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IT IS THE PROCESS, NOT THE TEST: A MIXED METHOD STUDY OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY AT ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN OKLAHOMA

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AT ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN OKLAHOMA

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

It is the Process, Not the Test

In 2001, the most far-reaching educational accountability initiative was launched by the Bush administration. The No Child Left Behind Act required all students to show incremental growth toward mastery of state standards with all students demonstrating proficiency by 2014.

This new "era of accountability" has called for unique investigations into ways in which schools are meeting the new requirements. A mixed method study of one Title I elementary school in Oklahoma explored how a professional learning community (PLC) was both developed and implemented in this case. In addition, the study sought to explore how learning for both staff and students was affected. Like many districts that formerly identified themselves as "suburban," the area in which this school is located has experienced rapidly changing demographics. This change has resulted in a student population that has compared to the district as a whole, a greater incidence of poverty, higher mobility rates, and a larger percentage of non-English speaking students. These factors have perpetuated a learning gap on both state and local assessments.

The juxtaposition of the quest for reaching accountability benchmarks and the desire for meeting students' individual needs has created a problem for district administration, site principals, and school staff. As a result, the stakeholders have struggled to redefine the way instructional and social support services are delivered to its rapidly changing students.

This study attempted to tell the story of one school's search to create the best possible teaching and learning environment while meeting the current high-stakes

accountability measures for student performance. This study sought to determine if, in this case, the establishment of professional learning communities was a viable strategy for addressing accountability demands while encouraging the use of best instructional practices. The analysis focused on the school's use of teacher collaboration as a means to facilitate conversation about teaching and learning, create common assessments, conduct data analyses, and reflect on how their goals were met.

The study indicated that increased student learning is strongly encouraged by the development of professional learning communities. In this case, the development of the PLC served as a means to focus the conversation on student achievement while encouraging collaboration among school staff as a means of addressing individual students' learning needs. The study also suggested that the development of meaningful community partnerships played an integral part in the PLC process.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This researcher conducted a mixed method study of an elementary school in Oklahoma. For many years, this school had the unique distinction of serving high poverty, high mobility, and ethnically diverse students in a historically affluent, stable, and homogeneous suburban school district. Because of the challenges presented by the school demographics, district officials implemented a variety of new programs and policies to address the achievement gap separating this school from others in the district. The pressure exerted at the state, district, and local level to "fix" the problem has increased dramatically with implementation of high-stakes testing and the looming sanctions imposed by lagging student performance.

Over the past ten years, the school has undergone a tremendous amount of change to address growing accountability concerns. A change in instructional leadership, several new program implementations, and a philosophical shift in resource allocation marked the restructuring effort. Some of the programs implemented initially – year-round school calendar, computerized learning stations purchased for students to use at home, and after-school tutoring, to name a few – have been very expensive endeavors but have shown little evidence of student learning. When these programs proved ineffective, the staff looked at the creation of professional learning communities as a means of addressing the needs of the changing population.

This study indicated that increased student learning is strongly encouraged by the development of professional learning communities that focus conversation on student achievement and collaboration among school staff with the purpose of addressing

individual student learning needs. Different from previously imposed externally initiated solutions, the professional learning community facilitates time for school staff to analyze student work and reflect on teaching strategies as a means of developing their own solutions to student needs.

Following an exhaustive review of the literature on the federal accountability movement and research-based strategies for addressing student achievement, the researcher conducted a mixed method study. The research employed the use of a survey, observations, document analysis, and interviews.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandates that districts and school sites address each child's individual learning needs and provide evidence that each student is achieving at grade level in both mathematics and reading. The legislation, however, tells us only the standard that must be met. It provides little to no mandate as to how the performance target is achieved, and it is the goal of the researcher to illuminate the unique ways this school sought to address the federal, state, and district accountability requirements.

Throughout the nation, school leaders are grappling with how to address the accountability demands of the federal government, state departments of education, and local school boards. Though many of the circumstances surrounding this school are unique, other districts may find the data gleaned from this study to be applicable to their own situation. Two questions form the basis of this study:

1. How was a Professional Learning Community developed and implemented in this case?

2. What, if any, concepts in the PLC model impacted student and faculty learning?

Purpose

This study will attempt to tell the story of how one school moved from an externally driven, bureaucratic accountability model to an internally focused, professional accountability structure as a means of addressing student achievement in a high-challenge environment. Aspects of principal leadership, teacher professional development, and instructional practices were analyzed to determine which behaviors had the most influence on increasing student performance. The study explored the school's emphasis on accountability and data analysis to discover the impact of these factors in a Title I school.

