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008). The SLT is designed to advance the instructional leadership efforts of school environments to improve classroom instruction, student achievement, and teacher development (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane, 2005). In essence, the underlying issue is two phenomena designed to improve student achievement are working exclusively of one another. This study sought to explore whether and how two phenomena, SLT and SIP, which share the same focus of school improvement, function to improve academic achievement in schools denied accreditation.

Purpose and Research Questions

This study is an instrumental case study of an elementary school leadership team to acquire an understanding of their role in the school improvement process in schools denied accreditation. This research focused on two primary questions with guiding subsequent questions:

1. What are the processes building administrators engage to select and professionally develop members of the SLT in school improvement efforts?
    a. What role(s) does(do) instructional leaders assume in the selection and professional development of members of the SLT?
2. What are the responsibilities of SLT members in the school improvement process?
    a. How is the SLT involved in the writing, monitoring, implementing, and adjusting of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)?
    b. How does the organizational structure of the SLT contribute to the process of collaborative leadership in school improvement efforts?

The focus of this study is the structures in place for school reform through the use of school improvement planning and school leadership teams. The purpose of this study is to advance understanding of the role of school leadership teams in school improvement initiatives in elementary schools denied accreditation in an urban district within a particular region in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Primarily, the inquiry focuses on the relationship between the organizational structure, member selection, and training of the SLT, combined with overall school improvement plan quality, and leadership capacity to lead the improvement practices in schools failing to meet state accountability standards.

Personal Perspective

My personal goals for writing the dissertation on school leadership teams and school improvement process stem from my life work in elementary school leadership. I have been a school/district leader for 15 of my 23 years in education. During my tenure, I have worked as a principal in the turnaround efforts of two Title I elementary schools in

the Commonwealth of Virginia. Also, as a Director of Elementary School Leadership, I have led school improvement efforts in 16 schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I take very seriously the responsibility to reflect on the steps necessary to improve student achievement and teacher pedagogy. As a building principal, it was my responsibility to provide the students with a quality education and the teachers with the tools necessary to empower them in the efforts to improve the school. In the role of central office leadership, the professional development of building-level personnel shifted my focus from an individual school to a global approach to affect multiple schools in the turnaround efforts toward full accreditation. The strategy of school improvement planning and school leadership in a distributed model is closing achievement gaps for groups of students by improving the practices of teachers in the delivery of classroom instruction.

The common framework in education in my daily work with school-based leadership is the creation of a school improvement plan by a sole source, usually a building principal. Additionally, members of school leadership teams are given this designation through the assignment of grade-level lead teachers and not based on any other criteria. Subsequently, principals fail in two areas: (a) the selection process of the members, and (b) the development of SLT members in the process of instructional leadership. In essence, the school improvement plan is created by a building principal and the school leadership team (without any training) are given the components of the plan to implement.

The intellectual goal is to develop a framework wherein the SIP and SLT work together in the improvement of the school culture, climate, and academic achievement. Intellectually, I aspire to define the steps that a building leader takes in the recruitment, training, and empowering of school leadership team members in the improvement efforts in the school. In turn, this study will have the potential to provide school districts with practical approaches in synthesizing school improvement planning and school leadership teams' collective efforts toward student achievement and improved teacher pedagogy in the pursuit of improved accreditation ratings and overall school success.

Statement of Potential Significance

The contribution of this study to the educational field could impact the school improvement initiatives in schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia through the development of a framework identifying key structures, strategies, and processes to improve student achievement and teacher pedagogy. Improving teacher pedagogy and student achievement positively impacts school culture, climate, and accreditation status. This research has the potential to develop a new approach to school improvement efforts, teacher development, and student comprehension of complex instructional curriculums for schools having the same profile as the school within the case study. Current research supports the use of school leadership teams in the improvement efforts of schools towards full accreditation (Cain & Gunter, 2012; Darling-Hammond, Bullmaster, & Cobb, 1995; Elmore, 1987; Heck & Hallinger, 2010).

The research also supports the development of SIPs to improve student achievement by establishing goals based on identified student data points, developing an improvement plan to address strategies to improve the student achievement, monitoring

progress towards goals established at identified intervals, and adjusting the strategies throughout the plan in response to the data collected (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fernandez, 2009; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). However, qualitative studies on the use of SIPs and SLTs in combined efforts to gain school accreditation status are limited. This gap in the literature served as the basis for this study to determine the process for the SLT and SIP combined effects on the improvement of school accreditation ratings**.**

Theoretical Foundation

Distributed leadership as a theory identifies the relationship between the leader and the followers of the organization working towards a common goal. The distributed leadership theory incorporates components of situational and transformational leadership theory. Distributed leadership as a practice in the school improvement process emphasizes the members of the team having assigned responsibilities and shared responsibility for the outcomes of the organization (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Day, 2000; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Dunaway et al., 2013; Elmore, 2014; Harris, 2004; Kaufman et al., 2012; Lane, Oakes, Jenkins, Menzies, & Kalberg, 2014; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

Educational reform efforts place a great emphasis on school leadership as a shared responsibility between multiple levels of instructional personnel in the school organization (Benoliel, 2017; Blase & Blase, 1999; Gronn, 2000; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Heck et al., 1990; Rigby, 2013; Timperely, 2005; Wallace, 2002). However, even though research supports sharing of responsibilities through this distributive model, in practice, a sole source persists in the leadership continuum, primarily the building

principal (Harris, 2004; Rigby, 2013). Instructional leaders who create an environment of capacity building through professional development and empowerment through shared responsibility and decision making increase the opportunity to sustain improvement efforts (Benoliel, 2017; Harris, 2004; Rigby, 2013).

Because of this process-oriented approach, the leader must undergo a transformational change from individualistic to participatory and developmental with members of the school organization (Kaufman et al., 2012). The following factors characterize the distributive leadership process: guidance and direction from different levels within the organization, formal leadership establishing the vision, the creation of a culture within the organization that empowers others to complete the mission, and the instructional leader orchestrating the multiple levels in a productive and collegial manner that leads to student achievement (Cain & Gunter, 2012; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Day, 2000; Elmore, 2014; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Hauge et al., 2014; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Kaufman et al., 2012; Knapp et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2004; Murphy, 2015; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Ruebling et al., 2004; Rigby, 2013; Spillane, 2005; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

The process of school improvement is a systematic approach of analyzing data, developing an improvement plan, monitoring and adjusting the plan at identified intervals, and executing the plan in a collaborative model (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fernandez, 2011; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). However, not only the presence but also the quality of the specific approaches to school improvement are important. This process is compatible with the framework described by Spillane (2005) regarding distributed leadership.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study suggests the combined effects of quality school improvement planning and the active participation by school improvement teams in the school improvement process will lead to improved student achievement. Active participation in this study will include the writing, implementation, monitoring, and adjusting the plan towards reaching identified goals. The framework for distributed leadership shares responsibility for school improvement across multiple personnel levels within the school organization (Day, 2000; DuFour, 2004; Gronn, 2000; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Harris, 2004, 2008; Murphy, 2015; Spillane, 2005). However, within the leadership responsibilities in the school environment, the situation often dictates the level of responsibility. Evaluation of teachers is primarily a responsibility of the administrative staff (principals and assistant principals), whereas responsibility for teacher development and planning in content areas are spread among curriculum specialists, coaches, and supervisors (Harris, 2004; Murphy, 2015).

Summary of Methodology

An instrumental case study approach was appropriate to develop an understanding of the relationship between the school leadership team and the school improvement process. The case study is a process wherein the researcher collects observable or measurable data to answer the specific research questions (Creswell, 2013). The case study approach provided the data necessary to analyze and compare the results on the use of existing school leadership teams and the school improvement plans in the improvement efforts within the school environment. The case study approach is grounded

in the interpretivist paradigm, which seeks to interpret or understand co-constructed realities (Creswell, 2013).

The realities examined in this case study are the collective effect of the people (SLT) and the plan (SIP) on student achievement. Current research is limited regarding the relationship between the SLT and the SIP as forces leading to school improvement. However, existing research supports the implementation of a school improvement plan to lead to student achievement (Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Huber & Conway, 2015). Also, research supports distributed leadership in schools to lead to school improvement (Bush & Glover, 2012; DuFour, 2004; Louis, 2015; Spillane, 2005). The purpose of this study is to expand upon existing research on SIPs and SLTs to illustrate how the two approaches function in school improvement initiatives in schools that have been denied accreditation. Specifically, through an instrumental case study, the aim is to understand how and whether the school leadership team is involved in developing the written school improvement plan and following the process of implementing, monitoring, and adjusting the SIP towards meeting the specific instructional goals of the selected elementary school.

Limitations

One of the primary limitations of the study is the potential for influence from the researcher. I have worked for years in the field of school improvement and am very familiar with the common practices from that daily work. Another possible limitation is that I worked in four of the districts within the region of study and thus established relationships and familiarity with district personnel and practices. This type of knowledge and relational familiarity has the potential to influence participants to provide the answers

they believe I am seeking. To protect against my experiential knowledge providing me with preconceived biases, I strictly adhered to following the protocols for each method of data collection. The protocols serve as mechanisms for me to report on what I see, hear, and write through the data collection process. Therefore, the protocol documents will serve as the tools that enable me to report on what I see and hear, not what I infer based on my field experience.

Research on the components of school improvement planning and school leadership teams clearly delineates the positive effects on student achievement. However, external political, social, and economic factors impact schools' ability to achieve accreditation. In many situations, these external forces impact the school improvement initiatives that fall outside the influence of the school leadership team or the school improvement planning. Therefore, the political, social, and economic factors can, both directly and indirectly, impact the school's ability to meet accreditation ratings, despite the efforts of the school improvement plan and school leadership team.

Political factors range from policy decisions at the federal level on requirements for school accreditation, state policies on length of school year and hours, to local decisions regarding curriculum and textbook adoption. All the aforementioned factors have a direct impact on the classroom instruction that students receive. However, these factors are external forces that the schools cannot control, yet they have the ability to impact school improvement and accreditation ratings. Still, the absence of consideration of the impact of the external political, social, and economic factors is a limitation of this study.

A final limitation is the human resources component of schools in general. The participants in the school environment could change due to administrative decisions from the human resources department, ranging from addition of personnel at other schools to administrative transfers. Also, if staff members leave the profession for any reason (e.g., medical, personal, financial), their departure could impact the findings of the case study if they leave during the six-month research period.

Delimitations

This study takes place in an urban district in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The region was chosen because of ease of accessibility for conducting the case studies. Specifically, each district within the region encompasses schools that match the criteria for the study. Additionally, I purposely excluded schools identified as fully accredited. The case study methodology provides a thick description of the SLT's role in the school improvement process by observing their daily work, interviewing members of the team to gain their perspectives, and following the process used to train, recruit, and empower the members of this team tasked with school improvement. The length of the case study within the school setting is four months from the time of research approval. When the approval is granted could limit the amount of time the researcher can observe members in their daily roles with staff members due to the school schedule (e.g., summer breaks, winter breaks, weather conditions closures, etc.).

Definition of Key Terms

Accreditation. This is the process by which a school achieves on standards-based testing in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Schools can receive classifications of *accredited*, *accredited with conditions,* or *accreditation denied* (VDOE, 2017). An

elementary school achieves full accreditation when it meets the benchmarks in English, math, history, and science. The benchmarks for the school ratings are a 75% pass rate in English and a 70% pass rate in math, history, and science. When schools fall below these pass rates, they are *accredited with conditions*. If a school fails to meet the benchmarks for three consecutive years, it receives the rating of *accreditation denied*.

Classroom instruction. This refers to the direct instruction all students receive from the classroom teacher during the allotted time. All students receive direct classroom instruction in the four core subjects (English, math, history, and science) daily in Commonwealth of Virginia.

Distributed leadership. The process in which leadership responsibilities are shared throughout the school building. Distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization. Distributed leadership is a form of the collective agency of individuals at schools guiding teachers and others in the process of instructional change (Spillane, 2005).

Implementing/monitoring/adjusting. These are terms directly related to the school improvement process. Implementation is the process and identified timelines for using strategies associated with the school improvement plan. Monitoring is the process for reviewing data derived from student performance and teacher observations in the identified strategies in the school improvement plan. Adjusting is the process for responding to the data in the plan to reach the desired goals in the school improvement plan.

Instructional leadership. This term refers to the primary source guiding teachers and staff in the school environment. Primarily, this function is the responsibility of the

building principal, but it also includes the assistant principal and content specialist (math, reading) in elementary schools. These members are responsible for professional development and coaching in the instructional initiatives within the building (DuFour, 2004; Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Members (Roles). Members are the personnel who are part of the school leadership team and take on the roles and responsibilities associated with the team.

School improvement. This term refers to the improvement schools make from one school year to the next on the standards of learning (SOL) test in reading and math. This number is in direct relation to student performance (pass or fail) on the assessment.

School improvement planning. The systematic process of writing, implementing, monitoring, and adjusting the improvement initiatives within the building. School improvement planning is goal and subgroup oriented designed to increase the achievement of identified student groups toward full accreditation.

School leadership teams. The school-based team that makes decisions and leads instructional initiatives within the building. The team in elementary schools usually consist of the principal, assistant principal, grade-level chairs from each grade level in the building, teacher content specialist, and in some cases, parents and business community members.

Subgroups/gap groups. These terms refer to the different groups of students who are measured in end-of-the-year assessments. Subgroups include Black, Hispanic, limited English proficient (LEP), special needs, and economically disadvantaged. Gap groups are combinations of groups of students from the subgroups; Gap Group 1 includes LEP, special needs, and economically disadvantaged students. Gap Groups 2 and 3 are race-

specific; Gap Group 2 includes Black, non-Hispanic, and Gap Group 3 are Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2015; VDOE, 2017).

Teacher pedagogy. Teacher pedagogy refers to the instructional approaches teachers used to deliver classroom instruction. Learning is dependent upon the pedagogical approaches teachers use in the classroom.

Summary

The combined application of the use of the SLT in the school improvement process improves student achievement and teacher development. By implementing the research-based steps in the improvement cycle of planning, monitoring, and adjusting in the school improvement process, SLTs are empowered with tools for achieving instructional goals. Previous articles on the effects of distributed leadership, school improvement planning, and the use of school leadership teams in the improvement cycle provide the necessary theoretical foundation for the conceptual framework in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to advance educational leaders' understanding of the role of School Leadership Teams (SLTs) in elementary schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia, in the School Improvement Planning (SIP) process. An SLT is a collection of teachers, content specialists, and administrators from each school, which focuses on improving the teaching for learning within the school environment. This review analyzes three primary areas of literature related to the SLT, including school improvement planning, school leadership team structures, and instructional leadership through the distributed leadership approach. The review seeks to extend current research on how the process of school improvement planning and distributed leadership practices through the collaboration of School Leadership Teams can impact student achievement, which in turn improves a school's accreditation status.

Historical perspective of school accreditation. The *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015) requires any schools denied accreditation, according to federal standards in math and English, to establish an SLT (USDOE, 2015) to collaboratively implement a Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) designed to improve the student achievement on end of the year assessments (VDOE, 2017). Under the federal guidelines, schools that fail to meet benchmarks in English and mathematics must have a comprehensive school improvement plan that addresses long-term goals and incorporates incremental measures that represent progress toward the improvement goals. The legislation identifies four indicators for elementary schools: set goals in academic achievement on reading and math state tests, work toward the growth of students not

meeting benchmark pass rates, achieve progress for students identified as English Language Learners (ELL), and improve school quality (ESSA, 2015). Additionally, all schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia that fail to achieve accreditation benchmarks on end-of-year standards of learning tests in English, mathematics, science, and history are state mandated to have an SLT (VDOE, 2017).

The Commonwealth will assign three accreditation labels for schools in the 2018 school year: *accredited, accredited with conditions*, or *accreditation denied* (VDOE, 2017) and schools will receive tiered levels of instructional support (state and local) and accountability reporting requirements based on their designation. Schools formerly referred to as *priority* or *focus* will now have the designation of *comprehensive support and improvement* or *targeted support and improvement*, respectively (VDOE, 2017). The application of all schools eligible for the label of targeted support, not just those receiving federal funding, in the Commonwealth is one difference between the state regulations in response to NCLB (2002) and ESSA (2015). In the Commonwealth of Virginia, the standards are called Standards of Learning (SOL) and the achievement on these tests in English, mathematics, history, and science determine a school's accreditation status and the level of required school improvement initiatives.

Under ESSA, schools identified for targeted support in the Commonwealth will increase due to the application of this rating applying to all schools and not just schools receiving federal funding. However, the formation of SLTs is common practice in schools in the commonwealth as local school districts have adopted this model toward school improvement. Creation of the SIP is a strategy implemented by NCLB (2002) to improve student achievement for schools labeled as not meeting standards. ESSA (2015)

supplemented this requirement with additional mandates and indicators. Meeting standards, as defined by ESSA, requires schools to meet Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) on English and mathematics end-of-the-year assessments. The AMOs are target numbers in each subject area. Whenever a school does not meet the AMOs, it is identified as needing comprehensive support with interventions or targeted support with interventions. *Comprehensive support with intervention* schools are the bottom 5% of Title I schools, and *targeted support with intervention* schools are all schools in the Commonwealth, regardless of their federal status, that exhibit gaps in proficiency pass rates between individual subgroups and the schools overall pass rate (VDOE, 2017). The VDOE (2017) will require all schools to complete a comprehensive school improvement plan (CSIP) and form a school leadership team to assist in school improvement efforts beginning in the 2017-18 school year (VDOE, 2017). The strategic formation of the SLT is grounded in the theory of distributed leadership.

Distributed leadership in school improvement. Distributed leadership as a theory identifies the relationship between the leader and the followers of the organization working towards a common goal. Distributed leadership as a practice in the school improvement process emphasizes the members of the team having assigned responsibilities in the instructional initiatives and shared responsibility for whether the organization meets its identified goals (Harris, 2004; Hauge et al., 2014; Spillane, 2005). Distributed leadership is more than the assigning of duties to a variety of staff members; Spillane (2005) characterized the practice as the "product of interactions between school leaders, followers, and their situation" (p. 144). Therefore, distributed leadership, as it relates to SLTs, is more about the practice of involving others in leadership decisions that

directly affect the improvement efforts within the school to include professional development, curriculum development and alignment, and instructional observations (Bush & Glover, 2012; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; DuFour, 2004; Elmore, 1987; Gronn, 2000; Hallinger, 2003; Harris, 2004, 2008; Hauge et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2004; Murphy, 2015; Rigby, 2013; Smylie, 1992; Spillane, 2005). The research supports the influence of instructional leadership on student achievement. Therefore, by developing a network of teacher specialist and instructional personnel to share in these responsibilities related to professional development, curriculum, and the instructional initiatives within the school environment increases the schools' capacity to develop professional learning communities and improve student achievement and teacher pedagogy (Benoliel, 2017; Harris, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Murphy, 2015).

Educational reform involves placing emphasis on school leadership as a shared responsibility between multiple levels of instructional personnel in the school organization (Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Lane et al., 2014; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Murphy, 2015; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Healey, 2010; Wallace, 2002). The distributive model of leadership encourages sharing the responsibilities for decision making, goal setting, and monitoring of instructional efforts but still places responsibility on a sole instructional leader (principal) as the catalyst for implementing the leadership practices to improve student achievement (Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004, 2008; Leithwood et al., 1999). However, the leader must undergo a transformational change from individualistic to participatory and developmental with members of the school organization (Harris, 2004).

Instructional leaders who create an environment of instructional leadership capacity building through professional development and empowerment through shared responsibility and decision making increase the opportunity to sustain improvement efforts (DuFour, 2004; Elmore, 1987; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Murphy, 2015). The distributive leadership process is characterized by the following: guidance and direction from different levels within the organization, formal leadership establishing the vision, the creation of a culture within the organization that empowers others to complete the mission, and the instructional leader orchestrating the multiple levels in a productive and collegial manner that leads to student achievement (Day, 2000; Elmore, 2014; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2005).

School improvement planning historical perspective. The process of school improvement is a systematic approach of analyzing data, developing a written improvement plan, monitoring and adjusting the plan at identified intervals by different levels of assigned personnel executed in a collaborative model (DuFour, 2004, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fernandez, 2011; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). School improvement planning derives from the concept of strategic planning associated with business models and the military (Cook, 2000; Sybouts, 1992). The concept of strategic planning involves the constituents of an organization deciding on a course of action to reach the desired goal. The key to strategic planning is multi-level. It includes the process of strategic thinking, strategic planning, and strategic action (Cook, 2000).

According to Sybouts (1992), “Strategic planning was developed in the military, adapted to the business world, and ultimately expanded into various governmental and municipal agencies before it was a formal process translated for education” (p. 30). The

strategic planning process usually follows four main steps: (a) prepare for the planning process; (b) develop institutional, division, departmental, or program mission; (c) develop appropriate strategies, goals, and objectives; and (d) launch the implementation plan (Cook, 2000; Freeman et al., 2004; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009). The school improvement plan, similar to a strategic plan, must have targeted areas for improvement, integration of specific strategies, frequent monitoring of student data and the identifications of persons responsible for the implementation of each strategy (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara, Patterson, Buehler, & Gearity, 2006; Doud, 1995; Dunaway et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2011; Giles, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Strunk et al., 2015). The parallel between school improvement planning and strategic planning is the systematic processes identified for implementation and the measuring of progress in the identified goals in determining the success of the organization.

Planning compels leaders and teams to set priorities, establish goals, develop strategies, and secure commitments from staff and other stakeholders. Careful planning helps organizations become more introspective and assists them in developing procedures for ongoing evaluation and feedback about their policies and priorities (Fernandez, 2011). The school improvement plan is responsive to the needs of students, parents, community members, business and social organizations, and the faculty of the school (Armstrong, 1982; Giles, 1998; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). In essence, the process of school improvement planning is systematic in the approach to writing, monitoring, implementing, and adjusting to meet the needs of the targeted stakeholders, primarily students. However, not only the presence but also the quality of the specific approaches are crucial to school improvement.

The conceptual framework for this study holds that the combined effects of quality school improvement planning and active participation by school improvement teams in the school improvement process leads to improved student achievement. Active participation in this study will include the writing, implementation, monitoring, and adjusting of the plan in pursuit of identified goals in a distributed leadership framework within the confines of the SLT. The framework for distributed leadership shares responsibility across levels within the school building (DuFour, 2004; Harris, 2004, 2008; Murphy, 2015; Spillane, 2005). Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between distributed leadership, school improvement planning, and school leadership teams in the school improvement process.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study: Distributed leadership.

Methodology, Consulted Databases, Search Terms

I conducted a review of school improvement plans, school leadership team organizational structures, and instructional leadership norms and processes from 1995 (onset of state SOL testing) to 2017. Using the following databases, ERIC, Education Leadership, Education Source, and Gelman Library, I reviewed using the following search terms: *strategic plans, comprehensive school reform, school improvement plans, instructional leadership, collaborative planning, school leaders, principal leadership, teacher leaders, teacher pedagogy,* and *school improvement*.

School Improvement Planning

The school improvement planning process is a common practice in schools across the United States. School improvement planning is the mechanism through which students and teachers define, implement, and adjust improvement efforts toward full-scale school improvement. Through this process-oriented approach, some components become essential to completion of the task of overall school improvement. The primary components include written quality, planning and implementation, and the monitoring and adjusting cycle (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Fernandez, 2011; Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

Written quality. The first component in quality school improvement is the written school improvement plan. Much of what the SIP documents depend on the templates schools use to write the plans. However, templates constrain the lens through which schools look at the improvement process (Mintrop, MacLellan, & Quintero, 2001). Successful strategic planning for the school organization involves the entire group of stakeholders within the school community participating in the initial stage of writing the

plan. The plan should be responsive to the needs of the students, community, business and social organizations, and the faculty of the school (Anfara et al., 2006; Dunaway et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2011; Giles, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Strunk et al., 2015). Quality school improvement planning is the mechanism through which instructional leaders outline the goals, strategies, structures, and procedures to improve the outcome of the organization.

The written plan is the strategic thoughts of the organization aligned in a format that is easy to read, interpret, and follow in the school improvement process. The formal planning process calls for the organization to set goals, think of strategies, and implement structures to monitor the goals at designed intervals that are communicated in written form (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Doud, 1995; Dunaway et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2011; Giles, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Strunk et al., 2015).

Strategic thinking is the idea that establishes the context, which in turn, gives meaning to human activity and defines reality. Strategic planning is the technique by which all energies are directed to accomplish the overall intent. Finally, the strategic action is the realization of the plan and the discovery of new possibilities within the action (Cook, 2000). Strategic planning involves scanning the environment and conditions that the agency faces, formulating goals and targets, developing an action to achieve the goals, and determining a method of monitoring and controlling implementation (Robinson & Pearce, 1983). SIPs involve similar processes, and staff members analyze problems, identify underlying causes, establish measurable goals,

incorporate strategies, adopt policies that directly address the problems, and monitor implementation.