It is the hope of this researcher that the study can inform decision-making at the district and local level in this particular school district. By increasing what is known about professional accountability models, other schools can consider the alternatives to the canned and expensive solutions promised by sales staff pushing the latest technology package, textbook program, "off-the-shelf" test preparation program, or step-by-step recipe for instructional delivery. Using a mixed method study was an especially important choice as most of the emerging evidence suggests that it is precisely this complex methodology that is most appropriate in examining multiple data sets at the site level for the purpose of school improvement.

Problem Statement

The recent passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, coupled with increasing state and local accountability initiatives, has created a laser focus on school

accountability. The primary focus of the legislation is to increase expectations for "at-risk" students, or those identified as minority, economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners, and special education students. Though the standards and sanctions apply to all schools, it is projected to have its greatest impact on Title I schools that, by definition, serve students in the greatest need of support. In fact, initial estimates are that 80-90% of schools receiving Title I funds will qualify as "in need of improvement" by the federal government. Consequently, they will be subject to increasing sanctions as outlined by NCLB (Bracey, 2002). Additionally, this type of high-stakes accountability may have many unintended consequences, and it may narrow the intended curriculum – defined as the knowledge, skills, and habits of thought which teachers believe are important for students to learn – causing teachers to "teach to the test" (McNeil, 2000).

The study examined the current emphasis on accountability to determine the impact of both federal and state regulations on the programs, processes, and strategies that were selected to address the complex issues raised by NCLB. Northeastern Elementary was of particular interest as a Title I elementary school facing increasing mobility, poverty, and cultural/linguistic diversity. The short implementation timeline and severity of sanctions imposed by NCLB have caused a reactionary response by many leaders of schools with similar demographics. Some have chosen "canned" programs aimed at increasing test scores; others have mandated strict curriculum outlines and pacing calendars that require all students to learn the same concepts on the same day. Many districts have eliminated the fine arts, physical education classes, and service learning projects in favor of more time on task in the regular curriculum. The fearful, frenetic atmosphere created by the accountability culture has led few to the literature

regarding meeting the needs of the whole child. This is particularly the case in situations where schools and districts appear on a list for low test scores.

Examination of research surrounding professional learning communities has generated some attention in recent years as a means of addressing individual learning needs from a holistic perspective. The use of data, including standardized test scores, is an essential component of this work. However, teacher-created, common assessments are most informative in guiding teaching and learning. In the same way, relevant, student-centered discussions most effectively facilitate the conversations about teacher and student learning.

Conceptual Framework

The increasing federal role in education policy evolved as a direct result to a controversial report on US schools' performance as compared to our international counterparts. The 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education report, "A Nation At Risk," was a catalyst for the beginning of an era called "The Excellence Movement" (Huffman and Hipp, 2003). Though light on research and data to substantiate its claims, this hard-hitting report was the impetus for public demand on schools to become more "efficient" a from business perspective. This mechanistic approach to quantifying school performance has led to application of business models to promote data-driven decision making.

As a result, the federal government began to tie funding to test scores as a means of imparting a "bottom line" for school performance. Today, school districts struggle for a way to meet standard accountability benchmarks while maintaining a healthy focus on the needs of individual schools, faculties, and students. Current research on professional

learning communities offers some direction for maintaining both strong accountability and a high degree of relevance for both teaching and learning.

Research Questions

1. How was a Professional Learning Community developed and implemented in this case?
2. What, if any, concepts in the PLC model impacted student and faculty learning?

Summary of Methods

A mixed method study sought to explore how a professional learning community evolved in this school and whether it affected student and faculty learning. The researcher studied the school setting, site administration, school climate, and instructional processes for the students. The researcher examined archival documents, including test scores, personnel reports, and Title I plans. The study utilized data gathered from three additional sources—formal survey, group observation, and semi-structured interview.

Limitations

The study is bounded by its focus on one elementary school over a five-year period. The focus on one unique elementary school will limit generalizability to other school sites.

Another limitation of this study is that the researcher holds an administrative position in the school district. Though her role does not encompass any formal supervisory or evaluative role for the administrators or teachers at Northeastern, she is a district office administrator with supervisory responsibilities for instructional program implementation and support.