School improvement planning, just like strategic planning, involves the components of thinking, planning, and action to accomplish a mission. School improvement planning involves five norms for school improvement to be effective: (a) the organization must know and understand why it needs to improve (the problem), (b) the organization must implement a solution-focused process that will result in improvement, (c) the proposed solution should be tested before large-scale implementation, (d) the improvement process must include a feedback loop to provide a picture to show whether or not the improvement is happening, and (e) organizational leadership must determine when and how to institute the solution on a permanent and large scale (DuFour, 2004, Dunaway et al., 2013; Elmore, 2014; Lane et al., 2014; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). The process needed for plans to work within schools for improvement is dependent upon two central items: (a) the upfront strategic framework for the school improvement plan, which should be futuristic in nature, monitored and adjusted, and collaboratively decided upon by the members and (b) resources for ongoing support to build capacity to change and improve (Giles, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Strunk et al., 2015).

Planning and implementation. The structure of the written plan may affect the SIP and the ability to implement the plan properly (Anfara et al., 2006; Kaniuka, 2012). Quality SIPs include timelines for identified benchmarks by individual subgroups, needs assessments of the community, professional development plans, mission statements, and measurable objectives for all areas related to the school organization. The formal

planning process calls for the organization to specify its goals and objectives, generate strategies to pursue these goals, determine and implement structures to monitor progress toward objectives, and seek commitment from stakeholders (Strunk et al., 2015).

These strategies can be interpreted more broadly as a means to improve public services, whereas the public service in the school organization focuses on improving students' comprehension of the curriculum. Therefore, the strategy behind the implementation of the SIP was intended to be provided by a network of people and not solely by the building administrator in the instructional improvement efforts (Boyne & Walker, 2004; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, 2015). The goal of the school planning process is to encourage school personnel to give careful attention to how they will implement reforms and instructional strategies to improve student achievement and other outcomes in their schools (Kaniuka, 2012; Louis, 2015; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). Through understanding the planning process and writing the school plan, school personnel will solidify their plans for change (Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Strunk et al., 2015).

The implementation of the SIP involves a group of individuals executing the strategic plan to improve student achievement. However, implementation is a systematic process that involves checks and refinement throughout the lifecycle of the SIP. In addition, studies on the importance of this step defined it as the number one determinant in the success of plans achieving their goal (Fernandez, 2011). The cycle for monitoring is based on a common data point designed to serve as formative data to collectively improve the student performance (Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Huber & Conway, 2015; Murray, 2014; Strunk et al., 2015). The analysis of data, in the school improvement

process, is a collective effort by multiple levels of personnel in the school organization (Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Harris, 2004, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Murray, 2014; Ruebling et al., 2004). Traditionally, building leaders, primarily principals, assume the responsibility of data analysis (Luo, 2008; Shen et al., 2010).

Building-level administrators are expected to present data to teachers within the organization in a variety of settings within the school environment (Shen et al., 2010). The goal of monitoring and adjusting is not a one-time event based on a one-time assessment (Murray, 2014). Effective monitoring can be performed during daily lessons, on quizzes, and during other assignments given by teachers. Waiting on end-of-quarter and end-of-year assessments does not provide enough time for the leadership teams to make adjustments. Murray (2014) suggested, "Multiple types of data should be used, and data should become a mechanism to connect student performance with curriculum, instruction, remediation, and acceleration" (p. 2). The reference to multiple types of data suggests that multiple levels of individuals may use the data; therefore, monitoring is a collaborative effort. The necessity of a collective body of professionals using student data from multiple sources of information to adjust to the students' needs and reteach or accelerate is important to achieving the organization's mission and goals (Shen et al., 2010).

Monitoring and adjusting SIP. School improvement plans should have flexibility in adjusting when identified benchmarks are not being met (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). The concept is to develop an initial plan based on data that attempts to correct or enhance what the school has accomplished. The formal planning process calls for the organization to set goals, think of strategies, and implement structures to monitor

the goals at designed intervals (Cook, 2000; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Strunk et al., 2015). The monitoring process in school improvement is not a unidirectional task. Monitoring requires organizations to systematically implement checkpoints of multiple data sources (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004).

Strategic thinking is a formal planning process that calls for the organization to set goals, formulate strategies, and implement structures to monitor the goals at designed intervals. This planning is one of the key components in the strategic thinking paradigm (Strunk et al., 2015). Within this process, the frequent monitoring of the incremental goals is necessary to determine the eventual outcome of the plan. The team implementing this plan needs to have regular meetings and collaborative data analysis sessions to determine where they are in moving towards the overall goal. *At scale* (DuFour, 2004) reform is driven by four main ideas or guidelines: (a) develop strong external normative structures for practice, (b) develop organizational structures that intensify and focus, (c) create intentional processes for reproduction of successes, and (d) create structures that promote learning of new practices and incentive systems that support them (Elmore, 2014). The implementation involves a group of identified individuals systematically working in the macro- and microenvironments to make the goals a reality. Teachers need time to observe, provide feedback, and collaborate to make this practice consistent and meaningful (Dixon, Yssel, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014).

Teacher Pedagogy and School Improvement

Teacher effectiveness in delivering quality instruction is one of the primary catalyst in improving student comprehension levels (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995;

DuFour, 2004; Hora, 2012; Kennedy, 2016; Murphy, 2015). Therefore, improving teacher pedagogy becomes a necessary component of school improvement in relation to student academic achievement. Teacher pedagogy commonly refers to the instructional practices, and classroom management techniques teachers use within the classroom environment when implementing state and local curriculums (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Drago-Severson, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996). Several theorists and researchers subscribe to the theory that teacher affect is one of the primary catalyst for student achievement (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2012; Darling Hammond et al., 1995; Dixon et al., 2014; Driel & Berry, 2012; Dufour, 2004; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Hallinger et al., 1996; Hora, 2012; Huber & Conway, 2015; Kaniuka, 2012; Kennedy, 2016; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). Therefore, the improvement in pedagogical practices influences student academic achievement and subsequently impacts student performance on end-of-year content assessments that are directly related to the improvement of school accreditation ratings.

Instructional leaders have the responsibility of improving the pedagogical practices implemented by teachers through the alignment of meaningful professional development in relation to student performance data and identified instructional strategies to increase student achievement (Ahearn, 1998; Benoliel, 2017; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Day, 2000; Dixon et al., 2014; Drago-Severson, 2004; Kanuika, 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Professional development is an ongoing process designed to inform and improve teacher pedagogy. As a result of improved instructional practices, teachers become better equipped to help students advance their content knowledge (Dixon et al.,

2014; Driel & Berry, 2012; DuFour, 2004; Hora, 2012; Kennedy, 2016; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). The alignment of teacher strategies to address specific student needs are consistent with the research on the components of quality school improvement planning (Fernandez, 2011; Freeman et al., 2004; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). The professional development opportunities created by the instructional leaders in alignment with the strategies to improve teacher practices also influence pedagogical practices.

Instructional leaders are responsible for providing teachers with macro- and micro-level professional learning opportunities to improve their pedagogy (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Drago-Severson, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Hallinger et al., 1996). Macro experiences occur at the broad level where teachers are learning by grade level, content area, or school wide on research-based instructional strategies from content specialists, expert practitioners, or contracted professionals.

The micro learning occurs when teachers apply their knowledge learned in the macro environment to the classroom practice (Driel & Berry, 2012; Hora, 2012; Kennedy, 2016; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). While engaging in this micro learning, teachers must analyze, reflect, collaborate, and share with colleagues in an effort to improve upon their own pedagogical practices (Blase & Blase, 1999; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Driel & Berry, 2012; DuFour, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 2010). Within the micro setting, principals and teachers refine practices and collaborate to foster the growth of the pedagogical practices into the classroom environment, primarily in the instructional delivery, in an effort to improve the students' comprehension of the written

and tested curriculum (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Drago-Severson, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Hallinger et al., 1996).

The instructional strategies incorporate student talk, cooperative learning opportunities, use of data to differentiate instruction, use of graphic organizers for comparing and contrasting, and the development of analogies to identify similarities and differences (Marzano et al., 2005; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Due to this process-oriented approach, the time invested in the micro environment with teachers leads to high quality instruction (Driel & Berry, 2012; Hora, 2012; Kennedy, 2016; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). Therefore, the instructional leadership are responsible for providing the opportunities for teachers within the micro environment in a stress free, collaborative, and structured environment to improve upon their pedagogical practices (Blase & Blase, 1999; DuFour, 2004; Kaufman et al., 2012).

The positive influence of school improvement planning impacts student performance (Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015). A necessary component of school improving planning is the identification of targeted strategies to influence student academic improvements (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2015; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Drago-Severson, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Hallinger et al., 1996). Teacher pedagogical improvement directly impacts the students' comprehension and has a positive effect on school accreditation ratings.

Studies on School Improvement Planning

In a quantitative study at the Clark County School District (CCSD) in Nevada, Fernandez (2011) used a unique set data to examine the relationship between SIPs and school performance. The CCSD is the largest of the 17 school districts in Nevada and the

fifth largest district in the nation. The dataset in this study derived from three sources of information: The Leadership and Learning Center data on SIP Quality (Reeves, 2006), which included a content analysis of each school's SIP; CCSD data on student scores on standardized examinations; and CCSD data on school demographics and resources (Fernandez, 2011). The basic components of quality school improvement plans included the following guidelines: (a) SIPs should be based on student data, (b) SIPs should be free of words that are difficult to understand, (c) they should be based on a goal that can be measured, (d) the measurable goal is the focus of the team, and (e) the vision and mission for accomplishing the goal is regularly communicated with the team.

Consistent with other researchers' findings, the goals developed from the student data should be specific to targeted groups and not have a broad approach. Quality goals consist of multiple data sources that paint a descriptive picture of the students' identified needs (Armstrong, 1982; Elmore, 2014; Freeman et al., 2004; Kaniuka, 2012; Kaufman et al., 2012; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). The National Study of School Evaluation (International Technology and Engineering Educators Association, 1997) offered a similar model of the school improvement process that involved six steps and aligned with the study from Fernandez (2011). The six steps were (a) developing the profile, (b) defining beliefs and mission, (c) defining the desired results for student learning, (d) analyzing instructional and organizational effectiveness, (e) developing the action plan, and (f) implementing the plan and documenting results.

The conclusions from that study indicated a positive relationship between the quality of the plan and the success of the plan. Three themes (goals, implementation, and assessments) emerged as useful in determining SIP quality (International Technology and

Engineering Educators Association, 1997). Additionally, the three themes encompassed criteria to ensure not only the presence but also the quality of the plan. The first component of goals focused on the relevance, the targeted nature of student groups, and the time factor for achieving the desired results. The implementation process focused on the design of the plan and the professional development for teachers. In addition, the process focused specifically on the *professional development gaps* and *professional development focus* data. The third component was the school's plan for assessments (International Technology and Engineering Educators Association, 1997). Schools that have a detailed plan of evaluation toward meeting specified goals, strategies outlined to meet the goals, and timelines for the monitoring of the outcomes have high quality (Fernandez, 2011).

The goals, implementation, and assessment components are consistent with research on norms in the school improvement process (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Doud, 1995; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, 2015; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004; Spillane, 2005). A principal component analysis (PCA) of the 17 indicators, according to Fernandez (2011), can establish a school's SIP quality. The results suggested a small but positive increase in student achievement in math and reading on the norm-referenced test when the SIP quality increased.

However, in a bivariate correlation of the 17 individual SIP dimensions, three dimensions had a significant impact as follows: monitoring frequency (math .242, reading .245), specific goals (math .205, reading .211), and timely goals (math .242, reading .186) showed statistical significance at the $p < .01$ level in improving student

achievement on the norm-referenced test. The findings from this study were consistent with the research on the correlation between school improvement planning and the positive impact on student achievement (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Doud, 1995; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, 2015; Marzano et al., 2005; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004).

In a quantitative study using correlational research design, Huber and Conway (2015) examined the relationship between the SIP quality and student achievement. The population for this study included low performing elementary and K-8 schools in Connecticut's Alliance Districts and reviews of 108 public school improvement plans. The sample represented 40% of the total Alliance District elementary or K-8 public schools (Huber & Conway, 2015). The Alliance Districts in Connecticut represent the lowest performing districts. The researchers collected three forms of data to rate the overall quality of the school improvement plan using the Planning, Implementing, and Monitoring (PIM) school improvement rubric. The PIM scoring rubric was created by an independent company and includes 30 different dimensions that focus on schools planning, implementation, and monitoring of school improvement (Huber & Conway, 2015). The 30 dimensions were coded into five domains of school improvement: assessment of needs, goal setting, program design, evaluation, and inquiry. A different instrument assessed student achievement, and the final instrument reviewed demographic data for the schools.

Overall, 67% of the plans were deemed to be of low quality, according to the PIM. Lower quality was determined by the SIP's having broad goals and strategies instead of targeted strategies for specific subgroups, strategies for leadership

development, and specific goals aimed at improving students by subgroup instead of by grade level. Plans that addressed subgroup-specific strategies instead of grade-level strategies showed the greatest improvement in effectiveness. The results indicated a positive correlation between quality of SIP and student achievement.

Huber and Conway (2015) used a bivariate correlational analysis and a multiple regression analysis on the performance dimensions in assessment. The five dimensions associated with assessment centered around goal setting for particular subgroups (r = .227) and goal setting from end of year results (r = .247), monitoring based on student data (r = .298), teacher actions in response to the assessment results (r = .234), and the use of multiple forms of assessment data (r = .284) showed the greatest links to student achievement ($p < .05$).

The researchers concluded, “Schools should consider whether their plans include appropriate goals, demonstrate a strong implementation plan to achieve the goals, and have mechanisms for frequent monitoring of goal progress” (Huber & Conway, 2015, p. 66). Additional quantitative and mixed methods studies (Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Strunk et al., 2015) on the relationship between the quality of the school improvement plan and the impact on student achievement indicate plans need to be monitored by a team of individuals, have a definite goal that can be measured, and be easily understood. A key component in improving student achievement is monitoring progress and adjusting strategies based on multiple data sources throughout the improvement process (Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Huber & Conway, 2015; Strunk et al., 2015).

Mintrop et al. (2001) completed a qualitative study on the content of school improvement plans in low performing schools. A comprehensive study on the school improvement planning, primarily the content analyzed from three school districts in Kentucky, Maryland, and San Francisco, California, comprised the population for this research. The two states' planning processes shared similarities in the goal setting based on student performance on state tests and in identifying growth targets for individual schools within the districts. The school improvement plans from San Francisco included a holistic approach to school improvement. In addition to state testing, the San Francisco plans also used attendance, discipline data, funding, human resource components such as staffing at the schools, and the funding sources for the schools in the design of the SIP. A total of 103 plans were read, coded, and dated. The plans from the states were broken down into similar sections: needs, causes, diagnostics, philosophy, goals, activities, resources, and responsibilities. Conclusions indicated, "The specific role of the SIPs is to facilitate rational planning and efficiency. Broad teacher participation in planning is not common" (Mintrop et al., 2001, p. 200).

Mintrop et al. (2001) concentrated on the manner in which systems measure performance and bridge external demands with internal development. In the study, the researchers reviewed three selected accountability designs to correlate the differences between them and the alignment of change strategies and internalization of goals and expectations (Mintrop et al., 2001). The most frequent commonalities among all three systems plans were the activities in curriculum and instruction. The findings indicated that of the different activity domains (organization, governance, climate, parents, curriculum and instruction, and professional development), the curriculum and

instruction areas were the most frequently reported by Maryland and San Francisco (26%) and Kentucky (31%).

School improvement planning stresses the importance of having a targeted goal based on identified data to lead the improvement efforts (Ahearn, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015). Quality school improvement planning includes the perspectives of multiple stakeholders when composing the plan. Consequently, the plan should be free of educational jargon that is difficult for noneducators to understand. The plan should have ease of understanding for all involved in implementation (Ahearn, 1998; Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

Researchers suggest a necessary component for school improvement is the frequency of monitoring the improvement efforts and adjusting the plan in response to the findings (Dunaway et al., 2013; Huber & Conway, 2015). A lack of focus on a specified goal could prevent the process from leading to success (Mintrop et al., 2001). One commonality in all three accountability systems was the amount of time, nearly one-third, being spent on the primary area of curriculum and instruction. Furthermore, the domains within curriculum and instruction centered around test practice, curriculum alignment, and district-sponsored workshops (Mintrop et al., 2001).

The goal setting in this study aligned with external goals set by the district instead of internal goals set by SLTs. The study concluded that the widespread nature of implementation impacted the plans' ability to facilitate change in student achievement. Consequently, this study validates research findings on the importance of setting student-specific goals, measuring progress, and making adjustments based on student data in the SIP process (Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Strunk et al., 2015).

Previous findings make clear that if a quality plan is developed, implemented, and monitored, it will assist in improving student achievement (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Doud, 1995; Dunaway et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2011; Giles, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Strunk et al., 2015). The inferences from the studies are that all improvement plans should focus on student improvement, specifically targeting strategies for identified subgroups of students. The simplistic nature of the straightforward task empowers the executors of the plans to properly implement the SIP. To create a clear and concise plan, school leaders answer three basic questions: (a) What goals do we need to take us where we are going? (b) What strategies will we need to get there? and (c) What action steps will help us get the work done? (Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008). These three studies indicated the positive impact of quality SIPs on student achievement.

All three studies' findings implied that SIPs must have detailed evaluation plans, strategies designed to address specific instructional goals, and a process for frequently monitoring the progress toward the goals (Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). Quality SIPs have a positive effect on student achievement when the targeted goals are specifically related to individual student needs (Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). However, within the three components, the frequent monitoring of the progress by a collective group (SLT) ensures the plan is (a) being implemented as designed in the written plan and (b) adjusted to meet student needs based on data received from interval progress checkpoints proved to be one of the most important steps in the process (Benoliel, 2017; Day, 2000; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood et al., 1999; Strunk et al., 2015). Comprehensive planning assists

organizations in achieving their goals when they follow the steps in the process, which include writing a clear plan, developing strategies to address identified goals, monitoring the progress, adjusting the plan based on data, and assigning multiple levels of personnel to task within the improvement planning cycle (Dunaway et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2011; Giles, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Strunk et al., 2015).

School improvement plans are effective when organizations have clear, commonly defined goals and simple plans that focus on straightforward actions and opportunities (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Doud, 1995; Dunaway et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2011; Giles, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Strunk et al., 2015). However, the quantitative studies reviewed examined the correlation between the plans' components and quality of school improvement. The researchers failed to connect the people implementing and writing these plans and to determine how the relationship between their lived experiences, professional knowledge, and organizational components affected the success of the plan. Therefore, understanding how instructional leadership provides professional development to personnel involved in all phases of the school improvement process becomes paramount to the success of the school improvement planning (Dunaway et al., 2013; Giles, 1998).

Effective instructional leaders understand their primary purpose is the advancement of student comprehension on the taught curriculum and improving the expertise of the practitioners who deliver the instruction to the students (Cain & Gunter, 2012; Day, 2000; Harris, 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Murphy, 2015). Instructional leaders must ensure that all schools are working under the previous two components to ensure system-wide improvement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). The

implication is that a missing component is the capacity of the building/district leadership to develop the individuals to share in the responsibility. Another limitation is the studies, to this point, have not taken into account the cohesive structure of the SLT or the instructional leader. School reform initiatives take three to five years to fully implement (Ahearn, 1998; Doud, 1995; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Elmore, 2014). As noted by several educational scholars, continuity of leadership is a necessary component to school improvement (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Knapp et al., 2014; Louis, 2015; Ruebling et al., 2004; Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015). Continuity in instructional leadership increases the competency of the leaders in curriculum knowledge, instructional best practices, and implementation of professional learning communities (Elmore, 2014; Murphy, 2015).

School Leadership Teams (SLT) as Organizations

Organizations are designed and exist to achieve goals. School leadership teams and elementary schools establish goals to improve teacher practice and student achievement. The SLT is a micro-organization within the school environment created to support the improvement of teacher practice and student achievement. However, because the SLT is one element within the confines of the school organization, they have the potential to operate in conflict with the school mission and vision if norms and structures are not established for their responsibilities in the overall school improvement continuum.

> Organizations are societies with their own values, beliefs, and rituals or norms. These values, beliefs, and norms are responsible for shaping the culture or the environment they create. In any organization, there may be different and competing value systems that create a mosaic of organizational realities rather than a uniform corporate culture. (Morgan, 2006, p. 132)

The necessity of the leader to establish the vision for the SLT is a key component in engaging the SLT in working towards the organizational goals within the school improvement plan. Through the creation of these realities for the SLT, the instructional

leader protects against the SLT operating in conflict with the school's goals and values and increases the SLT's capacity to operate in a collaborative manner in the school improvement process.

School leadership teams exist to lead the work within the school and engage in the thoughtful planning required for whole-school decision making. The purpose of the SLT is to improve student achievement and improve teacher practice (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Dunaway et al., 2013; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). As noted previously, the theory behind a group of individuals working towards a common goal is grounded in the distributed/collaborative leadership framework. Collaborative leadership emphasizes basic principles in the constructs of school improvement.

The first principle is to establish a shared vision with a group of people working towards accomplishing the vision (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005). Second, the principal (instructional leader) is not solely responsible for the implementation of the vision (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Spillane, 2006). However, it is necessary for the leadership to have defining roles for the members of the team assigned with the task of school improvement (DuFour, 2004, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Elmore, 2014; Harris, 2004; Lane et al., 2014; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). In addition to defining roles, the team also requires time to make the vision a reality (Kaniuka, 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Fourth, training is necessary to support effective teaching and building teachers' capacity to implement a rigorous curriculum (Benoliel, 2017; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Harris, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Murphy, 2015). Finally, instructional leadership increases teacher pedagogy which increases student performance (DuFour, 2004, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Lane et al., 2014; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008;

Mitchell & Castle, 2005). Within any organization, it is important to establish norms, define roles, empower members with tools to lead, and have a clear goal that is articulated by the leader of the organization if the organization desires to accomplish its mission (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Elmore, 2014; Kaufman et al., 2012; Lane et al., 2014; Lunenberg, 2012; Morgan, 2006; Spillane, 2005).

In a case study of the SLT in a middle school, Olsen and Chrispeels (2009) identified, described, and understood the work of a school leadership team in setting and accomplishing goals. The primary goal of the SLT was to transform the daily schedule from seven bells to six bells as a strategy for increasing time in the core subjects. The researchers examined four main questions to establish the relationship between the SLT's setting and accomplishing its goals: (a) What was the focus work of the school leadership team, and how was this work evidenced at the school site? (b) In what ways did the school-university partnership contribute to the work of the team in accomplishing their goal? (c) What leadership behaviors and practices of the principal supported the work of the SLT? and (d) In what ways did the school exhibit the qualities of a professional learning community and what were the consequences of the team in facilitating school-wide change? To eliminate bias, the researchers employed a variety of data sources, including interviews with key players in the administration, focus group discussion with the leadership team, observations of the team and the SLT seminars, and the review of documents and meeting records relevant to the case. The research took place over a two-year period (Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009).

The initial phase of the research began with three elementary schools and four middle schools participating in professional development with a university partner. The

trainings took place over a four-day period with participants from the district and school level on leadership capacity and involved teacher leaders and stakeholders in the decision-making and goal-setting processes (Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). The middle school continued its work for an additional year with the university partner. During this second year of training, the participating school expanded the focus of study in the themes of setting direction, developing people, designing the organization for success, and leading toward social justice. This process of development over the second year encouraged critical thinking, reflection on practices, and reflective dialogue. Additionally, the participants were also involved in the examination of multiple data sources to serve as their focus for the change in the scheduling.

The conceptual framework for Olsen and Chrispeels's (2009) study centered on three constructs of micropolitics, social capital, and intellectual capital, which allowed for a holistic view of analyzing data and determining a course of action. The micropolitical lens enabled the team to identify and eliminate barriers that would cause the goal not to be achieved. Micropolitics is the means by which individuals within an organization use their power to influence the decision making within the organization (Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). The micropolitical lens was applied in the study because the schedule change was not a unanimous decision within the school organization. The social and intellectual lens provided knowledge of the community and revealed how they developed as one body toward a common goal:

> Social capital arises from the structures that enable its actors to act in productive ways. Social capital arises from the relationships among members of a community in three different forms: (a) trust, (b) access to information channels that provide opportunities for learning and action, and (c) norms and sanctions within a community that promote common good over self-interest. (Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009, p. 387)

The data consisted of open-ended interviews, focus group meetings, videotaped observations, and artifacts produced by the SLT, all of which were coded and analyzed. In addition, data from a previous study were used to provide insight on the change process in schools. Data were also collected using a focus group of additional members of the school community. With an inductive approach and a goal of identifying causal conditions, data analysis identified three key themes that enabled the SLT to be successful in changing the schedule (Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). The themes were school/university partnerships, organizational learning, and principal leadership.

The researchers concluded when the themes worked together in a web-like structure and provided the SLT with the ability to accomplish its goals (Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). However, one of the limitations of this study was the small size of the sample. The findings also could be considered biased because the school was not randomly selected. Furthermore, the researchers' involvement with the university partner for an additional year of training (the initial participants' seven schools did one year) also could potentially limit the application of this study to the broader population. Even though their findings were consistent with other research on school improvement through the use of the SLT (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004), the bias created through the selection process and additional training impacted the widespread application of the results.

Collaborative Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership in elementary schools is a multi-level discipline designed to facilitate student growth and teacher pedagogy (DuFour, 2004; Murphy, 2015). The

theoretical framework behind collaborative leadership emphasizes the importance of shared responsibility and shared decision making in the school improvement process (Spillane, 2006). In a case study, Leithwood and Mascall (2008) examined the effect of collective leadership on student achievement. The term *collective leadership* used in this study illustrated the combined impact of all leadership sources and the contribution of each source. The participants in the study spanned nine states, 45 districts, and 180 schools. This study was part of a larger study, informed by leadership from Leithwood et al. (2004).

Primarily, the study concentrated on three variables related to teachers: (a) impact of collective leadership on student achievement and teacher impact, (b) influence of different stakeholders on school decision making, and (c) whether the differences in collective leadership were related to the differences in student achievement. Teachers completed a 40-question survey; nine questions measured capacity, 17 questions measured motivation, and 14 measured work setting. One of the limitations of this study is the unequal distribution of questions to validate the findings. Questions on motivation and work setting are almost twice as numerous as the questions on teaching capacity. However, the results using Cronbach's alpha indicated that collective leadership was significantly related to all three teacher variables. All scales received acceptable levels of reliability between .72 and .96 with the greatest impact from collective leadership on student achievement through teachers' motivation. Collective leadership impacted teacher works setting (.91), teaching capacity (.86), and motivation (.96). Subsequently, collective leadership impacted student achievement because of the direct impact on teachers' motivation. In addition, Leithwood and Mascall (2008) reported on patterns of

leadership showing an influence on students' scores. Schools in the highest 20% attributed success to collective leadership from outside sources compared with schools scoring in the lowest 20%. Their study concluded that in the higher performing schools "parents and students were perceived to be influential in those schools when compared with their counterparts in the lower performing schools" (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008, p. 555).

Similarly, a study conducted by Heck and Hallinger (2010) on collective leadership efforts on school improvement defined collaborative school leadership in the following manner: "Strategic schoolwide actions directed toward improvement in student learning that are shared among teachers, administrators, and others" (p. 228). Heck and Hallinger outlined four basic assumptions on the contribution of collaborative leadership to school improvement. First, the practice of leadership involved developing a shared vision for change and enabling people to work collaboratively to achieve the vision (Hallinger et al., 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004). Second, leadership was distributed; therefore, measuring success is not limited to principals' actions. Third, leadership is responsible for creating situations to improve teaching and learning. Fourth, leadership that creates conditions for professional learning communities positively impacted student performance (DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008).

Heck and Hallinger (2010) examined the reciprocal effects of collaborative leadership and school improvement using three different frameworks. In two of three models, they examined the unidirectional effects on school growth and the staffs' perspectives on leadership. The third model conceptualized the reciprocal effects system

wherein each contributing factor enacted change on the other. In all three models, the status factors for measurement are initial leadership, initial capacity, initial achievement, change in leadership, change in capacity, and school growth. The first model suggests that a change in leadership affects student growth, and the second model proposes that a change in student achievement (growth in a particular subject) affects change in leadership. The third model suggests that change processes all affect one another, and in turn, they multi-laterally impact all of the status factors.

The data source for Heck and Hallinger's (2010) study was a U.S. American public school system with 284 schools. In conjunction with the school system, the researchers used survey data on leadership and school improvement collected over a four-year time span. The participation from the school system included 195 schools. Heck and Hallinger also used statewide survey data collected from teachers on leadership and school improvement capacity. Because these surveys were regularly administered to all certified staff, the return rate increased. Total teacher return rates for the three periods of data collection in this study were 73.4%, 76.4%, and 75.6%. The return rates from the survey ranged between 47 to 100 % (m = 74.4%; SD = 6.2%) during the four-year data collection period (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). The survey data provided the researchers with the teachers' understanding of the changes in leadership practice and academic processes that impacted student achievement, specifically, "the goal of monitoring key educational processes (e.g., collaborative leadership, implementation of standards-based instruction, professional capacity, focus on academic improvement) over time" (Heck & Hallinger, 2010, p. 236).

The results from the study indicated the positive effects of collaborative leadership on student achievement. Models 1 and 3 supported the research on the positive effects of a change in school leadership to a collaborative model impacting student achievement (Heck & Hallinger, 2010). Subsequently, Model 2 failed to show student achievement had a direct impact on facilitating a change in collaborative leadership practices. The multidirectional third model established the positive impacts of collaborative leadership on all six aspects (initial leadership, initial capacity, initial achievement, change in leadership, change in capacity, and school growth) measured in this study. The researchers explained,

> Change in collaborative leadership was related positively to change in school improvement capacity (.17, $p < .05$), and change in improvement capacity was related positively to student growth rate (.19, $p < .05$). Therefore, the reciprocal effects model supported the proposition that changes in collaborative leadership and school improvement capacity are mutually reinforcing processes. (Heck & Hallinger, 2010, p. 243)

Collectively, the two studies illustrated the importance of creating an environment where collaborative leadership grows. Instructional leadership is responsible for establishing the vision, creating an environment where members are empowered to implement the vision, and facilitating collaboration and shared responsibility in the school improvement process (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004). Collaborative leadership efforts led to student growth when combined with targeted professional development (Dixon et al., 2014; DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Harris, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Mitchell & Castle, 2005).

Additionally, collaborative leadership had a positive impact on teacher motivation, which led to increased student achievement (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). In

fact, several studies and theorists validated the positive impact on the relationship between teacher motivation and student achievement (DuFour, 2004; Kaniuka, 2012; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). In essence, when teachers receive sustained professional development (macro-learning) and time to implement the strategies they learn in the professional development sessions (micro-learning), the result is a positive impact on teachers' motivation (Elmore, 2014; Kaniuka, 2012).

Cain and Gunter (2012) studied the PIVOT (purpose, identity, values, options, and trust) framework to collaborative school leadership. In this study, the researchers identified the five factors of leadership ABCDE: (a) architecture, the planning and direction; (b) building, the systems and organizational structure implementing leadership; (c) context, different leadership styles and approaches; (d) development, leadership development of the team that will complete the work; and (e) emotional, the well-being of the leaders is important in completing the work. The PIVOT framework is a holistic approach wherein the five factors work together to facilitate the school improvement efforts. PIVOT is connected in two parts: identification of key factors in leadership practice and the action of leadership in practice. The study by Cain and Gunter emphasized how the organizational structure of the SLT contributes to the school improvement process. The conclusion was that if attention is not given to the manner in which the SLT operates as an organization within the school environment, the school improvement process could be limited in achieving its goal (Cain & Gunter, 2012).

Efficient organizations establish mechanisms that complement their market strategies, but inefficient organizations struggle with these structural and process mechanisms. Successful organizations identify a strategy to justify the implementation

designed to meet the target audience. Effective SLTs establish organizational structures for meeting norms, professional development for teacher development and planning, collaboration among peers, data analysis, teacher observation, and feedback (Cain & Gunter, 2012; Fernandez, 2011; Lane et al., 2014; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Research on leadership teams suggests that a number of variables contribute to or hinder the effectiveness of an SLT.

Primarily, SLTs need to have a clear and elevating goal, focus on results, competent and committed members, leadership and external support, shared decision making, a feeling of ownership over the issue, positivity and connectivity with members in the organization, district leadership support, professional relations among the team and with others, and the use of data and collective learning (Cain & Gunter, 2012; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Kaufman et al., 2012; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). Subsequently, having competent and committed members of the SLT increases the organization's ability to succeed in the school improvement process (DuFour, 2004; Elmore, 2014; Kaufman et al., 2012). Collins (2005) described this scenario as having the right people on the bus when moving organizations from good to great: "Greatness flows first and foremost from having the right people in key seats and from removing people from the wrong seats" (p. 14). Essentially, the work of school improvement is a complex process that requires a certain level of expertise in school improvement initiatives (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004; Spillane, 2005).

In conjunction with the instructional leaders' level of expertise, another variable of importance is the commitment of SLT members toward implementing the vision of the

instructional leader/building principal. According to Leithwood et al. (1999), “The principal challenge facing schools as learning organizations is to determine the organizational conditions that foster individual and collective learning and to build these conditions into the school” (p. 215). The connection between members’ expertise and the interactions within the organization (SLT) are two variables that impact student achievement: teacher practice and school climate and culture (Anfara et al., 2006; DuFour, 2004, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fernandez, 2011; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, 2015; Marzano et al., 2005; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004).

One challenge of the school improvement process is the basic structure of the larger organization, the school (Murphy, 2015). The SLT is a micro-organization within the larger organization of the school itself (Lunenberg, 2012). However, because the basic structure of the school does not encourage or foster the opportunity for colleagues to work together, this structure directly impacts the SLT in accomplishing its mission. The primary structure of school environments is such that the members of the SLT also have daily responsibilities that are primarily focused on students. Teachers spend the majority of their workday interacting with students. This situation makes it a necessity to create the organizational norms and structures that allow the SLT time to also interact with colleagues in observations, peer coaching, and professional development opportunities (Benoliel, 2017; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Day, 2000; DuFour, 2004; Goldstein, 2004; Harris, 2004, 2008; Leithwood et al., 1999; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Healey, 2010).

Murphy (2015) completed an integrative review of literature to examine the cultural and structural barriers preventing the creation of professional communities. The framework for this review of literature spanned from 1990 until 2013 and is best described as an inductive thematic analysis that synthesized previous research to expose the challenges to creating professional learning communities (PLC). According to Murphy, five aspects of the structural challenges hinder the success of the SLT in achieving the mission of school improvement through the formation of PLCs.

First, the school workplace is designed to have teachers working in isolation from one another and in isolation with different groups of students (Harris, 2004). In the secondary school environment, teachers have more time to interact with their peers during open class periods, and teacher leaders have fewer teaching responsibilities and increased observational and procedural responsibilities (Anfara et al., 2006). However, in the elementary school environment, the primary structure places the teacher with one group of students from homeroom until dismissal. In some elementary school schedules, teachers may have a common planning block (usually 45 to 50 minutes) with other teachers of their grade level if human capital resources are available (Drago-Severson, 2004).

Murphy (2015) concluded that existing organizational arrangements and familiarity with current organizational systems hindered the formation of professional learning communities: “The current organizational system is the only one that most educators have known. It is difficult to move to the unknown even when one can glimpse its contours. In addition, even if the change process is set in motion, there are strong inclinations to regress to the familiar” (p. 157). Because educators, teachers, and

principals are familiar with the traditional leadership framework, the implementation of new research-based systems including professional learning communities must be intentionally and strategically planned to bring about a change.

The next aspect that hinders the process is the existing structures are not malleable, and the forces of organizational persistence and "institutional precedent" (Smylie, 1992, p. 55) act as barriers to structural changes (Murphy, 2015). School improvement reforms are common in public school environments. Teachers and school leaders have adapted to this type of environment, and that mindset hinders progression (Elmore, 1987). The culminating effects of the organizational arrangements, familiarity of practice, and institutional precedents impact the school's ability (primarily as represented by the instructional leader) to form a system wherein a collaborative approach to school improvement can be adopted (Murphy, 2015).

In addition to the structural challenges, cultural challenges also affect the creation of professional learning communities, comprehensive school reform teams, school leadership teams, school improvement teams, or at scale (DuFour, 2004) improvement efforts. Murphy (2015) identified these cultural changes as "professional norms and values" that compete with each other in a power struggle among teachers. Within the confines of these professional norms are the attitudes of the different hierarchical positions in the school organization. However, other researchers suggested that collaborative leadership is the gateway to school reform (Anfara et al., 2006; DuFour, 2004, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fernandez, 2011; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, 2015; Marzano et al., 2005; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004). The fact remains

that teachers see their jobs as teaching students and the principals' job as leading the school (Goldstein, 2004). This value system is embedded in teachers' as well as administrators' viewpoints on the school level organizational matrix. Teachers are seen as followers of the principal, not as equals in the improvement process. The role of the teacher has not evolved into a collaborative model in elementary schools as the design of the school day, schedule, and classroom environment remains one that contains a leader (the teacher) and followers (the students) confined in a four-walled environment.

Another cultural norm working against the collaborative leadership efforts is the autonomous authority teachers have within the classroom (Murphy, 2015). Most teachers work alone, disconnected from their peers. They value autonomy more than a chance to influence others work. Due to the organizational structure of the classroom environment, teachers engage with students for the majority of their time in the school environment. Accordingly, teachers view the classroom as a micro-domain within the larger organization of the school, one in which they have control over the decisions in the environment. In essence, because of this situational norm and instructional mindset of teachers, school leadership teams in the elementary school environment are often not cultivated within the school organization (Murphy, 2015).

As school leadership organizations evolve toward the common goal of achieving instructional best practices through collaborative leadership efforts, the need to identify and remove structural and cultural barriers is paramount to success (Murphy, 2015). The findings from Murphy's study reinforced the necessity of completing such actions. The instructional leaders of schools are accountable for multiple layers of data disaggregation and implementation of instructional practices to reach students at their level of

comprehension (Luo, 2008). Equally important is the creation of an environment that nurtures professional learning communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; DuFour, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2004, Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004). The task of school improvement is no longer a practice of isolation by one central figure within a school building or school district (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Day, 2010; Elmore, 1987; Harris, 2004, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Murphy, 2015). Structural change is important to developing the SLT; however, it is not a sole predictor of the organization's success (Murphy, 2015). The structural change combined with relationship building, norms and patterns for meeting structures and professional development, the creation of opportunities for collaboration among team members, and the building of trust between administration and teachers are all components necessary for school improvement team success (DuFour, 2004, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fernandez, 2011; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, 2015; Marzano et al., 2005; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004; Spillane, 2005).

Summary

Quality school improvement planning has a positive impact on student achievement (Anfara et al., 2006). Quality school improvement planning is an essential component if school organizations are to achieve their desired goals. Current research is available on the specific elements that determine the quality of a school improvement plan. Specifically, the elements for quality SIPs include specific language that is easy to understand and free of educational jargon, targeted strategies to address the improvement of identified goals, specific timelines to monitor and measure the effectiveness of the

instructional strategies, and flexibility in the adjustment of strategies in response to the student data collected throughout the timeline of implementation (Anfara et al., 2006; DuFour, 2004, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Fernandez, 2011; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis, 2015; Marzano et al., 2005; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004; Spillane, 2005). The written plan constitutes the initial phase of the improvement process.

Consistent with researched components of school improvement planning, it is necessary to write a plan that is easy to interpret while providing the organization with the defining steps for achieving the mission (Fernandez, 2011; Mitchell & Castle, 2005). Simultaneously, during the writing, the specific goals must be embedded within each section of the written plan. The goal setting process derives from identified data (normally student testing data) to be measured, over time, to gauge the success of the plan. The processes involved with the development of the SIP encompass the distributed leadership framework as there are multiple individuals writing, monitoring, and implementing the plan.

Sharing responsibility within the components of the school improvement process empowers members of the organization to ensure the plan is monitored, implemented, and adjusted towards achieving the identified goals (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Healey, 2010). The case study method will be used to determine the SLT's involvement in the aforementioned components of quality school improvement planning. The observations, interviews, and document analysis protocols will provide the researcher with data to determine how they are involved in this process. In addition to quality school improvement planning, extensive research supported shared,

collaborative, or distributed leadership models in the school improvement process (DuFour, 2004, DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane, 2005).

The primary purpose of an SLT is to improve teaching and learning through a collaborative effort within schools. School improvement teams exist to lead the work of engaging in thoughtful planning for whole-school decision making (Kaufman et al., 2012). Previous collective studies primarily concentrated on the individual efforts of SLTs and SIPs to improve student achievement. The majority of the studies on school improvement planning were quantitative and examined the process for school improvement in terms of the SIP's effects on student achievement. In addition, the majority of the studies on SLTs were qualitative and examined how the SLT is developed in the organizational environment in the process of becoming a professional learning community through the distribution of leadership responsibilities.

However, because of the limited studies on the SIP and SLT, working collectively toward improving the accreditation status of elementary schools informed the basis for this case study. This study is designed to examine the combination of school improvement planning and collaborative leadership development, through the SLT's impact on the improvement of accreditation ratings as measured by student achievement on criterion-based end-of-year tests. The research focuses on two primary questions with subsequent guiding questions to inform this study:

1. What are the processes building administrators engage to select and professionally develop members of the SLT in school improvement efforts?
    a. What role(s) does(do) instructional leaders assume in the selection and professional development of members of the SLT?

2. What are the responsibilities of SLT members in the school improvement process?

    a. How is the SLT involved in the writing, monitoring, implementing, and adjusting of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)?
    b. How does the organizational structure of the SLT contribute to the process of collaborative leadership in school improvement efforts?

The main criterion in organizing school leadership teams is shared responsibility for addressing the fundamental questions that drive the work. Teams are more effective when members have clarified their expectations regarding when and how they will work together to achieve common goals (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). This qualitative case study was conducted in an urban school district with 40 schools, of which 18 have the designation of *accreditation denied*. The case study was conducted at an elementary school where the principal has served more than five years. The school's student performance data was analyzed over a three-year span to include local benchmark data and state end-of-year assessment data on SOL tests in Grades 3 through 5.

The case study involved observations of SLT meetings monthly for four months, observations of SLT members in all assigned roles (i.e., teaching, observations, grade level planning sessions), reviews of professional development logs, interviews of seven members of the SLT to include the building administrator, and reviews of the school improvement plans for three years from 2015-16 to 2017-18. This study is designed to expand the current research on school improvement and distributed or collaborative leadership through school leadership teams. The study aimed at understanding the correlation between school leadership teams and school improvement planning.

Collaborative school leadership focuses on instructional leadership sharing a vision, distributing responsibilities among several layers of school personnel, creating conditions for professional learning communities, and improving teaching expertise to positively affect student performance (Heck & Hallinger, 2009, 2010). Previous research exists on school improvement planning, school leadership teams, distributed leadership, instructional leadership, and their impact on overall school improvement (DuFour, 2004; Fernandez, 2011; Harris, 2004, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane & Healey, 2010). This research expands current knowledge on how the four aforementioned phenomena are implemented in the work of school leadership teams in the process of school improvement initiatives, as measured by student achievement on standardized tests.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Educational researchers suggest school improvement is a collaborative process. This process involves the systematic use of data to formulate a School Improvement Plan (SIP). A SIP must include targeted areas for improvement, integration of specific strategies, frequent monitoring of student data, and identification of the people responsible for the implementation of each strategy (Huber & Conway, 2015). The school improvement process can be neither effective nor successful without the implementation of a SIP and a collective group of instructional personnel who lead the improvement efforts. The primary purpose of the School Leadership Team (SLT) is to assist the school through a collaborative effort to improve the teaching and learning of all stakeholders within the community.

Collaborative school improvement is a process of identifying the needs of the school community and then acting upon those needs in a systematic approach. The emerging importance and focus on teams are driven by a desire to develop "collaborative modes of work performance" (Cranston & Ehrich, 2005, p. 84), often resulting from the notions of the devolution of responsibility from the top of organizations to enhance productivity and staff engagement. The formation of a SLT is a strategy rooted in distributed, shared, and collaborative leadership theories. The SIP process derives from the strategic planning processes common among business communities and military organizations. Subsequently, these two research-based strategies became the norm for schools when subgroup data and student achievement data on state end-of-year tests

became the means of rating a school and determining its success or lack thereof, in essence, when school success became a numbers game.

NCLB (2002) and ESSA (2015) clarified the accountability standards for America's public schools in regards to student achievement measures. The primary purpose of NCLB (2002) and ESSA (2015) was to provide schools with resources and strategies to improve the instructional capacity of teachers through outlining specific processes aligned with the teaching of students through the implementation of a rigorous curriculum. As a result, all schools must establish long-term goals for academic achievement according to the following guideline: "The long-term goals for improved academic achievement are measured by proficiency on annual statewide reading/language arts and mathematical assessments by all students and identified sub groups" [ESSA, 2015, §1111(c) (4) (A)].

The current system of accountability requires schools that fail to achieve these goals to enact a written SIP and assign a team of highly qualified individuals to a SLT to monitor the improvement efforts (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2002). The creation of the SIP and the assignment of the SLT provide systematic approaches to long-term school improvement. The adoption of NCLB (2002) and reauthorization of ESSA (2015) required a written SIP and a collective group of school instructional staff to implement the leadership efforts for schools that fail to achieve annual measurable objectives as outlined in the legislative guide. Previous research on educational reform and instructional best practices supports both the concept of distributed leadership and strategic planning in the school improvement process (Bush & Glover, 2012; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Day, 2010; DuFour, 2004; Goldstein, 2004; Harris, 2004, 2008; Heck &

Hallinger, 2009, 2010; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Murphy, 2015; Rigby, 2013; Spillane, 2005) toward student improvement. Conventional wisdom suggests the use of SIPs (strategic planning) and SLTs (distributed leadership) are essential components to improving overall school performance (Ahearn, 1998; Armstrong, 1982; DuFour, 2004; Fernandez, 2011; Freeman et al., 2004; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Mintrop et al., 2001; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Strunk et al., 2015).

During my tenure as an elementary school administrator in instructional school leadership, I have come in contact with several schools and school districts wherein SIPs and SLTs are common practices, required for all schools regardless of their accreditation designation. In my professional experience with schools designated as *accreditation denied*, the improvement efforts toward full accreditation have shown minimal growth in the time from 2013 until 2017. The number of schools that fail to meet state accreditation benchmarks has increased despite implementation of the two research-based initiatives of the SLT and SIP. This situation contradicts the findings of previous researchers on school improvement.

Several studies correlate the success of school achievement with the systematic approach of identifying academic goals based on student data, implementing targeted strategies to improve student achievement, assigning instructional personnel to monitor the improvement efforts, and having regular benchmarks to assess the progress toward the end goal (Ahearn, 1998; Armstrong, 1982; Benoliel, 2017; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009, Gronn, 2000; Hallinger et al., 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 2009, 2010; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). I suggest

the influence of a common element between the systematic development of the SIP and the distributed leadership efforts of the SLT in the successful improvement of student achievement and schools improving their accreditation ratings. Therefore, the aim of this study is to gain an understanding of how the SLT and the SIP function in the improvement efforts in schools denied accreditation, based on English, math, history, and science end-of-the-year assessments in an urban district in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Research Goals

As a researcher, my goals for conducting this study derive from my professional experiences in elementary school leadership. I have been a school/district leader for 15 years of my 23 years in education, and during my tenure, I have been involved in the turnaround efforts of two Title I elementary schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia. My experience as a school leader will serve as an asset when participating in the lived experiences through the case study. Because I have extensive experience in school turnaround, I have knowledge of educational language, instructional best practices, data disaggregation, classroom instruction, and instructional leadership.

This knowledge will enable me to recognize certain components that other researchers might need to have interpreted for them. My experience will enhance my ability to recognize educational best practices when conducting observations with and of school leadership team members in their daily lived experiences. This experiential knowledge is also beneficial when auditing school improvement plans because there will not be an educational language barrier. In addition, my familiarity with school improvement planning on every level from the perspectives of teacher participant, school

leadership participant, and district level participant will serve as an asset in the coding process in the determination of quality school improvement plans.

The knowledge I have gained through my experience of helping schools improve from rankings of *accreditation denied* to fully *accredited* is consistent with the literature on school improvement. The necessary steps to improve student achievement and teacher pedagogy include developing school personnel in instructional leadership, analyzing student data, creating academic goals to increase student comprehension and performance on standardized tests, monitoring student performance and teacher pedagogy, and consistently providing feedback to teachers on the progress and necessary next steps. School improvement through student achievement is my primary focus, and to complete the mission, it is my responsibility to ensure the students receive a quality education and the teachers have the tools necessary to provide that education. Following the research-based steps to school improvement became the mechanism through which to systematically implement efforts toward full accreditation, primarily the development of the SLT and the creation of the SIP.