Assumptions

It is assumed that federal regulations and criteria regarding No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Title I program are being implemented and enforced in the same way to all school districts. It is also assumed that the data reported by the Oklahoma Office of Accountability and the Oklahoma State Department of Education have accurately reported the achievement data for the districts and school site encompassed in this study.

Definitions

- Achievement Gap: refers to the wide differences in measures of academic achievement that exist between low income and minority children and other children in the same age/grade range (Haycock, 2001)
- Best practices: research-oriented principles that are shown to positively affect student learning. Examples include differentiated instruction, experimental inquiry, and use of graphic organizers (Marzano, 2001).
- Low performing school: designation of Title I schools not reaching state benchmarks for student test scores in the areas of reading and mathematics
- Oklahoma School Testing Program: tests measuring the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS), Oklahoma's core curriculum. At the elementary level, these tests have historically been administered in grades 3, 4, and 5.
- Professional learning community: a place where learning occurs through participation as people engage in common activities (www.ed.gov/pub/policforum/April98/vision.html)
- SAT-9: Stanford Achievement Tests Series, Ninth Edition (Stanford 9), a norm-referenced achievement test

- Title I: US Department of Education supplementary program for K-12 schools. Schools identified as Title I must have 40% of the student population eligible for free or reduced school meals.

Human Subjects Review and Ethical Issues

The study utilized group observation, personal interview, anonymous surveys, and document analysis as the primary means of data collection. Participation in the study was voluntary. Each participant and school received a pseudonym. Participants gave written consent for each aspect of the study. Consequently, the effects on the adult human subjects were minimal.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section of the dissertation presents an overview of literature relating to the regulations and research that have shaped the way programs have been developed and implemented to address accountability issues in a high-poverty school. The first section provides a historical overview of the federal government's role in establishing a culture of high expectations and accountability through federal law and funding allocations. The second section explores the theoretical frameworks of existing accountability models to inform the design of an effective school accountability model. The final section explores the use of professional learning communities as a means of increasing student performance through collaboration and reflection among teachers.

In total, the literature review provides the basis for understanding the complex factors that influence a school's decision-making processes in addressing student achievement – compliance with the law, funding requirements, and best practices in a Title I school. Understanding the historical, political, and theoretical basis surrounding school accountability is also critical. By identifying the motivations, strengths, and pitfalls of previous initiatives, our purpose is to not repeat past failures.

Historical Context of School Accountability

Over the past forty-five years, the federal government has done a lot to shape educational policy and programs designed to increase student achievement. The aim of this section is to trace the federal involvement from the 1960s leading to the current standards and accountability movement of 2005.

The 1960s signaled a new role for federal involvement in education policy with a focus on expanded funding and legislative control. By 1963, forty-two departments, agencies, and bureaus of the government were involved in education to some degree (Wirt and Kirst, 2001). One of the new federal initiatives created in 1963 was the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). With early funding from the Carnegie Foundation and later from the Education Commission of the States, this program sought to deliver national assessment data to evaluate the overall effectiveness of education programs. The design of NAEP was not to deliver testing data on individual students but rather to compare each state's progress made by sample populations. The population to be tested included students at age nine, thirteen, and seventeen. Tests given to public, private, and parochial school students generated data at the state level, not at the individual or school level. Student demographics, including gender, race, economic level, and community type (suburban, urban, and rural), served as the basis for disaggregating the test data. When the first results were reported and discrepancies were shown among demographic groups, policymakers began to discuss the disparity and question what could be done to remedy the problem. This marked the first time in history when assessment data formed the basis for policy decisions (Campbell, et al 1990).

In 1965, the federal government passed the first Elementary and Secondary Education Act. It directed more educational resources to underachieving students, especially those in poverty (Wirt and Kirst, 2001). The passage of this legislation came on the heels of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and attempted to serve as a roadmap for how schools were to work to equalize opportunity for all students.

Through the 1970s, federal involvement focused on an equity perspective for underserved students with a push for increased funding, innovation, and research. Most funding and programs came through categorical aid to schools, such as Title I and Title II. Districts qualified based on the demographic factors of its student population such as free and reduced lunch participation rates. Regulations allowed funding allocations at the discretion of states and districts as long as they assisted the intended target population.