The instructional objective of the SIP is to develop a strategic plan based on school data derived from student performance on end-of-year, criterion-based tests aimed at improving student performance (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). The instructional leadership objective of the SLT is to work collectively to improve teacher practice and student achievement (DuFour, 2004; Elmore, 2014; Spillane, 2005). School improvement planning and school leadership teams individually have a positive impact on student achievement, teacher pedagogy, and school climate and culture. This study is designed to

focus on the role of the SLT in all phases of the school improvement process in schools where the implementation of these initiatives is required due to their accreditation rating.

In this qualitative instrumental case study, I determine the common aspects that school leadership teams implement when participating in the school improvement process. The aim of an instrumental case study is to understand a specific issue related to a specific problem. Case studies are an appropriate method of data collection when the researcher seeks to provide a thick description to make meaning of the identified problem (Yin, 2009). In the instrumental case study design, the researcher chooses one case to provide this description and uses multiple levels of data collection. The data collection methods may include observations, surveys, artifacts, archival records, and interviews (Yin, 2009). This study focuses on observations, archival document reviews, and interviews to provide the data for analyzing the role of the SLT in the chosen school.

Research efforts focus on how the SLT (a) is professionally developed in instructional leadership; (b) guides the teachers and staff in the improvement cycle; and (c) assumes leadership roles in the areas of professional development, data disaggregation, and building professional learning communities. The primary purpose of this research study is to examine the people involved in school improvement planning, the process of writing the SIP, and implementation of the strategies outlined in the SIP. Moreover, the focus includes an exploration of how stakeholders contributed to improved student achievement, as measured by the end-of-year assessments, in elementary schools denied accreditation.

Epistemology

Social interpretivism is the epistemological framework for this study. The interpretivist approach is concerned with the real-life experiences of the individual case and with understanding how the lived experience contributes to the individuals' reality: "Interpretivism emerged in contradistinction to positivism in attempts to understand and explain human and social reality" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 66-67). Implementation of the instrumental case study supports gaining an understanding of the lived experience of the SLT. The instrumental case study is a method used to provide insight into an issue or refine a theory (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

This method of research provides answers to the research questions through the observations of the team members in SLT meetings and in daily assigned duties, through interviews regarding their perspective of the role they play in school improvement, and through reviewing archival documents related to school improvement (e.g., SIPs, meeting agendas, and professional development plans). Triangulation of the three data sources yields a description of team members' roles in the school improvement process. This study provides a thick description and a deep understanding of the responsibilities of SLT members in the school improvement process through their lived work experiences and observed behaviors in leadership settings with teachers and other faculty members.

Research Questions

The focus of the research is to determine the role of SLTs in elementary schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The SLT is an organization within the public school environment composed of administrators, teachers, teacher specialists, and in some cases, parents or other members of the community. Research on

distributed leadership validates the importance of collaboration in school improvement efforts (Dunaway et al., 2013; Elmore, 2014; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane, 2005). This body of work focuses on two primary questions with subsequent guiding questions:

1. What are the processes building administrators engage to select and professionally develop members of the SLT in school improvement efforts?
    a. What role(s) does(do) instructional leaders assume in the selection and professional development of members of the SLT?
2. What are the responsibilities of SLT members in the school improvement process?
    a. How is the SLT involved in the writing, monitoring, implementing, and adjusting of the School Improvement Plan (SIP)?
    b. How does the organizational structure of the SLT contribute to the process of collaborative leadership in school improvement efforts?

Research Design

In the current system, schools denied accreditation are those that do not show significant progress toward full accreditation. The instrumental case study design is appropriate to identify the role and formation of the SLT towards school improvement. In addition, the study determines the common aspects that successful school leadership teams implement when participating in school-wide improvement efforts through the use of the SIP. The case study approach enables the researcher to acquire knowledge of how the team develops leadership, guides the teachers and staff in the improvement cycle, and assumes leadership roles in all areas related to the school improvement process.

Instrumental case study approach is appropriate when a researcher intends to describe commonalities associated with multiple groups involved in the same process. The instrumental design is often used when a researcher is attempting to illustrate different perspectives on common problems (Creswell, 2013). The case study is an appropriate method to provide a focused picture of the relation between the SLT and school improvement in elementary schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The elementary school in this case study (APlus Elementary–pseudonym) employs a principal with six years of experience at the current location. The school is located in an urban district within the Commonwealth of Virginia. The facility consists of individual classrooms within the building (no mobile classrooms) with wireless computer access. All classrooms have smart boards and digital document cameras for teacher and student use. The school has a regulation-size gymnasium, outdoor playground and ball field, computer lab, media center, and classrooms that are equipped with student computers and other digital devices for student and teacher use. The school receives pacing guides and curriculum resources, including lesson plans, assessments, and video tutorials of model classrooms for each subject, from the district curriculum and development department.

APlus Elementary serves students that walk to school from the neighborhood shadow zone. However, the school also serves students who are bused to the school outside of the neighborhood shadow zone. The building is a single-level structure with handicapped access for students and staff members. APlus Elementary is a Title I school, so classified because at least 64% of students receive free and reduced-cost lunches, in

accordance with district-established thresholds. The school has an established PTA and business partners that provide resources to the school for students and faculty members. APlus elementary school has failed to achieve accreditation status since the 2012-13 school year due to its failure to achieve the designated benchmarks in accordance with state guidelines in English (75%), math, history, and science (70%).

The participants in this study are SLT members at APlus Elementary. The data collection consisted of interviews with team members, observations of SLT meetings and grade-level planning meetings, and reviews of artifacts related to the school improvement process, including meeting agendas, school improvement plans, and professional development plans. Observations took place over a four-month period, during which three SLT meetings and four grade-level meetings took place. Interviews were conducted with members of the SLT at the beginning of the study to acquire information about their perspectives on their responsibilities in the school improvement process. The four-month time frame of this study encompassed the completion of one school year's improvement plan cycle (2017-18) and the beginning of the next year's improvement plan cycle (2018-19). This time frame provides a valuable perspective on the analysis of the SIP and how data from the previous year influences the processes of establishing the goals, writing the plan, and identifying strategies to continue with the improvement efforts for the next school year.

Data Collection

Observation of SLT meetings. SLT meetings were observed to gain an understanding of how the organizational structure contributes to the instructional leadership development of team members. While observing a total of seven SLT

meetings that encompassed 13 hours, I recorded ethnographic field notes on the interaction between members to provide data on how the team interacts with one another in their organizational environment. Ethnographic notetaking is the process by which I recorded observations that included behaviors, physical environment, and responses from participants using an observation protocol (Appendix F). I took field notes to describe experiences and observations while participating in the members' lives. After recording the notes, the process of coding and categorizing proceeds in thematic analysis to complete the narrative description. These observations within this organizational environment enabled me to participate in the team members' daily lives and gain an understanding of how they are professionally developed in school improvement efforts.

The use of observations in a case study enables the researcher to eliminate the distance between himself and the participants (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009): "The case researcher emerges from one social experience, the observation, to choreograph another: the report" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 240). To fully understand the SLT members' roles in school improvement, it is important to collect data from their work in this role of instructional leadership. The collection of data derived primarily from participants' meetings as a collective team and through their assigned individual meetings with grade levels and departments. The process of immersing myself in the daily work of the SLT through observations provided the necessary data to narratively report the findings in response to the research questions. In addition, the observations enabled me to gain knowledge of members' work-life experiences in school leadership and their involvement in the school-wide improvement efforts outlined in the SIP.

Interviewing SLT members. The interview process is an effective qualitative data collection method to acquire information from people regarding their feelings, opinions, experiences, and overall perceptions (Creswell, 2013). Interviews with SLT members occurred once during the four-month period of the case study. I solicited the interviewees' opinions when deciding on the location for the interview and selected a location that was most comfortable for the interviewee. Interviews took place face-to-face in a one-on-one setting and were audio recorded. The ethnographic interviewing method and the interview protocol guided the interview process.

Ethnographic interviewing is a method designed to elicit responses that provide context on experiences and enable the researcher to develop meaning about the situation. The ethnographer seeks a deep immersion into the other group's world. The job of ethnographic interviewing is to see from the inside how the SLT members lead their lives while assuming this leadership role (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Maxwell, 2013). Interviews are common in qualitative research, and they are one of the six data collection methods suggested by Yin (2009) for use in a case study. The process of interviewing involves multiple steps to collect quality data. The initial process of conducting quality interviews is to develop an interview protocol, which allows the researcher to develop questions to ask all participants during the study. The strength of the interview protocol (Appendix C) is it provides the interviewer with a guide for conducting the interview and serves as a mechanism to collect quality data pertinent to the research questions.

Review of artifacts. The collection of artifacts related to the SLT and the SIP provided a historical perspective on the training team members are receiving and delivering in the school improvement process. Specifically, the professional development

programs on instructional leadership, school improvement planning, and distributed or collective leadership provide the focus for the artifact study. Artifacts fell into two categories: school improvement and professional development plans. I reviewed the SIP and agendas from SLT and grade-level meetings and then coded the contents across themes related to the research questions.

Once all artifacts are coded, preparation begins with inspection for common themes across the different school years' artifacts. This data cleaning process provides the researcher with cross-coding themes among the different years' artifacts in the school improvement process as well as common themes in the roles of the members of the SLT. Reviewing and coding themes from the SIP provide a historical perspective on improvement efforts at the school. The process of coding involves the aggregation of material into small categories and then assigning a code from the different data collection materials in the study (Creswell, 2013). Through this process, the themes that emerge are used to descriptively reflect the contribution to school improvement (Appendix E).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves three main themes: memoing, coding/thematic analysis, and narrative analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Qualitative data analysis consists of preparing data, organizing data, and reducing data through the memoing, coding, and cross-connecting (narrative analysis) approaches to provide a descriptive analysis in response to the research questions (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). The instrumental case study method in this study involves all three strategies in the data analysis of interviews, observations, and review of document artifacts.

Interview data handling. Interviews took place with seven of the eleven members of the SLT at APlus Elementary. Analysis of interview data included the processes of open, axial, and thematic coding. The initial analysis of the data occurred immediately following the interviews in the form of listening to the interview recordings within one hour of the interview. The second listening of the interview tapes accommodated professional transcription to a narrative form from a contracted transciptioner, which served as the data source used in the first round of open coding.

The process of memoing occurs during the second phase of analyzing the interview data. Listening to interview recordings several times enables the researcher to fully understand the whole before dissecting into parts (Agar, 1980; Creswell, 2013). Open coding in the first round of data analysis allows the highlighting of words or phrases that accurately describe the overall meaning of the participants' responses: "Researchers begin with open coding to code for major categories of information" (Creswell, 2013, p. 86). I reviewed the data in the open coding phase to establish emerging themes to be used in the second round of axial coding.

In the second round, axial coding serves to aggregate codes into categories that directly relate to school improvement, instructional leadership, organizational structure, and distributed leadership: "Axial coding emerges in which the researcher identifies open coding categories to focus on as the core phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 86). The interview questions are primarily designed to provide an understanding of the members' roles in the distributed leadership process and the school improvement planning process.

The axial coding analysis involves multiple readings of the data and the creation of an organized system for categorizing into concepts related to the study. The importance of axial coding is the linking of codes into themes related to the overall study. All themes related to the study are compiled to enable the researcher to make meaning of the phenomena occurring in the case study. The codes are analyzed for similarities and differences through the use of a chart of responses along the themes of school improvement, instructional leadership, organizational structure, and distributed leadership. Analysis of this chart informs the final round of coding for descriptive analysis of selective coding.

The selective coding process creates a narrative description that describes the phenomenon under study. The premise of selective coding is to create a storyline incorporating all themes to describe the core concept from the research questions. Selective coding is the process through which the researcher develops different hypotheses to combine the categories and describe the interrelationships in a narrative model (Creswell, 2013). The selective coding in the case study provides the narrative description of the lived experience of the SLT in their daily work on school improvement toward full accreditation.

Observation data handling. I assumed the role of a nonparticipant observer with the SLT and completed the observational data collection on the operational responsibilities of the SLT members. Observations took place in two primary settings: SLT meetings and grade-level meetings led by SLT members. During all observations, I followed the observation protocol (Appendix F). The protocol requires recording the

length of the observation, the date, the time, and descriptive notes on the interactions with SLT members in the settings.

The participants in this study were observed three times in the SLT meeting environment and four times in grade level planning sessions over the four-month period. At the conclusion of each observation, I reviewed the field notes and provided a narrative description of the observable behaviors in response to the research questions. I further analyzed the data from the observations through the open coding, axial coding, and selective coding processes. The goal of coding was not primarily to count things but to fracture the data and rearrange them into categories to facilitate comparison between the data pieces in the same category and those that aid in the development of theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). This process facilitates the aggregation of themes around the lived experiences in the school improvement process by the SLT members to describe their contributions to the instructional goals identified in the SIP.

Document data handling. The documents reviewed in the case study were school improvement plans, professional development plans embedded within school improvement plans, and agendas from SLT and grade-level meetings. I reviewed three years' worth of SIPs to identify whether they contain the components outlined in the literature review and constitute quality school improvement plans. Previous literature indicates that quality SIPs contain identified measurable objectives based on specific student data points and include a process for implementing strategies, monitoring student progress, and adjusting the implementation of the strategies based on the interval data analysis. Also, quality plans include embedded professional development for the teachers in charge of executing the plan (Anfara et al., 2006; Fernandez, 2011).

I recorded the themes on a spreadsheet that identified the presence of the components as limited, evident, or emerging across a three-year span. Analysis of the SIPs followed the process of an initial reading, a second reading with the identification of themes, and a final reading with categorization of similarities and differences across the three-year span. Once the artifactual data were organized according to the limited, evident, and emerging themes, I wrote the narrative description to serve as the final data point used in the overall analysis of the case study.

The three data analysis methods of reading/memoing; open, axial, and selective coding; and charting for similarities and differences served as the triangulation source points to provide the report on the findings in response to the research questions. The first step in the data collection process consisted of the reading and memoing of the field notes from the observations of the SLT in a variety of work settings to include team meetings, grade-level meetings, and staff meetings. The open, axial, and selective coding applied primarily to interview data collected from SLT members after the interviews had been transcribed and read for clarity. The third data analysis method of charting for similarities and differences applied to artifacts such as the SIP and professional development documents specifically related to the SLT's professional development and not to the entire staff. The connection of the analysis strategies is a necessary step in the case study methodology: "The connecting step is necessary for building theory, which is a primary goal of analysis" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 113). Consistent with qualitative research, the descriptive report provides the thick description for the case study.

Human Participants and Ethics Precautions

The qualitative case study of the SLT did not present any physical, social, or emotional danger to the participants. Because participants were sharing personal and professional perspectives, which could jeopardize their careers if made public, precautions for protecting anonymity were in place. Any risk that could threaten job security was eliminated by using a pseudonym for the school participating in the case study and securing informed consent from the district before data collection began (Appendix G.). All documentation collected from human participants was secured in password-protected files, and recordings of interviews were destroyed after transcription. Finally, every participant in the case study (Appendix H) and the principal (Appendix I) received an informed consent letter and a full description of the research design. Any members electing not to participate had the opportunity to opt out of the study.

Conclusion

The aim of this case study was to develop an understanding of the role of the SLT in the school improvement efforts in an elementary schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The case study features interviews with SLT members, observations of SLT meetings, and document analysis of SIPs over a three-year span. The data from the study were coded, categorized, and analyzed in narrative discourse to report the findings from the study. Chapter 3 presented a detailed outline of the case study data collection methodology, and Chapter 4 will present the results in response to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

A single case study is appropriate to answer the research questions on the role of the school leadership team in an elementary school denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The purpose of the research is to answer the following research questions:

(a) What are the processes school based administrators engage to select and professionally develop members of the School Leadership Team (SLT) in school improvement efforts?

(b)What are the responsibilities of SLT members in the school improvement process?

The case study involves three data collection methods: interviews with school leadership team members, observation of school leadership team members in their assigned daily roles, and analysis of school improvement plans and professional development documents. The elementary school selected to participate in this study is known as APlus Elementary (pseudonym) throughout the reporting of the results.

Case study school profile. APlus Elementary School is a kindergarten through Grade 5 Title I public school that has failed to achieve the full accreditation rating assigned by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) since the 2012-2013 school year. APlus has been denied accreditation, which indicates that student performance on end-of-year standardized assessments, the Standard of Learning (SOL) tests, fell below the required benchmarks of 75% in English and 70% in math, history, and science for four consecutive years for all students in Grades 3 through 5. APlus Elementary is

situated in an urban district with multiple specialized schools to include early childhood centers, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, an alternative school, and specialized programs that include magnet and career science fields. APlus Elementary is centrally located in District Alive (Pseudonym), and the school was built in the 1960s. The school has over 500 students, 40 instructional staff members, and 30 support staff personnel. The faculty and staff at APlus Elementary have experienced minimal turnover since the 2014-15 school year as they have retained 90% of their teaching staff, and in the 2017-18 school year, they retained 95% of the teaching staff. In addition, classes in Grades K through 5 feature a teacher-to-student ratio that averages 19 to 1, which is five students fewer than District Alive's average teacher-to-student ratio of 24 to 1.

APlus Elementary serves a student population of many races and ethnicities with a total school enrollment of over 500 students. The majority of the students (54%) are African American, which is higher than the state average but comparable with the district average. However, in contrast, the White student population is lower than both the district and state averages at 17%. Currently, the English language learners (ELL) and students with a disability (SPED) populations are higher than the district and Commonwealth of Virginia averages. In addition, the ELL population increased by four times from the 2016-17 school year to the 2017-18 school year. The increase in ELL students is the result of a neighborhood within the zone for APlus elementary having an increase of ELL families residing there during the 2017-18 school year. The subgroups of ELL and SPED are eligible to receive educational accommodations in the subjects of reading and math from specialized personnel within the school district. As a result of the percentage of students receiving free and reduced price lunches (52%), the entire school received free

lunch and breakfast through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program in the 2015-16 school year, implemented through the United States Department of Education (USDOE). This program continues to be in existence in the current (2018-19) school year.

The school leadership team is divided into two categories, administrative and nonadministrative members. The principal, assistant principal, and reading specialist are considered administrative team members, and the grade-level and content teachers are the nonadministrative members. The profiles of the members provide perspective on their length of time in education and the amount of time they have worked at APlus Elementary. The profiles also provide a personal perspective on each member's philosophy of the role of the SLT. These profiles serve as an important component in developing an understanding of each member's perspective on the school improvement process and also provide answers to the research questions. Eleven members make up the team, three administrative and eight nonadministrative members (Table 1).

Administrative participants. The principal of APlus elementary is known as Principal Sunshine and has served for six years. APlus elementary school is the first building Principal Sunshine has served in as the leader of the school. Prior to becoming the principal of APlus elementary, she worked as an assistant principal for three years. Principal Sunshine has worked in the field of education for 24 years in many different capacities. She has been an elementary school teacher, math interventionist, grade-level chair, and a member of a school leadership team as a nonadministrative participant. Principal Sunshine has worked in District Alive for all 24 years and started her career in 1994.

Table 1

School Leadership Team APlus Elementary

Pseudonym	Grade Level	Administrator	Teacher Leader	Interviewed	Observed
Principal Sunshine	K-5	X		X	X
Assistant Principal Wonderful	K-5	X		X	X
Reading Specialist Superior	K-5	X		X	X
Teacher Divine	2nd		X	X	X
Teacher Glowing	4th		X	X	
Teacher Magnificent	SPED 3-5		X	X	X
Teacher Lovely	1st		X	X	X
Teacher Incredible	5th		X		X
Teacher Happy	Kindergarten		X		X
Teacher Excited	K-5 Physical Education		X		X
Teacher Diligent	K-5 Guidance Counselor		X		X

Principal Sunshine described her role as a member of the SLT as the person who shares the vision of what the school is to accomplish. She states, “My whole purpose is to share my vision of where we are going and how we are going to get there.” Principal Sunshine gets her vision from the belief in what she wants for her students. Additionally, her vision comes from the “expectations of how and why we, school personnel, do what

we do with children every day in our building." Principal Sunshine also leads the math and science content areas within APlus Elementary. In preparation for this assignment, Principal Sunshine partnered with District Alive's Curriculum and Development Math Specialist and attended professional development with a university's school of education on the initiative of Math Talks. Math Talks is a strategy used to improve student numeracy and mathematical problem solving. Principal Sunshine feels the need to lead these efforts because during observations of teachers, she realized that teachers spent the majority of the time lecturing to students during the math block, and the scores in math dropped by 15 percentage points between the 2016-17 and 2017-18 school years.

Assistant Principal Wonderful has served as the assistant principal for two years at APlus elementary. Assistant Principal Wonderful is working in her first assignment as an administrator in elementary school. Assistant Principal Wonderful has eight years of experience in the field of education as a classroom teacher in kindergarten, first, and second grade. Assistant Principal Wonderful has worked on multiple school leadership teams during her eight-year career in District Alive. Assistant Principal Wonderful stated during our interview, "I love my job and really like to take part in the growth of a school and being a part of the school improvement planning."

Assistant Principal Wonderful describes her role on the school leadership team as one of the leaders of the school. She states, "The purpose is to collaborate as a team and guide the next steps of the improvement plan and move the school forward." She currently leads the Kindergarten through second grade literacy content at APlus Elementary. Her focus for the 2017-18 school year is to improve the teacher pedagogy in small group reading blocks. This task became her focus due to the number of students

identified as reading below grade level from second to third grade. The students identified in this category equaled 42% of the rising third graders for the 2018-19 school year.

Reading Specialist Superior is new to APlus Elementary and completed her first year in the 2017-18 school year. She has seven years of experience in the field of education. Reading Specialist Superior and has worked in multiple districts across the United States of America in many different capacities. She has experience as a teacher, response to intervention specialist, and as a director of instruction for a K-12 charter school.

Reading Specialist Superior feels as though the purpose of the school leadership team is to "meet bi-monthly to discuss any upcoming events, housekeeping information, but also to discuss progress on our goals, supports that are needed, and what supports are in place." She also describes her role as the presenter of student progress from data collection to all teachers from kindergarten to fifth grade in the content area of reading. Reading Specialist Superior is responsible for leading weekly grade-level planning sessions as well as providing coaching to teachers having difficulties implementing curriculum initiatives from the district. She explained that a coaching cycle with a teacher involves planning lessons, modeling lessons, and providing feedback to the teacher on delivery of instruction.

Principal Sunshine, Assistant Principal Wonderful, and Reading Specialist Superior serve in the capacity of school-based administrators on the SLT at APlus elementary. Altogether, the three administrators on the SLT have 35 years' experience in

school leadership. In addition, each one of the administrative members is responsible for a content area and the writing of the school improvement plan.

Nonadministrative participants. Teacher Glowing, Teacher Lovely, Teacher Divine, and Teacher Magnificent are members of the SLT serving as grade-level leads and department chairs at APlus Elementary.

Teacher Glowing is a fourth grade teacher at APlus Elementary and has served on the SLT for one year. Prior to joining APlus Elementary, Teacher Glowing served on the SLT at a different school within the same district for six years. Teacher Glowing has a total of nine years in education with teaching experience in second through fifth grades. Teacher Glowing was assigned to be a member of the SLT in her first year at APlus elementary because she had served in the capacity of grade-level lead teacher.

Teacher Glowing describes the "core purpose" of the SLT as to take any initiatives, district-wide or school-wide, and translate them to team members and to make them relevant for the grade level. She also states that her purpose is to relay information regarding wants and needs from her grade level to the building administration. Teacher Glowing is not leading any school-level content areas, but she does participate in a district math cohort for teachers. Teacher Glowing serves as the site coordinator for the afterschool program at APlus Elementary. In her role as site coordinator, she is responsible for hiring of staff, observation of instruction, coordination of curriculum implementation, and other operational duties, such as securing transportation and meals for students. The afterschool program serves students identified as in need of afterschool tutoring in reading and math; it meets twice a week for two hours daily and two Saturdays a month for eight hours for field trips related to the afterschool curriculum. The

site coordinator position is not directly related to Teacher Glowing's role as a member of the SLT, and it is a contracted position made possible by a district grant.