Categorical aid was the prevalent source of funding to schools from 1964 to 1980. This method of allocating resources increased the number of special interest groups that began to vie for federal funding priority. Programs focused on outlining how special education, bilingual, and economically disadvantaged students would receive additional services through Title I, Title II, and IDEA programs.

Special needs legislation and funding garnered the most attention during this period. Public Law 94-142, passed in 1975, outlined rights for handicapped students, and the Individuals with Education Disabilities Act (IDEA) set guidelines for service to students with an individualized education plan (IEP) in their least restrictive environment. Together, these two pieces of legislation revolutionized the delivery and monitoring of services for special education students.

Throughout the 1970s, Congress offered bipartisan support for increasing federal oversight for local spending. In fact, the federal government's percentage of funding reached to 9% in 1970 (Wirt and Kirst, 2001). This remained the largest contribution on record until 2005 (US Department of Education, http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html?src=ln).

The United States Department of Education moved to a Cabinet level agency in 1980 in an effort to consolidate education-related programs and funding into one arm of the federal government. Though intended to increase efficiency and accountability, many questioned the wisdom of placing all of the control with one agency. As a result, the school lunch program resides today in the Department of Agriculture and the Head Start program remains a part of the Department of Health and Human Services (US Department of Ed, http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html?src=ln).

In 1980, the Reagan administration defined itself early as having an explicit agenda for public education. Up until this time, education initiatives were more reflective of a political time in history such as the previous efforts to address racial and economic inequities. Reagan's presidency, however, marked a shift in the definition of education policy being attributed to the personal philosophical and political ideology of the President himself. Reagan made it clear that he viewed education as a right delegated to state and local governments. Under Reagan's self-described "new federalism," he advocated for the abolishment of the United States Department of Education and endorsed a tuition tax credit to reimburse parents who sent their children to private schools. This affirmation opened the floodgate to legislative conversations about the viability of vouchers and blurred the lines between public funds and private schools.

Reagan's plan was more fully articulated in his proposal written in 1981 and entitled, "A Program for Economic Recovery." This agenda was appealing to some who saw the change in the federal role as more accommodating to state and local entities as funding transitioned from more restrictive categorical aid to more flexible bloc grants;

others looked upon these policies as a devaluing of education—both philosophically and fiscally.

During the first two years of Reagan's first term, education spending decreased almost 30% in seven major program areas (vocational, impact aid, disadvantaged, bilingual, handicapped, state block grants, and other programs (Peterson, et al, 1986). This cut was the beginning of a decreased emphasis on the federal government's role in supporting public schools.

In 1981, Secretary of Education Terrence Bell began exploring possible replacement arrangements for the Department of Education functions—including the extreme option of abolishing the Department altogether. In addition, Secretary Bell began pushing Reagan's plan for tuition tax credits and school prayer. Though popular among right wing special interest groups, none of these initiatives captured support from Congress.

In response to Congress' lackluster support of his initiatives, Secretary Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education, appointed a group of distinguished, conservative educators and lay persons. The commission conducted a study of teaching and learning, comparing progress of American schools and colleges with that of other advanced nations and defining the problems that lie in the way of achieving excellence in both common and higher education. The ensuing report, known today as "A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," was a damning, rhetorical account of the state of American schools (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report, written as an "open letter to the American people," attracted widespread attention and catapulted education to a major national concern.

Though many educators and researchers sharply disagreed with the validity of the report, Reagan had successfully moved the public school conversation into homes, schools, and churches. Consequently, he ran and won a second term under the guise of the Education President (Campbell, et al., 1990).

Reagan's next four years were sparked by the appointment of William Bennett as Secretary of Education in 1985. Known as a blunt-spoken, sharp-tongued critic of public education, Bennett rode the tide of interest created by "A Nation At Risk" and successfully utilized the "bully pulpit" to project ideas and values through the media. According to Campbell, et al. (1990), his stance on education caused immense controversy as educators, researchers, and policy groups believed he "politicized educational issues in dysfunctional and simplistic ways and betrayed the constituencies that he had been appointed to represent" (p. 67).

The negative assumptions about public education that Reagan promoted laid a foundation of mistrust for both public schools and the federal Department of Education. Vouchers and school choice grew in popularity. As a result, there was waning pressure for the federal government to be part of the solution to the problems that schools were facing. Therefore, both the public's confidence and federal policy role diminished during this time.

In 1988, former Vice-President George H. Bush became President, and his focus shifted more toward international policy and a faltering US economy and less on the domestic education agenda. Still heavily influenced by his years of service to the Reagan administration, President Bush convened a national summit of governors to respond to the claims of "A Nation At Risk" and set goals for his education agenda, including

student performance targets on standardized tests in reading and mathematics. The ideas presented at this meeting resulted in the The National Education Goals Report: Building a Nation of Learners, and the development of standards for student performance was once again emphasized (http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/99rpt.pdf).

Shortly thereafter, the Secretary of Labor released the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills Report, also known as the SCANS, which detailed the skills that young people need to succeed in the workforce. This report was consistent with many of the recommendations of "A Nation At Risk" and placed more responsibility for student employability, or lack thereof, back on the public schools.

In 1994, after fourteen years of a Republican-dominated White House, William Clinton became President. One of President Clinton's first education initiatives was the creation of the Goals 2000: Educate America Act. The program was the result of the growing concern about the rigor of the academic curricula and the lack of district, state, and site accountability for student performance. *Goals 2000* allocated funding to states to create core curriculum standards and matching assessments. *Goals 2000* focused the nation's attention on "standards" for curriculum and assessments to measure student mastery of the content. In addition, President Clinton created new funding sources to reduce class size and build better school buildings as another means to support student achievement.

President Clinton introduced the idea of a national voluntary test for 4th grade reading and 8th grade mathematics in 1995. Unlike NAEP, which had been in place since the 1960s, this test would yield individualized student results and afford norm-referenced (comparing a student to the performance of the national norm group) and

criterion-referenced (comparing a student's performance against specific academic standards) data. Though the idea was consistent with the movements toward standards-based curricula, renewed emphases on reading and mathematics, and increasing accountability expectations, the idea met with much opposition from both parties and never came to fruition.

In 1996, governors already active in the education policy arena teamed with business leaders to form yet another organization, *Achieve.* Its challenge was to assist states in creating standards, compare the rigor of state standards against each other, and hold states and schools accountable for student performance (Achieve, 2005). In the same year, the National Education Summit assembled with participation of governors and national business leaders. This same group convened again in 1999, a decade after the first national summit with President Bush. The major outcome from this meeting was an agreement for each state to develop its own standards and accountability measures.

In 2000, George W. Bush, former Texas governor, became President. During his tenure in Texas, Governor Bush had been responsible for directing a strong push on school accountability through the *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)* and the accompanying state-mandated assessments (*Texas Assessment of Academic Skills*). Texas was a state with one of the most punitive testing systems in the nation requiring students to pass assessments to advance to the next grade level, assigning "grades" to schools based on the percentage of students passing the test, and paying teacher bonuses based on student test scores. When President Bush came to Washington, he brought with him the former superintendent for the Houston Independent School District. Together,

Secretary of Education Rod Paige and President Bush began creating a national model for accountability based on their experiences in Texas.

By 2001, forty-six states had adopted curriculum standards in most of the core subject areas. States began working to align teacher preparation, certification, and professional development initiatives to the academic standards. In addition, all states except Iowa and Nebraska had state assessments in place to gauge student achievement and promote school accountability.

Consequently, President George W. Bush announced the creation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (www.nclb.gov). Signed into law in 2002, this legislation is easily the most far-reaching example of federal involvement in public education. This effort is in sharp contrast to the efforts of former Republican presidents, such as Ronald Reagan and George H. Bush, as it emphasizes the federal role in education. Not only does this Act mandate federal guidelines for the implementation of state standards and assessments, but it also ties state, district, and school performance to the receipt of federal funds.

One of the main requirements of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) is that students must make "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP) in order to meet the performance benchmarks as evidenced by student performance on state-mandated testing. The AYP requirement applies to all students including those identified as special education, English language learners, and of low socio-economic status.

The most punitive aspects of the bill affect schools that have enough students in poverty (50% or more of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch) to

qualify for Title I status. The No Child Left Behind Act lays out a plan and timetable for action when a Title I school fails to make AYP.