Teacher Lovely is a second grade teacher at APlus Elementary and has served on the SLT for three and a half years. She has 13 years of teaching experience in pre-kindergarten through third grade and worked previously at a different school within the district for seven years. Teacher Lovely assumed the role of SLT member for one half of a year when the assigned leader had to leave the school for medical reasons. She stated, "I became a member when another member left because of my ability to lead conversations. I was then asked to apply for the grade level lead position the following year and have been on the SLT since then." Teacher Lovely describes the purpose of the SLT as focusing on what the school needs to improve upon and then working as team to do that. She does not lead any content areas and sees herself as a bridging member because people feel comfortable with her. Teacher Lovely describes her leadership of the second grade team as one that helps new teachers with the application of the curriculum.

Teacher Divine has been a first grade teacher at APlus Elementary for the past five years and served as a member of the SLT for one year. Teacher Divine has worked at APlus Elementary exclusively throughout her five-year teaching career. Teacher Divine became a member of the SLT because new teachers were not eligible, and other teachers did not want to serve in the capacity of grade-level lead. Teacher Divine describes the purpose of the SLT as helping other people. She feels as though it is her job to communicate with the principal on behalf of her grade level and to communicate the expectations from the principal to the grade level. She does not lead any content areas

and indicates her job is to communicate expectations from the administration and to communicate wants and needs from the grade level to the principal.

Teacher Magnificent is a self-contained third, fourth, and fifth grade special education teacher. She has worked at APlus Elementary for seven years and has been a member of the SLT for six of those seven years. She has one year of teaching experience in another state and is entering her eighth year in education. Teacher Magnificent was asked to be the lead when the previous lead retired. Teacher Magnificent describes the purpose of the SLT as to be the conveyor of wants and needs from the grade level or content teachers to the building administration. Teacher Magnificent stated in her interview, “I guess my role as a member is to kind of facilitate between the leadership and the special education teachers—just make sure we are on the same page.” She is involved only in leading the special education department and does not have any content responsibilities at APlus Elementary.

These seven members participated in the interviews and observation data collection for this study. The school leadership team consists of 11 members with four members new to the team in the 2018-19 school year. All members were observed in the SLT and grade level meetings at APlus Elementary.

Data Sources

During this case study, three methods of data collection were appropriate to answer the research questions. The methods included interviews with SLT members, observations of members in the SLT and grade-level meetings, and a document analysis of the school improvement plans for a three-year period. One of the documents included in the methodology was professional development plans for the SLT. Because APlus

Elementary did not have a specific professional development plan, this document was not reviewed. However, within their school improvement plans, a column was designated for professional development for the year that pertains to the entire faculty of APlus Elementary. Table 2 provides an overall analysis of the data that informed the results from the case study. The data is reported in terms of *limited*, *emerging*, or *evident*.

The limited, emerging, and evident themes derived from the use of the School Improvement Plan Averaging Worksheet (Appendix E), interview data responses from SLT members using the Interview Protocol (Appendix C), and observational data collection and ethnographic notetaking during the observations of SLT meetings and grade-level meetings led by SLT members using the Observation Walkthrough Protocol (Appendix F). All of the data collection protocols were reviewed by an interpretive community to minimize bias that may have derived from my being the researcher and a practitioner in the field of instructional leadership. Once the data protocols, data collection, and data analysis were vetted by the interpretive community, the rating system was applied to the data.

The rating of *limited* indicates a lack of physically documented evidence or observed behaviors on the process aligned with the theme. Additionally, the rating of *emerging* indicates a process in place and some evidence to support the thematic category, but the consistency is sporadic and not quantifiable with documentation. Last, when a theme is rated as *evident*, data has shown a consistent process in place that has been quantified through evidence-based documents and observations. These terms indicate the level of quality in relation to the emerging themes of school improvement

process, professional development, and school leadership team members' roles as they pertain to instructional leadership.

Table 2

Overview of Data Collection

Emerging Themes	Data Collection Methods		
	Interviews	*Observations*	*Document Analysis*
School Improvement Process (SLT) a. Written b. Monitoring c. Adjusting	a. L b. L c. L	a. L b. L c. L	a. E b. E c. E
Professional Development For SLT	L	L	L
School Leadership Team (SLT) Member Roles	EM	L	E

Note. L = Limited, EM = Emerging, E = Evident .

School improvement process. The School Improvement Plans (SIP) for APlus Elementary are all approximately three pages in length and are formatted in a spreadsheet document layout. The school improvement plans reviewed in this case study included those for the school years of 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18. The 2015-16 and 2016-17 SIPs included the same headings across the x and y axes. X-axis headings included the following: Clear Expectations, Professional Development, Monitor, Feedback. Goals appeared across the y-axis under the following headings: Learning Environment, What is Being Taught, How it is Being Taught, How will you know if students learned the material?, and What will we do if students don't learn? In addition to the goals on the y-axis, there is a connection to the state-mandated Teacher Development Evaluation Program (TDEP; Appendix D) standards as they are listed along this continuum.

The format of the SIP for the 2017-18 school year was structured differently than those for the two previous school years. The adjustment derived from a district-wide revision committee on the format of the SIP. The committee, which included central office personnel and building principals, met three times during the summer of 2017 and presented the new format to building principals during the August 2017 principal meeting.

The spreadsheet format with headings for the x- and y-axes remained the same, but the content of the headings changed. In the 2017-18 SIP, the headings across x-axis included:

- What is being taught?—Clear expectations,
- How is it being taught?—Identified strategy,
- Who is responsible?—Inclusive of all staff,
- How will you know if the students learned the material?—Including assessment,
- What will you do if students don't learn?—Including professional development, and
- Reflection—daily, weekly, monthly monitoring, and response practices.

The headings across the y-axis included:

- Teaching and Learning Goals--Making Connections,
- Intervention and Enrichment Goal,
- Youth Development Goals,
- Building Community Goal, and
- Environment Goal.

The final difference between the structure of the plan in 2017-18 was the teaching standards were removed from the y-axis.

***Written plan*.** I used the School Improvement Plan Averaging Worksheet (Appendix E) and assigned a score in the components of the written plans, use of specific, measurable, attainable, time bound, realistic (SMART) goals, strategies to address the goals, professional development, and monitoring of progress. The score assignments were (2) *evident*, (1) *emerging*, and (0) *limited*. The School Improvement Plan Averaging Worksheet provided clarity and eliminated any professional biases when reviewing the School Improvement Plans. This document was reviewed by an interpretive community (to include method, analysis, and results) to minimize any biases due to my professional knowledge in regards to school improvement planning and processes.

The written quality of school improvement plans enhanced the plan's application, effectiveness, and implementation (Ahearn, 1998; Fernandez, 2011). The written quality includes the use of language that all stakeholders can understand, defining of unfamiliar terms, and whenever acronyms are used, the full terminology is spelled out first and then the acronyms are used from then on throughout the plan. According to research, SIPs should first and foremost have an ease of understanding for all stakeholders. The ease of understanding is described as the ability for laymen to understand the language and be able to comprehend the written plan. The SIPs from APlus Elementary school received a score of 2 (*evident*) for the school years 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18.

The average for the three years was 2, which is an overall rating of *evident*. All three SIPs were written in a language that was easy to interpret and free of educational

jargon that only practitioners in the field could understand. During the interviews, SLT members answered two questions in reference to the written SIP. The questions were (a) When was the school improvement plan written? and (b) Who was responsible for writing the plan? SLT members' responses indicated they were not sure when the SIP was written. Responses included "August to October," "I don't know," "in the fall," and "sometime during the year."

Conversely, document reviews revealed there were several people assigned to implement the strategies in the plan in the designated column for monitoring. However, the observations of school leadership meetings and reviewing of agendas did not align with what was written in the SIP in the monitoring section of the plan. In the 2015-16 and 2016-17 SIP monitoring responsibilities are assigned to administrators and feedback from the monitoring is provided through observations and feedback. In the 2017-18 SIP, monitoring responsibilities are assigned to teachers, administrators, instructional assistants, interventionist, instructional technology coaches, and reading specialists. However, the document does not define the manner in which the aforementioned personnel are to provide monitoring. Additionally, the interviews with SLT members also indicated the absence of the collaborative participation in the written process.

The interview responses to the question, Who was responsible for writing the plan? were clear. Principal Sunshine stated, "I did the initial write-up of the entire plan." Assistant Principal Wonderful shared, "I would say the administrators did a lot of the writing and then shared with the SLT." Reading Specialist Superior responded, "My principal and assistant principal came to me and shared the plan in October," and Teacher Glowing stated, "The principal has the ultimate responsibility in writing the plan."

Teacher Divine stated, “I know it was our principal,” and Teacher Magnificent stated, “The principal is the one who originally did the write-up.”

The majority of the interviewees responded with the building principal or building administration to include the assistant principal as well. The designated responsibilities in the written plan were divided between administrators, teachers, and content specialists. The observations of SLT meetings and agenda topics did not include school improvement planning. According to the interview responses, nonadministrative members (teachers on SLT) were not involved in writing the SIP. Additionally, they were not assigned any responsibilities for monitoring the progress of the plan in the written SIP. SLT members, other than Principal Sunshine and Assistant Principal Wonderful, could not articulate how they were involved in the initial stage of writing the SIP. However, based upon the monitoring responsibilities within the SIPs, it would be expected the SLT members would participate in the writing of the plan. Research on quality school improvement planning indicates shared participation in the school improvement process increases the ability to achieve goals (Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015; Strunk et al., 2015).

SMART goals. SIPs should have goals that align with the SMART criteria (Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015). The School Improvement Plan Averaging Worksheet (Appendix E) was developed to identify the quality of the goals section in the written plan in alignment with the SMART criteria. This document was analyzed by an interpretive community for accuracy and reliability prior to my applying it to the SIPs from APlus Elementary.

The 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years’ SIP goals achieved a rating of *emerging* (1), and the 2017-18 SIP achieved a rating of *limited* (0) in the SMART goals category.

The combined average for the three school years was 0.66. In the measurable, achievable, and relevant categories, the 2015-16 school year rating was *emerging* (1), and the 2016-17 and 2017-18 rating was *limited* (0) for a three-year average of .33. The time-bound category was rated as *limited* (0) for the 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 school years with three-year average of 0. The goals written in the SIP did not meet the criteria of the SMART rubric.

The 2015-16 SIP consisted of five goals for school improvement. The categories for the goals targeted five domains to include learning environment, what is being taught, how it is being taught, how will you know if students learned the material, and what will we do if students don't learn. The quote below conveys the goals created by the administration for the 2015-16 school year:

> (a) Learning Environment—Decrease the number of students referred through the disciplinary process by 10% by creating an environment that promotes a sense of community and student responsibility in the building; (b) What is being taught—100% of all classrooms will have literacy and math learning targets posted that is aligned with curriculum framework, essential questions, and elementary instructional guide; (c) How it is being taught—All students will participate in daily whole group and small group instruction, intervention/enrichment through the use of the division framework, VDOE (Virginia Department of Education) standards and C&D (Curriculum and Development) instructional guide; (d) How will you know if students learned the material?—Teachers will check for understanding on a daily basis in all instructional areas; administer a formative assessment weekly to determine mastery/needs of students. Students performance should be within 80% to show evidence of mastery; (e) What will we do if students don't learn?—All students identified of intervention will meet their instructional goal through targeted instruction showing data proven growth based on a data point used for exiting intervention. (2015-16 School Improvement Plan APlus Elementary)

The SIP goals are specific, measurable, and relevant in the plan for the 2015-16 school year when assessed using the SIP Averaging Worksheet. However, the two components of attainable and time bound did not meet the criteria and were scored in the limited

category, according to the averaging worksheet. Additionally, four out five of the goals were scored as limited in the category of attainable due to the fact that *all* and *100%* were the targets.

The 2016-17 SIP consisted of five goals for school improvement. The categories for the goals targeted five domains include learning environment, what is being taught, how it is being taught, how will you know if students learned the material, and what will we do if students don't learn. The quote below presents the goals created by the administration for the 2016-17 school year:

> (a) Learning Environment—Students will be supported by the student support team in order to decrease the number of out of school suspensions, while improving daily attendance and exposure to direct instruction; (b) What is being taught?—All teachers will use learning targets developed in planning with success criteria that are aligned with standards/curriculum framework to increase mastery and produce student products that are aligned to the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy; (c) How it is being taught?—All teachers will use researched based strategies that include practices, structures, strategies and tools found on the division instructional guide; (d) How will you know if students learned the material?—Teachers will formatively check for understanding on a daily basis in all instructional areas to determine mastery/needs of students; (e) What will we do if students don't learn?—Teachers will provide intervention to students who do not demonstrate mastery based on data (benchmarks) and observation during core Tier 1 instruction. Those students in need of supplemental intervention will receive additional support at Tier 2 (intervention) or Tier 3 level (SPED). (School Improvement Plan APlus Elementary, 2016-17)

The goals toward improvement in the 2016-17 school year SIP met the emerging (1) criteria for the domain of specific. The remaining areas of measurable, achievable, relevant, and time bound received a score of limited (0). When applying the averaging worksheet criteria, the written goals did not have an instrument of measurement to determine if the goal was effective. The goals were also absent a determinant of how they will be achieved or even if they are achievable when the term of all was applied to the

goals. The relevance of the goals could not be determined because they were not related to specific academic achievements for students. Finally, no time frame was associated with the measurement of progress; therefore, it was difficult to ascertain whether or not the goal had been met. Therefore, the goals within the SIP for 2016-17 did not meet the components of SMART goals.

The 2017-18 SIP differed from the format of the 2015-16 and 2016-17 SIPs. The 2017-18 SIP format has two basic domains for goals broken into two different sections. The first domain is Teaching and Learning Goals with subsections (a) Making Connections, and (b) Intervention and Enrichment. The second domain is Youth Development with subsections (a) Building Community Goal and (b) Environment Goal. The following quote conveys the improvement goals for the 2017-18 school year:

> (1) Teaching and Learning (a) Making Connections—Provide opportunities for students to make cross-curricular connections through the implementation of real world experiences in all content areas; (b) Intervention/Enrichment—Provide opportunities for students to receive additional Tier 2 support or enrichment based upon data points; (2) Youth Development (a) Building Community Goal—Increase the opportunity for all students to build relationships by participation in student-led experiences; (b) Environment Goal—Provide opportunities for students to develop voice, choice, confidence, and competence. (School Improvement Plan APlus elementary, 2017-18)

The improvement goals in the 2017-18 school year SIP met the limited (0) criteria for each domain of SMART goals. The goals within the plan utilized nonquantifiable terms such as *provide*, *increase*, and *develop*. Applying the criteria from the averaging worksheet to the written goals revealed they lacked an instrument of measurement to determine if the goal was met. The goals were also absent determinants of how they will be achieved or even if they are achievable when the term of *all* was applied to the goal. Finally, there is no time frame associated with the measurement of progress; therefore, it

was difficult to ascertain whether or not the goal was met. Therefore, the goals within the SIP for 2017-18 did not meet the components of SMART goals.

Interview responses on SMART goals. Interview responses related to SMART goals in the SIP were inconsistent among the interview responders. The theme that emerged from the collection of responses from the question "How does the SIP specifically address the needs of students in relation to academic achievement?" illustrated that members were unable to make a connection between the student achievement and the goals for improvement. Prior to answering the question, six out of seven members had a long pause of approximately one minute. Four of the members, Assistant Principal Wonderful, Teacher Glowing, Teacher Divine, and Reading Specialist Superior, repeated the question prior to taking the long pause and had a look of confusion on their faces prior to giving their responses. In addition, two of the four aforementioned members, Reading Specialist Superior and Teacher Glowing, are in their first year of service on the SLT at APlus elementary.

Reading Specialist Superior stated, "There was an individual goal for student academic progress, and then it was like bulleted down to be very specific for our third through fifth graders based on their SOLs." When asked a follow-up question in regards to a specific grade level or subgroup of students, the response was "not really." While answering this series of questions in regards to the needs of students, Reading Specialist Superior's body language and facial expressions indicated frustration with this process. She also stated that this is something that "needs to be addressed" when developing the 2018-19 SIP.

Teacher Glowing, the fourth grade lead teacher and afterschool program site coordinator, stated,

> Well, the improvement plan, like, one goal would be to improve reading. So, on the plan, it would have things that we kind of already do on the plan, so it would be the intervention groups would be on the plan, or small group reading would be on the plan. This year, we were able to put afterschool instruction on the plan, but those were things that were already being done and in place, so, as far as how does that help the kids, um, it's what we're already doing and we need more help, so I don't know.

Teacher Glowing, who is the site coordinator, shared the implementation of the afterschool program as how this extended learning program specifically addressed the needs of the students. She was very eager to describe the process for selecting the students to attend the afterschool program and how that was based on student data from three sources to include grades, district benchmark scores, and previous SOL scores.

All seven interview responses stated academic achievement for students individually, but they could not articulate the collective goal for the student population as a whole. The only subject mentioned by all interview participants was the subject of reading. SLT members spoke to reading improvements from an individual student's perspective when answering questions in relation to the contribution of the SIP toward school improvement and school accreditation. SLT members were unable to connect the goals listed with school specific student data and measurement tools for monitoring improvement. Terms related to goals and objectives were stated by SLT interview participants from an individual student's perspective. The participants shared,

> The school went backwards this year, the plan addresses more of how we are instead where do we need to go. I think we have a way to go, and I have to do a better job of revisiting during the year.

In addition, when conducting observations of the SLT in school planning meetings and grade level meetings, specific goal setting and analysis of student data were not observed behaviors. The observed behaviors in the meetings included discussions regarding a disconnect in culture between colleagues and the negative effect this misalignment was having on the school climate and culture. Another behavior observed was the reviewing of housekeeping procedures to include supply needs, plotting out the calendar for the first two months of school, and norms for SLT and grade-level collaboration sessions.

During the observations of summer meetings with the SLT, there was not any direct professional development on instructional leadership. Since the school leadership team did not have a professional development plan I could not determine if there was professional development outside of the observations I conducted. It is also important to note that during the initial meeting with the SLT, the SIP process was not on the agenda. The absence of school improvement planning processes continued over the next two observed meetings of the SLT. In the time span from August 22 until September 12, during 13 hours of observation of the SLT and grade-level planning sessions, there was no mention of the school improvement process. The written agendas in the SLT meetings consisted of the following topics: Connecting with One Another (Introduction of Team Members), Reflective Conversations, Plotting our Year (Calendar)—this was a handout that was completed prior to meeting, Next Steps, Professional Learning Communities, Discussion Questions, Communication, Youth Development, and Use of Data. Grade-level meetings led by SLT members did not have agendas. Figure 2 provides an analysis

on the percentage of time each one of the topics was covered during the observations of the SLT meetings.

Figure 2. School Leadership Team meetings: Agenda topics.

The agenda for the August 10, 2018, SLT meeting identified clock hours associated with agenda items. The agenda listed 11:00 Connecting with one another, 11:15 Reflective conversations, 12:30 Plotting our year, and 1:00 Next Steps: Goal. The flow of the meeting was primarily controlled by Principal Sunshine. The principal directed one hour and five minutes of the meeting, open dialogue between SLT members lasted for forty-three minutes, team building for twenty-three minutes, and independent work lasted three minutes. During the forty-three minutes of open dialogue, the topic of conversation focused on the cultural dynamics between the members of the instructional staff. The wait staff at the restaurant interrupted the meeting on four different occasions. The school improvement planning process was not discussed during the August 10, 2018,

SLT meeting. In addition, school improvement planning was not included as a topic on the agenda for the SLT meeting.

The agenda for the August 22, 2018, SLT meeting did not have a timeline associated with each agenda item. The agenda items were Looking Closer at PLCs [professional learning communities], Discussion Questions, Model by Doing, and Next Steps. The model APlus Elementary used is *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Richard DuFour. The PLC initiative is a district-wide agenda for all schools during the 2018-19 school year.

The August 22, 2018, meeting began with a handout that recapped the notes collected from the August 10, 2018, meeting. The handout was distributed but it was not discussed. The length of time for the second meeting was three hours, and the location was at the school's media center. The meeting was primarily led by Principal Sunshine. During this meeting, Principal Sunshine employed a PowerPoint presentation to instruct the SLT on the implementation of PLCs. Principal Sunshine led the meeting and periodically checked for understanding with the school leadership team. During this meeting, there was no reference to the school improvement planning process, and it was not an agenda item.

The SIPs for APlus Elementary reached their highest score for SMART goal criteria in the 2015-16 school year. The subsequent years' 2016-17 and 2017-18 scores progressively declined. The SIPs were analyzed through the use of the School Improvement Plan Averaging Worksheet. The quality of the plans was determined through the average score for each year in each category. At the high end, a school improvement plan can receive a score of 2, and at the low end, a school can receive a

zero. The school improvement plan scores reached their peak with the 2015-16 school year, and the 2017-18 school year the plan received the school's lowest score. The 2017-18 SIP was in its first year of implementation as a district team revised the template for elementary schools.

Applying the score rubric with student performance data on end of the year SOL test yielded the following results: 2015-16 plan scored 1.33 Standards of Learning (SOL), Reading test (64%), and Math test (62%); 2016-17 SIP scored .83 SOL, Reading Test (58%), and Math test (55%); and 2017-18 SIP scored .67 SOL, Reading test (51%), and Math test (43%). The percentage scores for reading and math indicated the percentage of students in Grades 3 through 5 who passed the end-of-year test. In order for schools to achieve accreditation, reading scores must meet the 75% benchmark, and math scores must meet the 70% benchmark.

Use of data in school improvement process. One of the primary components in the school improvement process is the use of student data to formulate goals, monitor progress toward the goal, and adjust the strategies based on the evidence (Fernandez, 2011). While conducting interviews with members of the SLT in regards to the relationship between the use of data and the school improvement process, SLT members answered three questions: (a) What types of student data are discussed? (b) What is the process for analyzing student data? and (c) How do you see the SIP contributing to the school improvement efforts in your building?

Types of student data. The nonadministrative members identified several assessments as the type of student data discussed. Assessments were labeled as either formative, benchmark, or standardized in Grades 3 through 5. In Grades K through 2,

members identified state and local reading assessments as the only measure for student progress. The state-level assessments are Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) and locally adopted assessments Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) and the Diagnostic Spelling Assessment (DSA).

There was no indication from the SLT members' responses in K through 2 classes that any teacher made assessments or classwork assessments used to measure student progress. In Grades 3 through 5, SLT members identified the use of teacher-made formal and informal assessments in addition to standardized assessments (benchmarks) as the student data discussed. Teachers in Grades 3 through 5 identified a formal assessment as either a common assessment given at the end of teaching a skill in reading and math or a benchmark assessment given at the end of a marking period on the skills taught during the nine-week period in reading and math. Informal assessments (formative assessments) were identified as the daily check for understanding that teachers created to assess the mastery of the daily learning target.

Teacher Glowing, the fourth grade lead teacher, stated,

> This year formative assessments were huge. We were to collect those formative assessments and hold onto them. We were also to keep a spreadsheet of how frequently we gave those formative assessments and what each student scored on those. We were also asked to keep a data notebook that was asked for and checked quarterly.

Teacher Glowing used a very emphatic voice when answering this question. The inflection of her voice indicated the administrative team had stressed this directive. However, when asked how often they met as staff to discuss assessments during the year, she stated, "We didn't," with a look of bewilderment on her face.

Teacher Magnificent, the third through fifth grade special education lead, went into more detail about the types of assessments and provided a description of the formative assessments used. She identified "formal and informal" assessments created through the use of an online tool called PowerSchool. Teacher Magnificent identified a formal assessment as a four-to five-question quiz given at the end of each week. An informal assessment was identified as a one-question assessment to measure what students learned at the end of the daily instruction.

Process for analyzing student data. SLT members referred to the use of data notebooks that included anecdotal notes, student work samples, quizzes, and unit tests. The frequency for analyzing data was once a week for 50 minutes during grade level planning sessions. Teachers on every grade level were required to bring the data notebooks to the weekly data discussions and review the students' results as a group. The following school personnel attended the weekly data discussions: Grade Level Chair (SLT member), grade level teachers, and Reading Specialist (SLT member). Reading Specialist Superior attended all of the data sessions where reading was the focus area for grade levels kindergarten through fifth.

> We used our PowerSchool data, and I would view it, like, as soon as the kids were taking the test, and identifying those students who did not perform well and the students that did perform well and compare those to what the teacher's data had collected. Then I went individually by strand for each SOL and provided the percentage correct and the percentage incorrect and then I did it by individual student in like a fancy little grid and then I presented that to the teachers. I did that first quarter for them, second quarter I modeled how did it, and then third and fourth, not really fourth quarter, but third quarter, they were able to do it themselves so the expectation was you familiarized yourself with this data collection process data analysis what areas of need do you need for your kids and then what support lessons are you going to put in place in order to achieve masteries of those SOLs?