The resulting sanctions increase in severity over a five-year period by requiring the following interventions:

- A Title I school that has not made AYP, as defined by the state, for two consecutive school years will be identified by the district before the beginning of the next school year as needing improvement. School officials will develop a two-year plan to turn around the school. The local education agency will ensure that the school receives needed technical assistance as it develops and implements its improvement plan. Students are offered the option of transferring to another public school in the district—which may include a public charter school—that has not been identified as needing school improvement. Transportation costs are assumed through the district's Title I funds, up to 10% of the total allocation.
- If the school does not make AYP for three years, the school remains in school-improvement status, and the district must continue to offer public school choice to all students. In addition, students from low-income families are eligible to receive supplemental educational services, such as tutoring or remedial classes, from a state-approved provider.
- If the school fails to make AYP for four years, the district must implement certain corrective actions to improve the school, such as replacing certain staff or fully implementing a new curriculum, while continuing to offer public school choice and supplemental educational services for low-income students.

- If a school fails to make AYP for a fifth year, the school district must initiate plans for restructuring the school. This reconstitution may include reopening the school as a charter school, replacing all or most of the school staff. Ultimately, it could result in turning over school operations to the state or a private company with a demonstrated record of effectiveness (US Department of Education, http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/schools/accountability.html#5)

As previously mentioned, many states had high-stakes testing in place in at least some grade levels prior to the passage of the NCLB Act. However, many of those tests were norm-referenced tests that were not in alignment to state standards. The Act's requirement that assessments align to each state's standards forced states to develop their own criterion-referenced assessments. Though states received federal funds for this purpose, this prerequisite placed a significant demand on state departments of education to create and administer new tests. Additionally, NCLB requires states to provide consistent assessments in mathematics and reading in 3rd through 8th grade and at least one assessment at the high school level. Though not currently included in the AYP determination, science testing is also required in at least one grade at the elementary, middle school, and high school level by 2006-07.

Over the past forty-five years, education policy decisions have been moving away from the local boards of education and state departments of education to the federal education agency. Though relegated as a "state's rights issue" by the United States Constitution, the federal policy influence is growing sharply while the federal budget

allocation has declined slightly to 6% (US Department of Education, www.ed.gov). Today, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 remains largely an unfunded mandate.

Theoretical Framework for Accountability Models

It is important to understand the theoretical underpinnings of accountability models in order to analyze the goals and outcomes (both intended and unintended) that result from a concentration on measuring school performance. Few can argue that increased accountability has been the laser focus of education reform for the past five years. In fact, the legislative processes for holding schools accountable is at the center of a national debate that has raised questions about school effectiveness, institutional reform, and human motivation (Lashway, 2001). Since public education annually consumes over $400 billion in public funds, it is not surprising that many different factions want to know how the money is being spent and, ultimately, if they are getting their money's worth.

The notion of accountability has taken various forms through the history of public schools. In the 19th century, teachers rose to extremely high standards of moral conduct and appearance, but often had few credentials to qualify them for the role of schoolmaster. Student accountability, in the form of grades and attendance requirements, has also been fundamental to the early state and local accountability models. In the twentieth century, schools remained accountable through regulatory compliance of safety codes, formal certification, and mandated textbook adoptions (Kirby and Stecher, 2004). Fiscal accountability increased in the 1960s as the federal government began to contribute additional funding through program such as Title I.

In 2001, the federal government introduced the most comprehensive version in the nation's history of the Elementary and Secondary Reauthorization Act. The reauthorization of this Act, known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, or NCLB, is different from previous accountability initiatives, because its scope encompasses more breadth and depth in state and district requirements. Labeled as the "new accountability" by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), the major emphasis of this movement is on student outcomes (primarily test results) as a measure of teacher, school, and district performance (O'Day, 2002). Supporters of the NCLB Act argue that previous reform efforts failed due to their emphasis on inputs such as facilities, teachers, and specific practices – rather than outcome-based measures. Because of the mandates surrounding this new accountability movement, states are frantically implementing assessment and compensation systems to insure that schools meet their state-mandated benchmarks for student achievement.

Though NCLB is a federal law, individual states determine much about its implementation, including the structure for how each state measures school performance. Though the Act passed in 2001, there is still time for states and districts to make decisions on how the law will articulate into policy and practice. The prevailing concern about the fast implementation of accountability programs is that too little time will be spent analyzing the types of accountability models that exist and which models are most likely to produce the intended result – increased student learning.

First, it is important to acknowledge that the word—accountability—conjures up very different notions to different people. In the most technical sense, accountability is an "accounting" of performance, a way of explaining one's actions to those who have a

right to the explanation. Sometimes, accountability is used synonymously with "responsibility." Other times, it can be merely interpreted as a measure of complying with policies, regulations, and laws or standards—a means by which rewards and punishments can be distributed based on outcomes or results.

While most all agree that schools should be held more accountable, the measures and expectations necessary to achieve that aim are quite different. To parents, it may mean that schools are accountable when they are responsive to the needs of the parent's own child. To teachers, accountability means that the school, collectively, is allocating the necessary resources to help all students learn. To legislators, it may mean that schools are meeting the state benchmark for performance on standardized tests. While each perspective encompasses the general notion of accountability, both the philosophy and policies required to generate these accountability programs are largely based on different theoretical constructs.

According to Garn (2001), four types of accountability form the basis of most programs: bureaucratic, performance, market, and professional. Kirst (1990) warns policymakers to balance the unintended effects of each system by incorporating attributes from each framework. For example, Finn (2003) advocates combining standards-based accountability with strong market accountability in the form of vouchers. O'Day (2002) argues that some of the ills of professional accountability could be alleviated with the inclusion of some aspects of performance, or test-based, accountability. By understanding the unique strengths and weaknesses inherent in each type, educators can attempt to build on the positive and mitigate the negative attributes to proactively impact student learning.

Bureaucratic accountability relies on procedural compliance with established standards and regulations. Standards are evaluated by local, state, or federal bureaucrats who analyze compliance reports and/or conduct site audits (Garn, 2001). Most examples of bureaucratic accountability are rooted in formal legislation or, at the minimum, local school board policy. In short, compliance is the demand and sanctions are the result if the requirements fall short. If states, districts, or individual schools fail to follow the regulations, they can suffer penalty by the loss of accreditation or funding or by the removal of teachers and administrators.

One of the biggest criticisms of bureaucratic accountability is the fundamental principle that a "one-size-fits-all" model can be effective for increasingly diverse school populations (Lashway, 2001). Another negative aspect to this model is that it is generally an "input model" that focuses on whether a particular practice or policy has been implemented rather than if it produced the desired results. For example, teachers who follow the district-mandated curriculum are considered to be in compliance regardless of whether students fail to learn the concepts that have been taught. In fact, many of the structures that are central to public education, for example, traditional teacher evaluations and tenure, are firmly rooted in bureaucratic accountability.

Performance accountability is based on data from various indicators to stimulate action, monitor compliance, and include rewards or sanctions (Garn, 2001). In an educational setting, this type is often called test-based accountability if the performance that is required is measured by whether students score proficient on standardized tests. Though performance accountability encompasses much more than a single measure on a paper and pencil test, education has few counterexamples of differing kinds of

accountability. This model has seen much popularity as a means of holding individual students more accountable. To date, 20 of 50 states have high-stakes graduation testing that determines whether students receive a diploma or merely a certificate of attendance after completing high school. Five additional states have laws in place to begin high-stakes graduation testing by 2009 (Gayler, 2004).

A variety of opportunities currently exist for bringing market accountability to education, including charter schools, magnet programs, and vouchers. This model operates under the notion that good schools demonstrate accountability by attracting students and maintaining enrollment. Parents, on the other hand, hold bad schools accountable by leaving for a more desirable placement. By definition, consumer participation is the measure of market accountability. This effect is recognized through increases or decreases in enrollment or by the number of student transfers to the school (Garn, 2001). Citing Gill, Timpane, Ross, and Brewer (2001), Stecher and Kirby (2004) state that "choice alone is not enough to guarantee full accountability in terms of ensuring a quality education for all students because of issues of supply, access, and information" (p. 7).

According to Stecher and Kirby (2004), professional accountability is built on the assumption that "teachers are professionals who possess sufficient expertise to determine the best ways of meeting the individual needs of their students. Thus, professional competence and standards for professional practice become important" (p. 6). Consequently, teacher preparation programs and professional organizations have a tremendous influence in establishing, acquiring, and maintaining such standards.

The focus of professional accountability in education can be described as having three major components. First, the processes of teaching and learning are at its center. Unlike performance accountability, professional accountability focuses at least as much on the performance of the adults who influence instruction as the students who receive it. Second, the development of a strong knowledge base for educators is imperative. Commonly referred to as "best practices," understanding of the research-oriented principles that are shown to affect student learning should be the core of all professional development. Third, professional accountability hinges on a culture of true, effective collaboration. Teachers and administrators both value and commit to the responsibility of sharing and reflecting as a means of personal growth, student achievement, and school improvement. Peer review, shared leadership, and data analysis are key components to the professional accountability model.