The process of analyzing student data by individual grade levels at APlus Elementary is completed weekly, with identified personnel, a structured format, and an identified amount of time.

The SLT met every two weeks to discuss grade-level data trends and to appropriately group students for an extended in-school teaching method of intervention/enrichment (IE). Principal Sunshine explained the IE process as the structure for remediating students based on the end-of-quarter benchmarks given to students in the content of reading: "Students that do not pass the benchmark are grouped by strand on our data wall and then assigned to a class to provide intense support on the identified strand." Teacher Glowing stated,

> So, we would take that and then try to come up with a scheme of how are we going to remediate or reteach these strands? Now, as far as teacher by teacher, what it looks like, we didn't do that. We did look at it as a whole grade level of what needed—what strands needed to be taught.

Teacher Lovely, the first grade lead stated,

> We have a room that has our data, it's like a data wall, so it shows where our students are, where they need to go so we can actually visually see it. The big thing—the big push is to make sure that we're meaningful with what we collect. It's not just about collecting a bunch because the previous year we collected more data, but we didn't feel like what we were doing with that data, so this year it became more about targeted data.

The SLT was able to describe the process for collecting grade level data to use as a means for providing students with additional instructional time based on the needs of students in response to benchmark assessments given quarterly.

The process for analyzing individual and classroom student data at APlus Elementary is completed in grade-level meetings for the daily formal and informal assessments created by teachers. The process for analyzing grade-level data for

intervention is analyzed two to three times a year in response to grade-level quarterly benchmark results. The process is used for grouping of students to respond to the instructional needs of students individually and as a grade-level cohort.

Contribution to the school improvement process. The final question regarding the contribution of the SIP toward the school improvement efforts in APlus elementary yielded varying responses. However, Principal Sunshine and Assistant Principal Wonderful stated that the SIP did not have its intended impact. Principal Sunshine articulated,

> As a leader, I have not taken the SIP beyond four or five people. I need to do a bigger broader span this school year and share it more frequently and revisit it throughout the year if it is going to have its desired impact.

Assistant Principal Wonderful stated, "We have to do a better job of visiting it more frequently." The consensus of the nonadministrative members was "The plan has a way to go to be effective," "Not something I lived and breathed," and "Honestly, if we didn't have a plan, the same efforts would go on." These responses indicated a disconnect between the SIP and the process for school improvement.

Observations of the SLT in their summer and preservice sessions were absent of any discussion in regards to the SIP. The first SLT meeting of the year was held at a local restaurant banquet hall. The meeting was scheduled to last two hours. The agenda for the first August meeting was on a half sheet of paper with graphic images of a football and the school mascot. There were four primary topics of discussion for the initial 2018-19 SLT meeting: (a) Connecting with One Another, which was described as the introduction of team members, (b) Reflective Conversations, which had three subtopics (Sharing our Why, Data Discussions, and Reflective Conversations through a gallery walk), (c)

Plotting our Year (calendar), and (d) Next Steps (Goal). Also posted around the room were large Post-It chart paper listing instructional goals, youth development, culture, use of data, and communication as topics. An additional piece of chart paper was posted and designated as a parking lot for any questions members wish to be discussed at the end of the first meeting.

Through the use of the Observation/Walkthrough Protocol document (Appendix F), I completed ethnographic notetaking on observed behaviors and reflective coding after reviewing the notes within one hour of the completed observations. The protocol document was reviewed by my interpretive community for alignment with the observed behaviors and the coding assigned to the observed behaviors. The themes that derived from the observed behaviors in the meeting were team building and culture.

During the SLT meetings, the primary topic of discussion centered around improving the culture of the school, primarily, the professional culture between colleagues within grade-level meetings and daily work interactions. Additionally, the theme of culture surfaced during interviews when members answered questions about social, economic, or policy issues that affected the school's ability to gain accreditation. Their responses indicated that students' backgrounds and socio-economic status played a part. However, all participants described a lack of trust and respect among staff members that acted as a barrier to working collectively as a group. Terms used included *lack of respect, cultural bias, social aspects, cliques*, *strong willed teachers,* and *mindset change to work with people from all backgrounds*. During the observations, responses included the following: "I never felt like I was a part of the team, only teacher of color on the team, this affected students, students can sense the relationship and interaction struggles."

Teacher Glowing went on to say "The majority of the students look like me, but the majority of the teachers don't." While Teacher Glowing was sharing what appeared to be frustration with the culture the facial expressions of the teachers could best be described as stoic or blank and void of expression. However, the expression from Assistant Principal Wonderful could be described as one of agreement as she had a smile on her face and constantly nodded her head in agreement with Teacher Glowing's assessment. Assistant Principal Wonderful eventually stated, "Culture has to change." Throughout the dialogue between the SLT members, Principal Sunshine recorded responses on chart paper. Furthermore, during the first August SLT, this discussion consumed one and a half hours of the two-and-a-half-hour meeting.

However, in the next meeting held two weeks later, the subject of culture between colleagues was not part of the agenda. The SLT members received a paper handout that summarized the first meeting, and then the agenda for the second meeting was enacted. The paper handout distributed to the SLT members captured the responses from the previous meeting recorded by Principal Sunshine. The handout captured the topics of culture, communication, use of data, youth development, and instructional goals. Under each topic was the subheading *Even Better When* and then a series of bullet points under the subheading. The topic of culture was not discussed during any of the school leadership team or grade level meetings led by school leadership team members observed in the month of September.

Professional development for SLT. Data from the observations, document analysis, and interviews indicated the absence of specific professional development directed for the school leadership team. I defined professional learning for the school

leadership team as the development in instructional leadership aligned with their responsibilities in the school improvement process. The primary method of professional development was completed through the book studies with the faculty as a whole on topics for classroom management and cultural competence for teachers to better understand their students. During the interviews, SLT members identified the book the staff read last year as *Lost at School: Why our Kids with Behavioral Challenges are Falling Through the Cracks and How We Can Help Them.*

The consensus from the teachers was they saw the book as helpful in dealing with student behaviors. Teacher Lovely, the first grade lead teacher, expressed the following regarding the book study:

> We've done some book talks in the past where I didn't really connect with them or felt like they were, um, not good, but this past year, the one that we did is right where we are right now with the students.

Even though the SLT members interviewed enjoyed the book study and felt it was helpful, in their teaching duties, the SLT members did not have a role in the professional development other than as participants. Teacher Magnificent shared, "Book talks occurred every two weeks during the first part of SLT meeting." Reading Specialist Superior stated, "Book studies were helpful in dealing with student behaviors, and she enjoyed the discussions held at SLT meetings." Additionally, SLT members articulated the book study did not assist in their instructional leadership development. Teacher Magnificent stated, "Book study on communicating as a leader and working with reluctant teachers would be beneficial for the school leadership team."

School leadership team members' roles. During the collection of data, nonadministrative teacher members were interviewed in regards to their individual role

on the SLT. The interviewees primarily responded in terms of "distribution of information." The question posed asked participants to describe the purpose of the SLT and their role as a member of the SLT. The responses included terms such as *relay to team, to convey information, housekeeping, take information and distribute it*, and *highlight wants and needs*. Teacher Lovely, one of the longest standing members with three and half years on the team and 13 years at APlus elementary, responded,

> I feel like I'm a bridging member. The leadership team has had some turnover. With new leadership coming in, there's been some returning. I'm kind of in the middle. So the newer members feel comfortable with me because I'm not—I haven't been there as long, but also the remaining members from the previous also feel comfortable with me because they know me and they're used to me so I kind of bridge everybody together.

The nonadministrative SLT members described their roles as the connecting piece between the administration and their particular grade levels in distribution of information.

In contrast, when administrative members answered this question, the responses included *ensure directives are implemented*, *collaborate as a school*, *leading discussions*, and *share and establish vision*. Principal Sunshine responded,

> The purpose of the School Leadership Team is—as I see it—is that we are to ensure that the directives and implementation of appropriate instruction is implemented in the building with students. That we're carrying out the directives of the school division one, but also the directives of the school leader, who is myself, in ensuring that all staff members are kept abreast of recent research, professional development, implementations, and follow-up to any programs or initiatives that we are putting out in the building for that specific year or something that we're following up from the previous year.

Assistant Principal Wonderful stated,

> I would describe the purpose of the SLT is to be exactly that, to be the leaders of the school. I think that it's, umm, the purpose is to collaborate as a team to guide the next steps of the improvement plan and move the school forward.

One of the newer members of the administrative team (SLT member) is Reading Specialist Superior. She is in her first year at the school and was informed the day she started that she was a member of the SLT. Reading Specialist Superior's actual response to how she became a member was "I was told that I was a member. I did not know that, to be honest, until my first day with Principal Sunshine. She's like, 'Congratulations, you're on the School Leadership Team.'" In addition, the responses to the question regarding the purpose of the SLT indicated the same understanding as the majority of teacher members: "The purpose of the School Leadership Team is to meet bi-monthly to discuss any upcoming events, housekeeping information, but then also where are goals based on our student." This disparity in responses speaks to the disconnect between teacher leaders and administrative leaders on the role of the School Leadership Team in the School Improvement Process.

Review of SIPs from 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 revealed that each document designated people responsible for carrying out monitoring responsibilities. Each plan contained a column labeled *Feedback to include who and when*. This designation was consistent in all three school improvement plans, and the *who* and *when* were inclusive of teachers, administrators, and other staff members as well as the timeframe for completing the assigned responsibilities. The language used within the SIP was very clear and directive in regards to the feedback and the type of evidence to be used: "Feedback in collaborative planning, observation forms inclusive of pictures, video conferencing and summative conferences by administrators." However, the SIPs contain no mention of responsibilities assigned to SLT members other than administrative members.

The defining of roles within organizational structures is a strategy that enables the group to meet their desired outcomes. When team members understand their responsibilities, they are empowered to complete the task. All members of the SLT have experience in multiple grade levels in elementary school. The majority of the SLT members have worked fewer than five years at the APlus Elementary. Data collection also revealed that six of the seven SLT members were asked or assigned to the team based on the position they were assigned at the school as either a grade-level or content lead teacher. Two of the seven members were unaware they were serving in a leadership role as a member of the SLT. The overall responses from members indicated the absence of a systematic process for selecting team members.

Summary

The school improvement process is designed to improve teaching and learning in the school environment. Because the SIP is the mechanism for empowering the school towards the goals of improving teaching and learning, it becomes necessary to determine how schools are aligning this process. Therefore, the first research question examined the processes school-based administrators engage to select and professionally develop members of the SLT in school improvement efforts through observation, document analysis, and interviews with members of the SLT. Interview data indicates the lack of a systematic process for selecting and professionally developing the SLT.

The SLT members collectively speak to book studies as the primary mechanism for school-based professional development but did not mention any specific professional development for the school leadership team collectively. As a result of the interviews, the collective perception of professional development implies that professional development

pertains to everyone, not just the leadership team. The construct of distributed leadership is a process wherein leaders empower and develop members within the organization to share in the leadership responsibilities within the school to bring systematic change throughout the school environment. The interview data does not validate the presence of distributed leadership.

As a result of the findings from the case study, three recommendations will be explored in Chapter 5. The first recommendation is two-fold: first, developing a systematic approach for the selection process of SLT members and then developing a systematic approach for professionally developing SLT members in instructional leadership. A second recommendation is practicing a distributed leadership approach in school improvement responsibilities between multiple levels of school personnel assigned to the SLT. The final recommendation is to define the roles of SLT members in the school improvement process and clearly align their responsibilities in instructional leadership of the school. This alignment will assist in moving the school toward the accreditation mark by improving teacher pedagogy and student performance.

Chapter 5: Interpretations, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Standards-based educational reform changed how schools were rated at the beginning of the 21st century with the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act* in 2001 and continued with the legislation of *Every Student Succeeds Act* in 2015. Two strategies that facilitated schools' ability to instructionally lead in the standards-based reform were implementation of School Improvement Plans (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Doud, 1995; Huber & Conway, 2015) and the development of School Leadership Teams (Day, 2010; Elmore, 2014; Harris, 2004, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). This study focused on the SLTs' role in the school improvement process and the professional development practices for SLT members in instructional leadership.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of the role of the SLT in an elementary school denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The process of school improvement planning is grounded in the strategic planning framework adopted from the military and business communities (Cook, 2000). School improvement planning includes multiple levels of specialized staff in the systematic process of goal setting, developing action steps, monitoring growth toward goals, and adjusting practices toward reaching the intended results (Ahearn, 1998; Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Ruebling et al., 2004; Strunk et al., 2015; Sybouts, 1992). The distributed leadership framework emphasizes the sharing of leadership responsibilities between teacher leaders within the school organization as a framework for school improvement

(DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Spillane, 2005; Spillane & Healey, 2010; Wallace, 2002). Therefore, this study also reviews how schools define the leadership responsibilities of SLT members and provide professional development in instructional leadership to SLT members. This chapter reviews how the systematic processes in school improvement planning and the distributed leadership practices can provide a framework for comprehensive school improvement in schools and districts in the Commonwealth of Virginia that fail to meet accreditation standards.

Research Process

Methodology. An instrumental case study (Creswell, 2013) was appropriate to develop an understanding of the SLT's role in the school improvement process in elementary schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The case study utilized three methods of data collection, including interviews, observations, and document analysis (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009) to frame an understanding of the data. The first method of data collection were interviews with seven members of the SLT at APlus Elementary. All interviews proceeded according to an interview protocol. Then the interviews were professionally transcribed and coded using open, axial, and thematic coding. The second method of data collection was observations of the school leadership team meetings. An observation protocol provided the structure for ethnographic notetaking and then reflective coding from the observed behaviors. The final method of data collection involved a review of documents related to the school improvement process. These documents included the school improvement plans for three school years from 2015-2018. The SIP averaging worksheet helped in analysis of the quality of the three SIPs.

Accounting for potential bias. Qualitative researchers must account for any potential biases they bring to a study as practitioners within the field. When researchers fail to address biases, the results of the study have the potential to be called into question. Throughout the data collection/analysis of the case study of APlus Elementary, an interpretive community evaluated the protocols and the data analysis to protect against any biases associated with my position and familiarity with school leadership.

As a central office employee in a public school system, I implemented precautionary methods to maintain objectivity and protect against influencing participant responses during data collection. Chapter 3 outlines the professional experience and potential biases I needed to mitigate during the case study. One of the primary methods to protect against these biases is the use of protocols for all data collection methods. The protocols allow me to collect data in a consistent manner with all research participants for interviews, data analysis with documents, and observations of participants in the study.

Another method was the use of an interpretive community to vet the results from the data collection prior to reporting on the data. The interpretive community was a group of experienced researchers who identified whether the reports and coding were free of subjectivity and aligned with the collected data. A final method was the use of casual dress and participant-chosen locations to conduct interviews with SLT members. The implementation of casual dress, which is best described as golf attire, allowed participants to see me as a student instead of a central office employee. In addition, offering the interviewees the opportunity to select the location for the interviews placed them in a state of comfort, which led to freedom of sharing of information. Interviews took place at coffee houses, libraries, and in the interviewees' places of employment.

Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the distributed leadership theoretical perspective. As a result, I suggest when the school leadership team roles are defined, professional development is provided on instructional leadership, and the school improvement planning process is implemented in a distributed manner across qualified, trained personnel, schools will improve the teaching for learning and student performance toward accreditation. Quality school improvement planning involves writing; the assignment of personnel in monitoring; the development of specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound (SMART) goals aligned with school specific data points; and frequent progress measuring, all oriented toward achieving the ultimate goal (Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002; Mintrop et al., 2001; Strunk et al., 2015). The SLT is the organization within the school environment that is primarily responsible for school improvement. Therefore, it becomes necessary to share the leadership responsibilities within the school improvement plan between the SLT members within the distributed leadership framework.

Members' roles. The success of an organization is often dependent on the individuals within the organization having a clear understanding of their assigned responsibilities. More importantly, members must have not only an understanding of the assigned responsibilities but also an understanding of how those tasks contribute to the organization's achieving its mission or goals. According to research on distributed leadership practices, one of the primary components is the need for people to feel empowered within the organization to accomplish not only the organization's goals but also individual goals (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, 2005). The process of clearly defining the

responsibilities and roles enables members within the organization to accomplish both organizational and individual goals.

Instructional leadership development. Professional development is the mechanism through which instructional leaders learn, cultivate, and enhance their craft (Murphy, 2015; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004). This phenomenon requires schools to have a plan for instructional leadership development of the SLT. The SLT is an instructional leadership team within the school organization assigned the responsibility of improving teacher pedagogy (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2012; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Day, 2010; Dixon et al., 2014; Kaniuka, 2012). Therefore, professional development on school leadership and instructional best practices (teacher pedagogy) becomes paramount to the individual team members' success in the instructional leadership goals within public schools.

Quality school improvement. The components of quality school improvement planning include the written component, wherein the document can be interpreted easily by novice as well as veteran educational professionals. The second component of quality school improvement includes the development of SMART goals (Fernandez, 2011; Kaufman et al., 2012; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). The SMART goals must align with student data and should not be based on a district or state goal. Another component of quality school improvement involves the measuring of intermittent goals to identify if changes or adjustments are needed to enable the school to reach desired outcomes. In addition to the measuring, it is also necessary to divide the responsibilities for monitoring among several members within the organization.

Results

The findings from the case study of APlus Elementary regarding the role of the SLT in the school improvement process included the following: (a) APlus Elementary has a limited implementation in relation to the components of quality school improvement planning, (b) the administrative team does not have an identified process for selecting and professionally developing the members of the SLT, and (c) SLT members do not have a clear understanding of their instructional leadership responsibilities aligned with the school improvement process**.**

The interpretations and conclusions provide suggestions for the selection process, the professional development of SLT members in instructional leadership, and the involvement of the SLT in all phases of the school improvement process. The research questions were (a) What are the processes school-based administrators engage to select and professionally develop members of the SLT in school improvement efforts? and (b) What are the responsibilities of SLT members in the school improvement efforts? The interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations all center around improving the practices schools and districts employ when providing the framework for SLTs and their subsequent involvement in comprehensive school improvement processes.

Interpretations and Conclusions

Quality school improvement planning. The importance of quality school improvement planning is directly connected to the implementation of standards-based assessments and school accreditation benchmarks for schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2002). School accreditation ratings in the Commonwealth of Virginia are attained by schools when the student performance on

the end of the year assessments meet the required benchmark for all students. In addition to state requirements the federal requirements must be met in the subjects of English and mathematics on the end of the year assessments. Due to this process oriented approach certain components or requirements must be fulfilled for school improvement planning to be deemed as having high quality (Fernandez, 2011). School improvement plans should include targeted areas for improvement, identified strategies to meet the targeted goals, use of student data to develop the goals, frequent monitoring of the progress toward the goals, and different personnel assigned to the monitoring and reporting of progress (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Doud, 1995; Dunaway et al., 2013; Fernandez, 2011; Giles, 1998; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mooney & Mausbach, 2008; Strunk et al., 2015).

While conducting the review of the SIP's for APlus elementary school the academic area of mathematics was not addressed. In the 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18 SIP there was not a connection to identified strategies or a targeted goal to improve the academic achievement of students in regards to mathematics instruction. The SIP for APlus elementary focused primarily on reading instruction. This omission is noteworthy due to the fact school accreditation status is directly impacted by math achievement on the end of the year assessments. The information collected from the interviews, observations, and document analysis in this case study suggested an absence of quality school improvement planning at APlus Elementary.

Interview data did not indicate a connection by SLT members between the SIP and the progress toward accreditation at APlus. Team members were unaware of when the plan was written, how the goals were developed, and what their role was in ensuring its implementation. During the observations of SLT meetings, I collected agendas to

analyze and identify topics for discussion. A review of three different agendas indicated that the SIP was not a topic of discussion. Therefore, including the SLT members in the process of developing the SIP was not a priority. However, researchers suggested that multiple levels of personnel should be included in all phases of the school improvement process in order for the plan to have its best chance at being successful and meeting its goals (Fernandez, 2011; Giles, 1998; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002).

Similarly, when the School Improvement Plan Averaging Worksheet was applied to the three years of school improvement plans, the data revealed the plans were not able to receive a score indicating an emerging or evident category. The only category in which the plans were able to attain the rating of evident was in the written category. All three plans received the rating of *evident,* which indicated the plans were written in a manner that ensured comprehension by all readers. Despite these results, it is important to note that the SLT members were not identified within this plan as the personnel responsible for monitoring the progress toward improvement. This omission indicated either a lack of confidence in the members of the organization to accomplish the task of monitoring and/or the need for the administration to professionally develop the members in the area of monitoring the instructional strategies and action steps toward school accreditation.

The combined data sources indicate that the absence of quality school improvement planning negatively affects the school's ability to achieve growth towards accreditation. The results also suggest the need for the administrative team to create an environment wherein the SLT members participate in the entire process of implementing school improvement initiatives. Therefore, if the distributed leadership framework were implemented with the school improvement process, the plan would have a greater chance

to achieve its desired outcomes (DuFour, 2004; Harris, 2004, 2008; Murphy, 2015; Spillane, 2005).

The SLT members' selection process. Instructional leadership is a process that involves specialized personnel providing the necessary guidance and feedback to teachers with the overall goal of improving teacher pedagogy (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2012; Day, 2010; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004). The need to select professionals within the organization to accomplish this task can be one of the key ingredients to the success of the team's meeting the desired outcomes. Therefore, the systematic process for selecting the professionals to accomplish this task becomes a strategic tool that empowers the team members toward success (Collins, 2005; Hallinger, 2003). The distributed leadership philosophy emphasizes the sharing of responsibilities with school personnel in the instructional leadership duties (observations, professional development, data analysis, school improvement planning, etc.) to achieve a direct impact on teacher pedagogy and student achievement (Bush & Glover, 2012; Driel & Berry, 2012; Harris, 2004, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). In an effort to validate the research on the impact of the distributed theory for instructional leadership, stakeholders must factor in the commitment and leadership capacity of the instructional personnel. This influence in turn requires the organization to establish processes and criteria for selection of SLT members.

APlus Elementary did not provide evidence of a systematic process for the selection of SLT members. SLT members' responses regarding how they became members of the SLT during individual interviews included, "My position is why I serve on the team," "I replaced someone who left because I was the veteran member," and even

"Congratulations, you are on the School Leadership Team." These responses indicated the building administrators (Principal Sunshine, Assistant Principal Wonderful) have not developed a structured or systematic approach for selecting the instructional leaders on the team. Because the school has failed to reach accreditation standards since the 2012-13 school year, I suggest the presence of a common element between member selection and school improvement toward accreditation. Furthermore, because of the lack of a systematic selection process, the members who end up on this team may not be interested in instructional leadership. That lack of interest in leadership becomes a barrier to developing the members in leadership capacities and in turn affects the school's ability to improve toward accreditation.

During the observations of the SLT meetings, one topic that consumed 50% of the meeting time revolved around the professional culture among school staff. In an open dialogue led by Principal Sunshine, the SLT members shared their reasons for teaching. The SLT members shared their responses orally and Principal Sunshine recorded the answers. At the completion of the sharing, Principal Sunshine stated that the professional culture within the building was having a negative effect on the school environment. Principal Sunshine's statement then led the SLT members into a lengthy discussion regarding their individual perceptions of the culture at APlus Elementary. The observations revealed the overall feelings of staff members toward one another and a lack of respect and trust that negatively affected the school's ability to become accredited.

The discussion implied there may be people on the SLT who have no desire to lead and who are not invested in the vision towards improvement as implemented by Principal Sunshine, Assistant Principal Wonderful, and Reading Specialist Superior.

Another factor to be considered is Principal Sunshine's capacity to lead and develop the members of the SLT. The culture of an organization derives from its members and the workplace behaviors exhibited on a consistent basis. High turnover within an organization can become a barrier to creating the culture the leadership desires (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger et al., 1996; Hauge et al., 2014; Murphy, 2015).

The SLT at APlus Elementary has experienced turnover on an annual basis. During the 2017-18 school year, the 11-member team had five new members. In addition, the 2018-19 SLT has six new members, and two of the six will be in their first year of work at APlus Elementary. As a result of these difficulties, the inconsistency of returning members may well impede the development of a culture of professional respect and in turn negatively affect the defining culture of the organization. This phenomenon further supports the suggestion that school districts and individual schools need to define the process for selecting SLT members in an effort to improve the SLT's ability to accomplish their mission of improving the academic improvement toward accreditation.

As theorists suggested, one of the key components of distributed leadership is shared leadership, which increases the responsibility, accountability, and decision making between teacher leaders within the organization (DuFour, 2004; Gronn, 2000). The sharing of these components are tools that empower the SLT members. A common characteristic of personnel who have a desire to serve in school leadership are the professional goals the individuals set for themselves (Benoliel, 2017; Bush & Glover, 2012; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005). In essence, when a team of motivated individuals assembles to work toward a common interest, the likelihood of the organization's achieving its mission increases.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop a systematic approach to selecting members who have the desire to be instructional leaders as they have individual goals and ambitions that working on the school leadership team can meet. The members of the SLT at APlus Elementary did not articulate this type of motivation or commitment when providing responses to the interview questions about their perceptions and practices related to their SLT responsibilities. The selection process is a topic that must be addressed by the administrative team (Principal Sunshine, Assistant Principal Wonderful, and Reading Specialist Superior) if the school is to move forward with improved, focused efforts toward accreditation.

Defining school leadership team members' roles. In connection with the systematic process for selecting team members, stakeholders at APlus Elementary must define the roles of the SLT members for clarity of work, purpose, and understanding of their importance in establishing the vision of the organization. Researchers agree that the distributed leadership theoretical framework can be a tool to improve instructional delivery by teachers, which may lead to improved student achievement (Ahearn, 1998; Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2012; Hallinger, 2003; Harris, 2004). The distributed leadership theoretical framework includes the clarity of purpose of members within the organization. Because the purpose of the SLT is to assist in the instructional leadership within the school, it becomes necessary to define members' instructional leadership responsibilities (Armstrong, 1982; Blase & Blase, 1999; Collins, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Drago-Severson, 2004; Gronn, 2000; Harris, 2004; Hauge et al., 2014).

According to data from interview responses, the members of the SLT at APlus Elementary viewed their role as one of disseminating information between the principal and their individual grade levels. That the SLT members did not see themselves as instructional leaders is a hindrance in the school's moving the accreditation rating from denied to accredited. This mismatch in purpose could also be a factor in the lack of connection between staff members, which is affecting the culture and collegial professional relationships among staff members at APlus Elementary. During observations of the SLT in the organizational meeting, the members did not have any tasks to complete or any topics to lead. During the team meetings, the SLT members' role was to listen to the information delivered by the principal. At the conclusion of the SLT meetings, the principal gave directives to the SLT members to turnkey this information to their respective grade levels and content areas. Subsequently, in the observations of the grade-level meetings, the SLT member's role was primarily to disseminate that information to the teachers in their grade level group.

As noted in the literature review, school leadership is no longer provided by a sole source. Instead, it is a multi-leveled approach of sharing of leadership successes and failures by teacher leaders, administrators, and content specialists (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Bush & Glover, 2012; Day, 2000; Elmore, 1987; Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger et al., 1996; Harris, 2004, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane, 2005). The SLT at APlus Elementary operates in ways that do not align with the research on distributed school leadership, and in turn, members do not fulfill any designated responsibilities other than disseminating the information they receive from the building principal to other teachers.

Members' limited roles of transferring information from administrators impacts the organizational culture and collegial atmosphere at the school. The topic of culture dominated the discussion in the first SLT meeting in August. The members expressed their perceptions that their opinions were not valuable to their colleagues. During this meeting, SLT members exhibited emotion and passion when discussing how this phenomenon negatively impacts the school's ability to improve. Before the discussion of culture, the SLT members had to write down and share their reasons for teaching. The following responses emerged: *empower*, *inspire*, *impact*, *love for students, motivate struggling students*, *encourage others,* and *develop relationships*.

Principal Sunshine then took control of the conversation and shared that teachers have to do better because their personal differences are affecting the students' ability to thrive. The subsequent discussion regarding the professional culture lasted for one hour and one minute, and it was halted because lunch orders needed to be taken. When these observations were combined with the interview responses and the analysis of the school improvement plans, the implication was that absence of distributed leadership practices is affecting the school's culture. Until practices are in place that define the responsibilities of the SLT, the improvement of student achievement towards accreditation will continue to decline or remain stagnant.

School leaders must consider the necessity for strategically assigning SLT members with instructional leadership responsibilities in the school improvement process. Potentially, investing the time to define SLT members' roles and empower them with the autonomy to lead, perhaps within a grade level or a content area, has the potential to improve teachers' professional relationships, pedagogy, student

comprehension and achievement, and school culture. On the other hand, if school leaders do not invest this time to define SLT members' roles in the instructional leadership of the building, then the goal of school improvement in the accreditation ratings will continue to elude schools operating in this manner.

Professional development in instructional leadership for the SLT. The school leadership team consists of instructional leaders and specialists who work to improve the processes and procedures for the delivery of instruction and support school improvement efforts. To achieve their goals, the members of the SLT must be provided with an appropriate amount of professional development in instructional leadership. Instructional Leadership professional development is different than instructional delivery professional development. When interviewing the members of the SLT they articulated the professional development that was provided to them in regards to instructional delivery. Therefore, I recommend the SLT should be involved in professional development directly related to (a) conducting observations and providing quality feedback; (b) data analysis to improve instructional delivery; and (c) the processes of coaching and modeling effective instructional best practices.

The importance of providing specific feedback to teachers on their delivery of instruction, analyzing data to improve instruction, and coaching/modeling best practices for instructional delivery are leadership skills that have to be given time within the macro and micro environments to develop towards mastery. Therefore, SLT members must be afforded with opportunities during the school day to work within these leadership domains. However, within an elementary school there are limited hours during the school day where the members of the SLT are not directly responsible for instructing the

students they are assigned. To that fact the first level instructional leader (Principal Sunshine) needs to create opportunities where the SLT are able to practice to improve in their instructional leadership pedagogy. I suggest this can be accomplished by creating extended resource blocks during the school day, ensuring of common planning time, and the use of funding to bring in substitute teachers to cover classes while these instructional leadership practices are developed. Through the employment of these strategies the SLT will be able to accomplish the goal of becoming instructional leaders and the sharing of leadership responsibilities will begin to be cultivated in the distributed leadership framework.

During the data collection process for APlus Elementary, the observations, interviews, and document analysis revealed the absence of professional development specifically aimed at the SLT in the area of instructional leadership. The lack of a plan for professional development indicates the absence of targeted professional development for the members of the SLT. Within the constructs of school improvement planning, administrators may target specific strategies to improve teaching for learning within the school organization (Fernandez, 2011; Huber & Conway, 2015; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). Therefore, the instructional leadership must have a plan for professional development that aligns with the strategies for improving pedagogy and student achievement. I suggest this is an area where Principal Sunshine and Assistant Principal Wonderful could collaborate in regards to the professional development needs for the SLT. By employing the shared leadership approach between the two building administrators in the professional development plan will serve as a tool for empowering Assistant Principal Wonderful in leadership development. In addition to the leadership

development of Assistant Principal Wonderful this strategy will also create an atmosphere where Principal Sunshine is practicing a distributive approach to school improvement and school leadership. This type of environment is proven to have positive effects on overall school improvement (Blase & Blase, 1999; Collins, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Drago-Severson, 2004; Gronn, 2000; Hallinger, 2003; Harris, 2004; Hauge et al., 2014; Huber & Conway, 2015; Kaufman et al., 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane, 2005). However, during interviews, Principal Sunshine and Assistant Principal Wonderful indicated they did not lead any professional development with the SLT during the 2017-18 school year.

One implication was that the building leadership, primarily the building principal, did not feel confident in her ability to provide professional development in instructional leadership. This finding emerged when Principal Sunshine responded to an interview question regarding the professional development that she led during the school year. Principal Sunshine's response indicated a lack of confidence in instructional knowledge, and she asserted that curriculum and development personnel were better equipped and smarter because they were the "experts," in her opinion. Principal Sunshine, who is the leader of the SLT, responded that she did not lead any professional development for the SLT during the school year. When asked about leading professional development she stated,

> That I have physically led? I'm not going to say that I led any this year, I did a lot of them last year, and this year, I requested and asked that people from Curriculum and Development, those who I feel have more expertise in it than me and I don't know that that's right or wrong to think that they—I don't know as much as them.

The demeanor that Principal Sunshine displayed while answering this question illustrated a lack of confidence in her own instructional leadership knowledge. The statement that "I don't know as much as them" was coupled with a look of disappointment. However, in her response, she noted that she did lead professional development in the previous years but did not this year.

I suggest that Principal Sunshine has the desire for the SLT to view her as the instructional leader, not only of the school leadership team but also of the entire school population. However, because she has lost confidence in her ability to fulfill her primary responsibility of instructional leadership, it is manifest in her desire to assign instructional leadership to members from the central office in the curriculum and development department instead of within her own building. Consequently, Principal Sunshine's mechanism for providing instructional leadership to the SLT manifests in two domains, the writing of the SIP and the leading of the SLTs' meetings. However, these two measures of solitary leadership directly contradict the research on effective instructional leadership practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 1995; Day, 2000; Harris, 2004, 2008; Spillane, 2005).

The first domain is the writing of the SIP. The SLT members' responses were very clear that Principal Sunshine wrote the SIP. In an effort to be viewed as the instructional leader of the school, Principal Sunshine provides all the direction regarding goals and strategies for school improvement. This behavior suggests that she is holding onto one of the tools for providing instructional leadership, composing the strategic plan for overall school improvement. However, this tactic has the opposite effect and contributes to the school's declining progress toward accreditation, dysfunctional cultural

dynamics between teachers, and the positive development of the SLT. These behaviors also contradict the tenants of distributed instructional leadership. Therefore, this feeling of inadequacy from Principal Sunshine could be the rationale behind the SLT's not having leadership responsibilities in the school improvement process and during their SLT meetings. I conclude this behavior exists because Principal Sunshine believes this is a means by which she can demonstrate her instructional leadership.

Distributed leadership stresses the importance of the leader establishing a vision and empowering leaders to support the vision (Harris, 2004, 2008; Spillane, 2005). One mechanism for empowering the members of the SLT is the aligned professional development in the content in which they will provide instructional leadership. However, if the instructional leader of the school lacks confidence in their ability to instructionally lead the members of their school leadership team, this deficit of self-assurance becomes a barrier to the professional development efforts within the organization (Blase & Blase, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Hauge et al., 2014; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Murphy, 2015). In an effort to build capacity as instructional leaders, it is necessary for building leaders to continually immerse themselves in professional development to improve their craft and empower themselves with the tools necessary to develop leaders within their building. Principal Sunshine mentioned professional development in mathematics she attended during the 2017-18 school year. However, during her interview, Principal Sunshine did not reveal she had attended any leadership development training.

Recommendations

The recommendations from this study encompass school recommendations and district recommendations with an emphasis on three categories. Recommendations for the

school aim to align school-based procedures with school improvement planning and instructional leadership development. District-based recommendation are more generalized to suggest district-level support through policies and procedures for schools at large in regards to school leadership team and school improvement planning requirements.

The first recommendation is to develop a selection process and professional development structure to enhance the SLT's ability to lead the instructional improvement efforts within the school. The second recommendation is to implement a distributed leadership approach in the school improvement process. The final recommendation is to define the roles of the SLT members in the instructional leadership responsibilities toward school improvement and school accreditation.

However, with both the school and district recommendations I would also recommend the methodological approach of case studies instead of quantitative or qualitative studies limited to interviews only. The strength of the case study is the ability to go in depth beyond participants' responses from surveys and actually analyze demeanor, environment, human interactions, and physical environments how they interact within one another and impact the findings.

District recommendations. This case study did not explore the influence school districts have on building-level requirements for school leadership teams and school improvement planning processes. However, it is necessary to examine the possible implications district-level decisions have on schools' ability to effectively implement these common practices in schools. Therefore, I would recommend conducting a case study with the Senior Staff at the district level to gain an understanding of their

perception of the role of the SLT. Within this case study I suggest the observation of senior staff meetings, reviewing of district policy and the requirements of SLT's at building levels, interviews with senior staff members and surveys of building principals on the requirements on the use of SLT's in school improvement. Research findings suggest that coaching for building principals is essential for continual professional growth (Benoliel, 2017; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Dunaway et al., 2013; Heck et al., 1990; Kaniuka, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004; Taylor-Backor & Gordon, 2015). Therefore, it becomes necessary for principal supervisors to provide support to building principals in areas directly connected to their pedagogy in development of instructional leadership.

In addition, since the SLT is a requirement at the school level, the district should have parameters in place for personnel assigned to the SLT. In essence, clear criteria should certify a teacher to assume a leadership position on the team. Furthermore, the district should outline designated responsibilities in connection with the SIP for the SLT members directly connected to instructional leadership. Research confirms the connection between shared instructional leadership and schools' ability to meet identified goals in school improvement plans (Anfara et al., 2006; Benoliel, 2017; Cain & Gunter, 2012; Elmore, 1987; Hallinger et al., 1996; Harris, 2004, 2008; Hauge et al., 2014, Heck & Hallinger, 2009, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane, 2005; Spillane & Healey, 2010). Implementing these initiatives may enhance the SLTs' effectiveness and influence on improving teacher pedagogy and schools' accreditation ratings.

Recommendation for selection and professional development. In theory, there are two ways to increase a team's effectiveness: employ better members or make the

current members better. These two areas were both identified as possibilities in the case study of the SLT at APlus Elementary. Members' responses regarding how they became a part of the team are random at best. Even though the members became part of the team based on their position, the ways in which they attained that position were not consistent among the members within the organization. Developing some criteria for the selection of SLT members by the administrative team will strengthen the quality of personnel appointed to the SLT. This process will enable the team to employ better members who will have the desire and the capacity to serve in an instructional leadership role.

The second facet of the first recommendation is to develop a process for professionally developing the members of the SLT in the area of instructional leadership. This professional development plan should include areas that align with research-based strategies for improving instructional leadership, including engaging in distributive leadership practices, promoting the conditions for teams to function as instructional leaders, providing macro- and micro-professional development opportunities for building leaders, and creating a learner-centered environment for continual instructional development (Benoliel, 2017; Blase & Blase, 1999; Bush & Glover, 2012; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Day, 2010; Drago-Severson, 2004; DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Hauge et al., 2014; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009). The administrative team should develop this plan with the input of the members of the SLT, perhaps by administering a survey to the team to determine what areas of instructional leadership they need and then creating a plan to meet the needs of the team.

Engaging the SLT members from the outset of the professional development process may empower them with a voice in their growth as instructional leaders. As these

processes evolve, the culture of the organization may begin to take shape, and the organization has a greater chance to meet its desired outcomes and fulfill its mission. However, the administrative team also needs to have a professional development plan for themselves in the area of instructional leadership to strengthen their capacity to professionally develop their school-based instructional leaders.

Recommendation for distributed leadership. The basis of the theory of distributed leadership is that as members within the organization take ownership of the collective improvement efforts, the organization has a greater chance for meeting its goals (Dixon et al., 2014; DuFour, 2004; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Harris, 2004; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Mitchell & Castle, 2005). The SLT at APlus Elementary can employ the distributed leadership responsibilities in the school improvement process to foster this type of collegial environment. The SIP involves writing the plan based on the needs of the school, assigning instructional strategies to meet the needs of the school, incremental reviewing of progress toward the goals, monitoring responsibilities for the different strategies, and analysis of data to inform the adjustment of strategies toward the desired outcome (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis, 2015; Mitchell & Castle, 2005; Olsen & Chrispeels, 2009; Rigby, 2013; Ruebling et al., 2004). The administrative team needs to employ a process wherein each member of the SLT is responsible for contributing to the school improvement process in all phases. In the current system, Principal Sunshine writes the plan and distributes it to the team for review. The suggestion based on findings is to present the data to the team and then collaboratively compose the written plan in response to the data presented.

Once the plan is complete, the team should have equal responsibilities in the monitoring of their assigned grade levels or content areas as they progress toward the overall goal. In addition, I recommend creating individual grade-level goals collectively among teachers within the common grade levels. Including grade-level teachers in a collaboration may enhance progress toward the overarching goal because the team creates the goals collectively, providing all grade-level participants with a voice in the improvement process. Collaborative instructional leadership has a positive impact on student achievement and teacher development (Elmore, 2014; Kaniuka, 2012; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Therefore, if the goal of the SLT is to improve the accreditation rating, this process has the potential to reverse the declining trend at APlus Elementary.

Recommendation for defining of roles within the SLT. Having a clear vision of roles within any organization is paramount to organizational success. The SLT members' roles at APlus Elementary are not clearly defined in the SIP. In addition, during interviews, members had difficulty in clearly articulating their roles on the SLT. Responses from the SLT members indicate inconsistency in their understanding. Some describe their role as a facilitator, information sharer, or bridge between levels of staff personnel. For the SLT to become the instructional school leaders, they need to have a clear understanding of what they are being asked to accomplish when they meet as a team, when they lead individual content or grade-level teams, and when they work in different capacities within the school improvement process.

Subsequently, it also becomes necessary for district-level leadership to provide direction of the expectations for school leadership teams. I propose district-level leaders outline the expectations for building-based leadership teams. By defining the parameters

in which SLTs are to function, district leaders can establish continuity between schools regardless of accreditation ratings. Potentially, the common requirements between schools in regards to school leadership teams can assist in defining the vision for the teams not only at the school level but also at the district level for all schools.

Recommendations for future study. Recommendations for future study include a case study on how the culture of the SLT impacts the improvement efforts within schools. This study could be completed in a school where the accreditation rating improved from denied to accredited. Researchers might explore the relationship between cultural relationships and school improvement. One dynamic this study did not explore was how the culture of the organization impacted the development of the team, the professional culture of the school, and the school's ability to improve teacher development. However, this cultural phenomenon was clear during the observations of the SLT meetings and could have an impact on school improvement processes. Thus, future researchers might explore the ways the cultural dynamics of school leadership create, cultivate, and foster the development of a high functioning SLT.

Future study of school districts' expectations in regards to the development of SLTs could prove enlightening, as well. Most districts require a school-based leadership team within each school. Therefore, a qualitative study utilizing interviews with district leaders could provide insight on the requirements school districts impose regarding the selection process of SLT members and responsibilities of school-based leadership teams in school improvement initiatives. This study did not explore the district-level involvement from policy to practice in the implementation of SLTs. This avenue of inquiry may yield insight on the processes that high performing school districts

implement in regards to school-based leadership teams and what they require of the school-based team in regards to instructional leadership.

Conclusion

The implementation of a SLT and a SIP are two strategies public schools use to support improvement initiatives. These strategies may have a positive impact on student achievement, teacher pedagogy, and school accreditation ratings (Ahearn, 1998; Anfara et al., 2006; Bush & Glover, 2012; Cranston & Ehrich, 2005; Doud, 1995; Drago-Severson, 2004; DuFour, 2004; Fernandez, 2011; Harris, 2004, 2008; Hauge et al., 2014; Heck & Halinger, 2010; Huber & Conway, 2015; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Mintrop et al., 2001; Murphy, 2015; Ruebling et al., 2004; Spillane, 2005; Strunk et al., 2015; Wallace, 2002). The purpose of the SLT is to facilitate the sharing of responsibilities among different staff members within the school organization. Existing research confirmed when this process for instructional leadership is cultivated and enhanced, the school has a greater opportunity to improve teacher pedagogy and student achievement (Benoliel, 2017; Bush & Glover, 2012; Harris, 2004, 2008; Heck & Hallinger, 2009, 2010; Spillane, 2005).

The implementation of a SIP is a strategy that outlines a school's goals, develops strategies to achieve the goals, assigns monitoring and support responsibilities across layers of teachers and instructional specialists to facilitate the support of the goals, and establishes a system for adjusting the plan based on subsequent data (Anfara et al., 2006; Doud, 1995; Fernandez, 2011; Mintrop & MacLellan, 2002). The existing research on school improvement planning confirmed that quality school improvement planning has a positive impact on student growth and school improvement initiatives (Fernandez, 2011; Freeman & Wilmes, 2009; Huber & Conway, 2015).

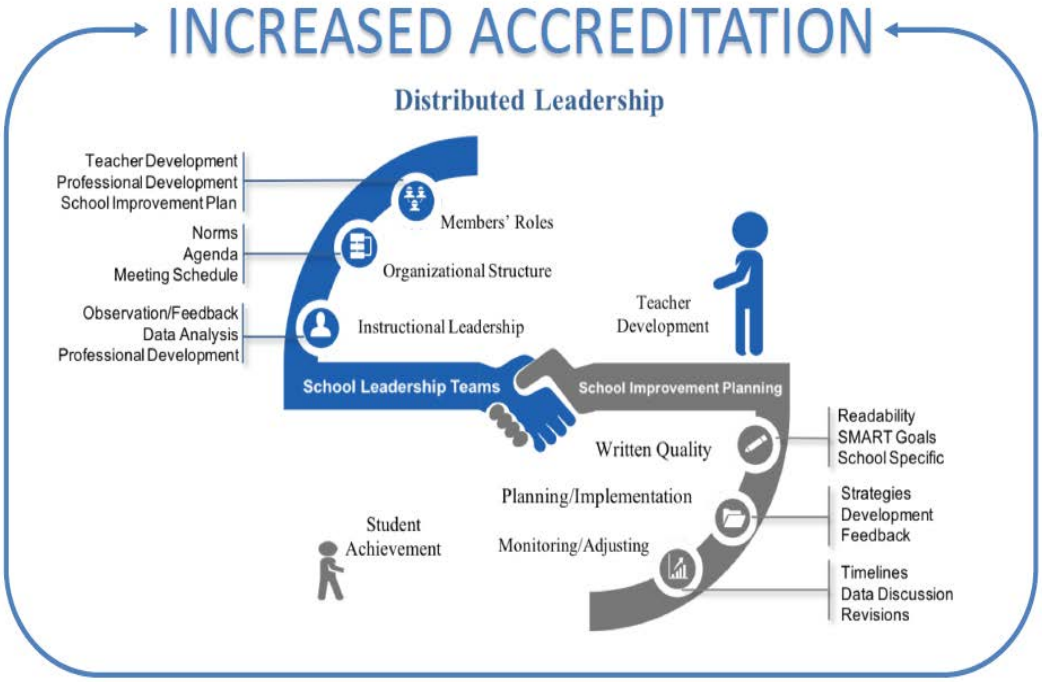

Figure 3. Conceptual framework redesigned: Post Case Study

This study was a review of the processes building administrators implemented when selecting and professionally developing members of the SLT in instructional leadership in a school denied accreditation and the level of involvement in the school improvement planning by the SLT. This school did not have a systematic approach for selecting members of the team. The findings indicated the need for professional development with the SLT in the area of instructional leadership and the need to include the SLT in all components of the SIP.

One recommendation derived from these findings is to increase the capacity of school leadership teams in instructional leadership at the building level. An additional recommendation is for district-level leadership to outline expectations for the SLT in the area of instructional leadership. As a result of the completion of this case study, the

conceptual framework was redesigned to include the aforementioned expectations in the school improvement and school leadership team processes (Figure 3). This framework provides more detail for any school or district that is seeking to improve their existing practices in school improvement planning and development of school leadership teams.

As a researcher and a practitioner in the field of instructional leadership, I feel extremely grateful for the opportunity to conduct this study. My participation in this research enabled me to expand upon my existing knowledge and improve my daily pedagogical practices with school and district leadership. This study has the potential to inform multiple levels of school leadership on the importance of professional development for instructional leadership at the school and district levels. By applying the concepts for distributed leadership with the components of quality school improvement, planning can be beneficial to any school organization regardless of accreditation status or school level. My sincere hope is that this study impacts the field of education as we strive to support students so they will emerge from their public school education prepared for either college or a career.

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Appendix A. School Accreditation Matrix for 2018

Indicators		Performance Levels		
	Accredited: Every school quality indicator is in either level I or II ranges. *With Conditions:* School quality has any indicators in the Level III range. *Denied:* Schools that continues to demonstrate level III in any school quality indicator due to failure to implement actions or has taken no action on Id strategies and interventions	Level I Monitor Indicators of a multi-year SIP-Subject to review by VDOE	Level II Develop & implement SIP based on CAN. Subject to review and my request TA from VDOE	Level III Academic Review Conducted, CAP and tailored TA from VDOE with consistence progress monitoring
English Academic Indicator*	*(includes passing state assessments, student growth and English Learner progress)*	Combined Rate for English Reading & Writing 75% or Higher	Between 66% and 74%	65% or lower
Math Academic Indicator*	*(includes passing state assessments and student growth)*	Combined Rate for Math 70% or Higher	Between 66% and 69%	
Science Academic Indicator*	*(includes passing state assessments)*	Combined Rate for Sci. 70% or Higher	Between 66% and 69%	
English Academic Achievement Gap*	*(examines all reporting groups)*	75% or Higher	Less than 10 points below state benchmark	10 or more points below state benchmark

Math Academic Achievement Gap*	*(examines all reporting groups)*	70% or Higher	Less than 5 points below state benchmark	5 or more points below state benchmark
Graduation/ School Progress	Graduation and Completion Index †	88 or higher ‡Dropout 6% or lower	Between 81 - 87 ‡Dropout :Between 7- 8%	80 or lower ‡Dropout: 9%or higher
Student Engagement	Chronic Absenteeism‡	15% or lower	Between 16% and 24%	25% or higher
College and Career Readiness	College and Career Readiness Index *(includes advanced coursework, CTE credentials, and work-based learning)*	85% or higher	Between 71% and 84%	70% or lower

Virginia's School Accreditation Matrix

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FOR ALL SCHOOLS

PERFORMANCE LEVEL	SCHOOL/DIVISION INTERVENTION
I **Level One: At or Above Standard** ▲ A school's achievement on the specific indicator demonstrates performance at or above the state benchmark, or ▲ A school has made adequate improvement in the indicator from the Level Two benchmark.	✦ These schools should monitor indicators and develop a multi-year improvement plan to ensure continuous improvement for all schools. ✦ School improvement plans will be subject to review via a VDOE established process.
II **Level Two: Near Standard or Improving** ***An indicator within Level Two (YELLOW) that does not improve to Level One (GREEN) shall be designated as Level Three (RED) at the end of a four-year period.*** ▲ A school's achievement on the indicator is below the state benchmark but close to Level One performance, or ▲ A school has improved in the indicator from the Level Three benchmark.	✦ These schools will develop and implement school improvement plans for the indicator based on a Comprehensive Needs Assessment. ✦ School improvement plans will be subject to review via a VDOE established process. For any Academic Indicator in this level, an Academic Review will be required. ✦ These schools may request technical assistance from VDOE.
III **Level Three: Below Standard** ▲ A school's achievement is below the state benchmark, or ▲ A school's achievement within the YELLOW (Level Two) has not improved to the Green (Level One) at the end of a four-year period.	✦ VDOE will conduct an Academic Review. ✦ These schools will work with VDOE to develop a Corrective Action Plan. ✦ These schools will receive tailored technical assistance from VDOE and consistent monitoring of their progress.

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Appendix B. State Accountability

ACCOUNTABILITY AND VIRGINIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

2016-2017 SCHOOL YEAR

Virginia's accountability system supports teaching and learning by setting rigorous academic standards — known as the Standards of Learning (SOL) — and through annual statewide assessments of student achievement.

Results from these tests — which most students take online — are used by the commonwealth to identify schools in need of assistance and to inform parents and the public about the progress of schools through the awarding of annual accreditation ratings.

State Accreditation

The Virginia Board of Education revised its accreditation standards in 2015 to better inform the public about the progress of schools toward meeting the commonwealth's high expectations for student learning and achievement.

The achievement levels required for a rating of Fully Accredited did not change. New "Partially Accredited" ratings, however, now differentiate schools that are close to full accreditation, or that are making acceptable progress, from those that are not.

Federal Accountability

The new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) designates 2016-2017 as a transition year during which the U.S. Department of Education issues final regulations and states develop implementation plans. The new law and the provisions of each state's plan to implement ESSA go into full effect with the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

As Virginia transitions to the new law, the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) established by the state Board of Education under Virginia's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) flexibility waiver no longer apply to most schools but will factor in the identification of Priority and Focus schools for 2016-2017.

Accreditation:

High Standards for Learning & Achievement

School accreditation ratings reflect student achievement on SOL tests and other approved assessments in English, history/social science, mathematics and science. Ratings are based on the achievement of students on tests taken during the previous academic year or on a three-year average of achievement. Schools receive one of the following ratings:

Fully Accredited

Elementary and middle schools are Fully Accredited if students achieve all of the following pass rates:

- English — 75 percent or higher
- Mathematics — 70 percent or higher
- Science — 70 percent or higher
- History — 70 percent or higher

High schools are Fully Accredited if:

- Students achieve pass rates of 75 percent or higher in English and 70 percent or higher in mathematics, science and history; and
- Attain a point value of 85 or greater based on the Graduation and Completion Index (GCI).

ACCREDITATION BENCHMARKS
(Adjusted Pass Rates)

Subject	*Grades 3-5*	*Grades 6-8*	*Grades 9-12*
English	75	75	75
Mathematics	70	70	70
Science	70	70	70
History	70	70	70

Note: Ratings for the 2016-2017 are based on 2015-2016 results or on average achievement during the three most recent school years.

Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Pass Rate

Schools that are not Fully Accredited, but that are within a two-point narrow margin of the adjusted SOL pass rates required for full accreditation in one or more subject areas, receive this rating.

Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Graduation and Completion Index

High schools that have attained the adjusted pass rates required for full accreditation, and that are within one point of the Graduation and Completion Index (GCI) required for full accreditation, receive this rating.

Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark		
Content Area	**Full Accreditation**	**Narrow Margin**
English	75%	73%
Mathematics	70%	68%
Science	70%	68%
History/Social Science	70%	68%
Graduation & Completion Index	85	84

Partially Accredited: Improving School-Pass Rate

Schools that are not Fully Accredited, and do not qualify for a rating of Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark-Pass Rate, but that are making acceptable progress toward full accreditation or that are raising the achievement of low-performing students.

Partially Accredited: Improving School-GCI

High schools that have attained the adjusted pass rates required for full accreditation, and that have improved their GCI by at least one point from the previous year, but that are not within a narrow margin of the GCI required for full accreditation.

Partially Accredited-Improving School	
Mathematics, Science & History/Social Science	
If the school's adjusted pass rate for the previous year was:	The school's adjusted pass rate must have increased by at least:
65	2 points
60-64	3 points
50-59	9 points
40-49	10 points
Below 40	15 points
English	
If the school's adjusted pass rate for the previous year was:	The school's adjusted pass rate must have increased by at least:
70	2 points
65-69	4 points
60-64	7 points
45-59	11 points
Below 45	15 points
Note: Schools with previous pass rates of 71-72 percent in English and/or 66-67 percent in mathematics, science and history/social science are ineligible for a Partially Accredited: Improving School rating and must meet the criteria for Partially Accredited: Approaching Benchmark or be rated as Partially Accredited: Warned School.	

Partially Accredited: Warned School-Pass Rate

Schools that are not within a narrow margin of, nor making acceptable progress toward, achieving the adjusted SOL pass rates required for full accreditation

Partially Accredited: Warned School-GCI

High schools that have achieved the adjusted SOL pass rates required for full accreditation, but that are not within a narrow margin of, nor making acceptable progress toward, achieving the GCI required for full accreditation

Partially Accredited-Reconstituted School

Schools that fail to meet the requirements for full accreditation for four consecutive years and receive permission from the state Board of Education to reconstitute. A reconstituted school reverts to accreditation-denied status if it fails to meet full accreditation requirements within the agreed-upon term, or if it fails to have its annual application for Partially Accredited-Reconstituted School renewed.

Accreditation Denied

A school is rated Accreditation Denied if it fails to meet the requirements for full or provisional accreditation for four consecutive years. Any school denied accreditation must provide parents and other interested parties the following:

- Written notice of the school's accreditation rating within 30 calendar days of the announcement of the rating by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE);
- A copy of the school division's proposed corrective action plan describing the steps to be taken to raise achievement to state standards, including a timeline for implementation; and
- An opportunity to comment on the division's proposed corrective action plan prior to its adoption and the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the local school board and the Board of Education.

Graduation & Completion Index

The GCI calculation comprises students in the cohort of expected on-time graduates (students who were first-time ninth graders four years earlier, plus transfers in and minus transfers out) and students carried over from previous cohorts. A student earning a diploma who entered ninth grade for the first time five years ago is an example of a carryover student. Carryover students are included in annual GCI calculations until they graduate or otherwise leave school. Students with disabilities and limited-English proficient students are included in the GCI calculation when they earn a diploma, GED or certificate of completion; drop out or otherwise exit high school; or are no longer eligible for free public education services.

OUTCOME	*POINT VALUE*
Board-Recognized Diploma	100
GED	75
Still in School	70
Certificate of Program Completion	25
Dropout	0

The weighted index points are totaled and then divided by the sum of cohort students and carryover students who earned a credential or stayed in school, plus all cohort and carryover students who dropped out or left school without earning a credential. In the following example, the 80 students in a school earn a total of 7,155 points and achieve a GCI of 89.

OUTCOME	*CALCULATION*		*RESULTS*
	# of students	*Point value*	*# of students x Point Value*
Diplomas	66	100	6,600
GEDs	3	75	225
Certificates of Completion	2	25	50
Students still in school	4	70	280
Dropouts	5	0	0
TOTALS	80		7,155
GCI: 7,155 ÷ 80 = 89			

A GCI of at least 85 is required for full accreditation.

The local school board — within 45 days of receiving notice of the status — must submit to the Board of Education a proposed corrective action plan. The Board of Education will consider the proposal and develop a memorandum of understanding with the local school board, which must be implemented by November 1.

Also, the local school board must submit status reports detailing the implementation of actions prescribed in the memorandum of understanding; and the principal, division superintendent and local school board chairman may be required to appear before the Board of Education to present status reports.

Additionally, in any school division where one-third or more of the schools have been denied accreditation, the local school board is required to evaluate the division superintendent and submit a copy of the evaluation to the Board of Education by December 1. The Board of Education may take action — as permitted by the Standards of Quality — against the local school board for failure to maintain accredited schools.

Conditionally Accredited

A rating of Conditionally Accredited is awarded for one year to a new school — comprising students who previously attended one or more existing schools — to provide the opportunity to evaluate the performance of students on SOL tests and other statewide assessments.

Accreditation Adjustments

A school's accreditation rating may reflect adjustments to pass rates resulting from successful remediation efforts and for the allowable exclusion of some limited-English Proficient (LEP) students and transfer students.

Remediation & Retesting

Virginia's accountability system recognizes successful remediation programs that help students achieve minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics in all tested grades. A school is credited for successful remedial instruction when a student — who failed a particular content-area assessment during the previous year — subsequently passes the corresponding content-area test for the next grade.

If a student fails an SOL test and successfully retests during the same school year, the result of the first test is not included in the accreditation calculation for the school.

Limited-English Proficient Students

The scores of LEP students enrolled in Virginia public schools fewer than 11 semesters may be excluded from the accreditation rating calculations. While all LEP students are expected to participate in the state assessment program, a school-based committee determines the level of participation of each LEP student.

Transfer Students

The scores of students transferring within a Virginia school division are included in the calculation of accreditation ratings. Students transferring into a school from another Virginia school division, another state, a private school, or who have been home schooled are expected to take the assessments for the content areas in which they received instruction. Under limited circumstances as described in Board of Education regulations, the failing scores of some transfer students may be excluded from the accreditation calculation.

Every Student Succeeds Act

The new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) eliminates many No Child Left Behind Act-era requirements and provides greater flexibility for states.

ESSA designates 2016-2017 as a transition year during which the U.S. Department of Education develops final regulations and states create implementation plans. The new law and the provisions of each state's plan to implement ESSA go into full effect with the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year.

Under ESSA, the flexibility waivers granted under the old federal education law are null and void after August 1, 2016. While the Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs) established by the state Board of Education under Virginia's waiver won't apply to most schools in 2016-2017, the AMOs will factor in the identification of Priority and Focus schools.

Priority, Focus & Reward Schools

Five percent of Virginia's Title I schools are identified as Priority schools based on overall reading and mathematics achievement and graduation rates in the case of high schools. Schools meeting one or more of the following criteria are identified as Priority schools:

- Title I schools and other schools receiving federal School Improvement Grant funds and identified as a Tier I or Tier II school
- Title I high schools with a federal graduation indicator of 60 percent or less for two or more of the most recent consecutive years
- Title I schools that fail to test 95 percent of students overall and in all subgroups in reading and mathematics for three consecutive years
- Title I schools in which overall achievement in reading and/or mathematics does not meet annual benchmarks — as needed to identify a number of schools equivalent to five percent of the state's Title I schools.

Priority schools must engage a state-approved turnaround partner to help implement a school-improvement model meeting state and federal requirements.

Ten percent of Virginia's Title I schools are identified as Focus schools based on participation and achievement by students in the three proficiency gap groups in reading and mathematics testing.

Focus schools must employ a state-approved coach to help the division develop, implement and monitor intervention strategies to improve the performance of at-risk students.

Participation in State Assessments

Like NCLB, ESSA requires states to annually assess the reading and mathematics achievement of not less than 95 percent of students overall and 95 percent of students in each reporting group, including major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and English language learners. These participation requirements apply during 2016-2017.

Appendix C. Interview Protocol

School Leadership Team Interview

First, I want to thank you for agreeing to be a participant in this research study. My name is Keith Hubbard and I am a doctoral student with The George Washington University in the Educational Leadership program. Your participation in this interview will contribute to the field of educational research. As a reminder, the purpose of this research is to understand your role in the school improvement process at your school. I am interested in learning about your perspective as a member of the school leadership team on your involvement in the school improvement process. Specifically, I will concentrate on the professional development, the formation of the school improvement plan, and the responsibilities you are assigned in the instructional leadership of the school. Do you have any questions about the purpose or why I am conducting the study?

I want to remind you that everything you say will remain confidential between you and I. I will not discuss with your administrator, central office personnel, or other members of the SLT that are interviewed. However, if you share something with me that results in a situation that is causing harm to a student or to another staff member I will need to share that information with someone. Before the interview begins is there anything you have questions about? I want to hear about your experiences as a member of the SLT and there are no right or wrong answers. I am going to tape this interview so that I don't have to take notes while we are talking. However, you may see me jot down a few items for my tracking purposes periodically while you are responding to questions. If at any time you need me to stop the recording, please indicate that and I will pause the tape recorder.

1. Selection on the Team

Intro question: Tell me about yourself as an educational professional

A. How long have you worked at _____ elementary school? Did you work at another school prior to working here?

B. What grade level do you teach?

C. How did you become a member of the SLT?

D. How long have you been a member of the SLT?

2. Responsibilities as an SLT Member

Now I want to change the direction and ask you questions related to your assigned duties as a member of the SLT at_____ elementary school

A. How would you describe the purpose of the SLT?

B. How would you describe your role as member of the SLT?

C. Are you leading any subject areas or grade levels? (Take notes for the answering of question 2D)

D. You stated you lead _____ I would like to learn a little more about that? Please describe and provide an example.

E. What types of professional development have you participated in that are directly related to your leadership responsibilities?

3. School Improvement Planning Process

I want to shift gears and ask you questions related directly to the school improvement process for _____ elementary school

A. When was the school improvement plan written? Who was responsible for writing the school improvement plan?

B. How are you provided with a copy of the completed school improvement plan?

C. How does the school improvement plan specifically addresses the needs of the students in relation to academic achievement, if at all? (*Depending on the answer will lead into the specificity in relation to their previously determined assigned duties question 2D*)

D. As a member of the SLT, please describe your involvement in the SIP process?

E. What types of assessments are used to measure student progress?

F. How often do you meet as a staff to discuss the assessments during the school year?

G. Can you explain the process for analyzing data in your school?

H. Please explain how you see the SIP contributing to the school improvement efforts in your building?

I. How would you describe your schools progress toward improving the accreditation status from denied to fully accredited?

J. Do you feel as though there are any social, economic, or policy aspects that affect the academic progress of your school?

4. Professional Development for the SLT

Now I want to change the direction one last time and ask you questions related to your professional development as a team member at_____ elementary school

A. How often do you participate in professional development?

B. What professional development sessions have you led as a member of the SLT?

C. When are professional development sessions held at your school?

D. What areas of professional development have you found to be helpful? Any area that you did not see as helpful?

That concludes all the questions I have for this interview. Is there any additional information you would like to share with me at this time (pause and wait for response)? Well I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study and I appreciate your time today.

Appendix D. School Professional Development Evaluation Tool

Evidence for: Professional Development

To be used with: Division- and school-level professional development procedures and plans (Include a variety of documents that evidence monitoring and feedback)

*Required Tool

Basic Component	No implementation (0 points)	Limited Implementation (1 point)	Functional Implementation (2 points) *All criteria must be met in order to achieve a score of Functional Implementation*	Full Implementation (3 points) *Meets ALL criteria for Functional Implementation and at least one of the following…*	Our Score
Support: Professional Development	0 or 1 elements for Functional Implementation are present	2 or 3 elements for Functional Implementation are present	☐ Creates a plan for appropriate professional development that connects teaching to student learning outcomes ☐ Provides support and opportunities for teachers to effectively implement learning from professional development ☐ Monitors whether and how professional development learning is used in classrooms ☐ Provides feedback to teachers' on their use of professional development learning through an explicit focus on student learning outcomes	☐ Uses data to determine appropriate professional development, monitor its effectiveness, and determine next steps ☐ Differentiates professional development based on teachers' needs	

Appendix E. School Improvement Plan Averaging Worksheet

Directions: Review the SIP and record each score here. Then find the arithmetic mean/average for each Indicator.

SIP Category	Indicators	Year 13-14	Year 14-15	Year 15-16	Year 16-17	Year 17-18								Score/ Average
Written Plan- Is the language written in terms that ensure comprehension of all readers.														
Goals	Specific													
Goals	Measurable													
Goals	Achievable													
Goals	Relevant													
Goals	Time Bound													
Strategies	Specific Strategies to address goals in the plan													
Professional Development														
Support: Professional Development Plan														
Opportunities & Connections to Specific Strategies														
Monitoring Plan														
People responsible Identified														
Frequency Outlined Weekly-Monthly- Bi Monthly-Quarterly														

Appendix F. Observation/Walkthrough Protocol

Date _____ Time _____

Place_____

Setting_____

Member's Title_____

Observed Behaviors	Reflective Description- Coding

Appendix G. District Consent Letter

District Contact
District Name
Street Address
City, State, and Zip

Dear [Mr. or Ms.],

I am seeking to conduct research in your school division under the auspices of the George Washington University, and part of my doctoral program. This study is under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Clayton, Associate Professor, The George Washington University. Her contact information is claytonj@gwu.edu or by phone at 757-269-2203. The study I am seeking to conduct is on the role of school leadership teams in elementary schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. I am requesting approval to conduct a case study of an elementary school leadership team in your district of a school that fits this profile.

This research is approved by the George Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB). An approved interview protocol will be followed, no personal or personally identifiable information (PII) will be sought or gathered. Participation in this study will be anonymous, and data elicited as part of the study will be confidential. Security measures are in place to protect data from disclosure, and all data and materials will be destroyed at the conclusion of research. The final dissertation will include a summary of findings not traceable to individual participants. Participation in this study is voluntary, and participants may opt out at any time.

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how school leadership teams are used in the school improvement efforts in schools failing to achieve full accreditation. The case study will employ a qualitative approach to gather and analyze data. The case study will utilize three forms of data collection to include: interviews of school leadership team members, observations of school leadership team members in meetings, professional development and independent daily responsibilities, and document review of school improvement plans and professional development plans utilizing the single case study methodology. Interviews will follow an interview protocol and will be professionally transcribed. Participants in the interviews will be given identifying codes only recognizable by the researcher. Open, axial, and thematic coding and analysis will construct what school leadership team members perceive as their role in the school improvement process. Observations of team members in their assigned responsibilities will follow the observation protocol and identifiers and the same coding procedures will provide the data on how the members are used in the school improvement process. Finally, a document audit of school improvement plans and professional development artifacts will provide data on the components of the school improvement process and professional development to assist in the turnaround efforts. It is the objective of this

study to gain understanding of the school leadership teams' contributions to the school improvement through improving teacher pedagogy and improving student achievement on end of the year assessments to assist in improving the accreditation ratings of elementary schools denied accreditation.

I appreciate you considering this request and look forward to working with your division and completing this case study.

Sincerely,

Mr. Keith P. Hubbard
Doctoral Student, the George Washington University
Cell: 757- 470-8607
Home: 757-809-1617
Email: keihubbard@gwmail.gwu.edu

Appendix H. Participant Consent Letter

June 11, 2018

School Leadership Team Member
A Plus Elementary

You have been recommended by the assessment coordinator of your district to participate in a qualitative research study on the role of school leadership teams in elementary schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This study is being conducted by me under the auspices of the George Washington University, and part of my doctoral program. Specifically, for my doctoral dissertation for the Graduate School of Education and Human Development. Your requested participation involves a case study of your school leadership team that includes three methods of data collection to include-interviews, observations and walkthroughs, and document reviews. This study is under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Clayton, Associate Professor, The George Washington University. Her contact information is claytonj@gwu.edu or by phone at 757-269-2203.

This research has been approved by the George Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and your Superintendents Office. An approved interview, observation, and document review protocol will be followed, no personal or personally identifiable information (PII) will be sought or gathered. Participation in this study will be anonymous, and data elicited as part of the study will be confidential. Security measures are in place to protect data from disclosure, and all data will be destroyed at the conclusion of research. The final dissertation will include a narrative summary of findings and will not be traceable to individual participants. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may opt out at any time.

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how school leadership teams are used in the school improvement efforts in schools failing to achieve full accreditation. The case study will employ a qualitative approach to gather and analyze data. The case study will utilize three forms of data collection to include: interviews of school leadership team members, observations of school leadership team members in meetings, professional development and independent daily responsibilities, and document review of school improvement plans and professional development plans utilizing the single case study methodology. Interviews will follow an interview protocol and will be professionally transcribed. Participants in the interviews will be given identifying codes only recognizable by the researcher. Open, axial, and thematic coding and analysis will construct what school leadership team members perceive as their role in the school improvement process. Observations of team members in their assigned responsibilities will follow the observation protocol and identifiers and the same coding procedures will provide the data on how the members are used in the school improvement process. Finally, a document audit of school improvement plans and professional development artifacts will provide data on the components of the school improvement process and professional development to assist in the turnaround efforts. It is the objective of this

study to gain understanding of the school leadership teams' contributions to the school improvement through improving teacher pedagogy and improving student achievement on end of the year assessments to assist in improving the accreditation ratings of elementary schools denied accreditation.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Mr. Keith P. Hubbard
Doctoral Student, the George Washington University
Cell: 757-470-8607
Home: 757-809-1617
Email: keihubbard@gwmail.gwu.edu

Appendix I. Principal Consent Letter

June 11, 2018

Principal Sunshine
A Plus Elementary
1111 Heaven Drive

Dear Principal Sunshine,

You have been recommended by the assessment coordinator of your district to participate in a qualitative research study on the role of school leadership teams in elementary schools denied accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This study is being conducted by me under the auspices of the George Washington University, and part of my doctoral program. Specifically, for my doctoral dissertation for the Graduate School of Education and Human Development. Your requested participation involves a case study of your school leadership team that includes three methods of data collection to include-interviews, observations and walkthroughs, and document reviews. This study is under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Clayton, Associate Professor, The George Washington University. Her contact information is claytonj@gwu.edu or by phone at 757-269-2203.

This research has been approved by the George Washington University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and your Superintendents Office. An approved interview, observation, and document review protocol will be followed, no personal or personally identifiable information (PII) will be sought or gathered. Participation in this study will be anonymous, and data elicited as part of the study will be confidential. Security measures are in place to protect data from disclosure, and all data will be destroyed at the conclusion of research. The final dissertation will include a narrative summary of findings and will not be traceable to individual participants. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may opt out at any time.

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of how school leadership teams are used in the school improvement efforts in schools failing to achieve full accreditation. The case study will employ a qualitative approach to gather and analyze data. The case study will utilize three forms of data collection to include: interviews of school leadership team members, observations of school leadership team members in meetings, professional development and independent daily responsibilities, and document review of school improvement plans and professional development plans utilizing the single case study methodology. Interviews will follow an interview protocol and will be professionally transcribed. Participants in the interviews will be given identifying codes only recognizable by the researcher. Open, axial, and thematic coding and analysis will construct what school leadership team members perceive as their role in the school improvement process. Observations of team members in their assigned responsibilities will follow the observation protocol and identifiers and the same coding procedures will

provide the data on how the members are used in the school improvement process. Finally, a document audit of school improvement plans and professional development artifacts will provide data on the components of the school improvement process and professional development to assist in the turnaround efforts. It is the objective of this study to gain understanding of the school leadership teams' contributions to the school improvement through improving teacher pedagogy and improving student achievement on end of the year assessments to assist in improving the accreditation ratings of elementary schools denied accreditation.

I sincerely hope that you will be able to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Mr. Keith P. Hubbard
Doctoral Student, the George Washington University
Cell: 757-470-8607
Home: 757-809-1617
Email: keihubbard@gwmail.gwu.edu

Appendix J. SLT Signature Approval to Participate in the Study

The Role of the School Leadership Team in Elementary Schools Denied Accreditation in the Commonwealth of Virginia

Name	Signature	Email	Phone Number