It seems that the most applicable use of the information about accountability types would be in the planning and evaluation stages of a new educational program or process. According to Reeves (2002), "Accountability-based reforms should lead to better teaching and learning…period" (p. 1).

After four years of implementation of NCLB, how does the effect of this legislation compare to the framework outlined above? Using the theoretical framework, NCLB was reviewed to determine how these accountability models were utilized in the legislation. Though the assumption of any legislation is that it stems from a bureaucratic model, it was important to examine the main component of the bill to assess whether other models were evident.

The NCLB is based on four basis tenets (US Department of Ed, 2004):

- Accountability
- Parental choice
- Flexibility
- Use of research-based curricula

The accountability component requires that schools meet the benchmark of AYP on state-mandated assessments in reading and mathematics. However, the school choice provision contained in NCLB reflects a market accountability orientation as the parents and students are able to "vote with their feet" by selecting a school outside of their attendance area. Another attribute of NCLB is the requirement that highly qualified teachers instruct students using scientifically-based programs. Both of these mandates are oriented toward professional accountability.

According to Stecher and Kirby (2004), the "cornerstone of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is a performance-based accountability system built around student test results." (p. xiii) Yet others describe NCLB as being a "standards-based" accountability model (Education Commission of the States, 2002). According to Orfield, Kim, and Sunderman (2004), one of the biggest detriments of the Act results from the "market-oriented policies" that are draining the resources from the schools most in need.

Professional Learning Communities

One of the most balanced approaches in meeting the accountability demands of NCLB comes in the recent literature surrounding professional learning communities. This concept is deemed as "simple and powerful" from one of its founders, Richard DuFour, though it requires deep understanding of fundamental principles. He states that

it "starts with a group of teachers who meet regularly as a team to identify essential and valued student learning, develop common formative assessments, analyze current levels of achievement, set achievement goals, share strategies, and then create lessons to improve upon those levels" (DuFour, 2004). Though there are several different definitions of a PLC, this study utilized a framework defined by five dimensions: supportive and shared leadership, shared values and norms, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions (Huffman and Hipp, 2004).

Supportive and Shared Leadership

Shared leadership relies on the use of democratic governance evidenced by collective decision-making, authority, and power. Supportive leadership is evident in those who create a participative leadership model while devoting time and energy to nurture and encourage leadership among staff.

As schools become professional learning communities, one of the most fundamental cultural shifts that take place involves how teachers are viewed. In traditional schools, administrators are viewed in leadership positions, while teachers are viewed as "implementers" or followers. In professional learning communities, administrators are seen as leaders of leaders (Eaker, DuFour, and Burnette, 2002).

The shift to supportive and shared leadership occurs through deliberate actions by the administrator. First and foremost, the principal must create a culture that relies on open communication with various groups within the school. Dialogue fostered between and among administration, teachers, support staff, community partners, parents, and students is critical. More importantly, administration must demonstrate through their

actions that they are not only asking for input from these groups but also truly listening to their feedback and ideas.

When teachers and other stakeholders feel empowered in the meaningful decisions about their school, they move from being compliant with the change to being connected and committed to its success. Once this shift occurs, the groups are monitoring their own success and eliminating the need for the administrator in charge to micromanage their behaviors.

Shared Values and Vision

Much has been written about the importance of creating and implementing mission and vision statements in organizations. The basic premise of this exercise is to clearly communicate the mission (what the organization is committed to doing) and the vision (what the organization believes it should become). When actions align with a vision, the result is a system that defines the organization itself.

In this regard, school communities are no different from business or any other organization. In order for schools to make a paradigm shift – to professional learning communities, in this case – it is critical for teachers to understand why the change is necessary and to be involved in the decision-making process. If a school is not already operating under a democratic governance model, several cultural shifts have to occur to make the leadership philosophy congruent with the values of the professional learning community.

In the culture of a professional learning community (PLC), mission and value statements cannot remain as lofty, esoteric statements written in a plan to satisfy a state or district requirement. Generic statements that often pass for mission statements are rarely

the result of careful, collaborative dialogue. According to DuFour, Eaker, and Burnette (2002), mission statements must address three fundamental criteria:

1. Statements must clarify what students will learn.
2. Statements must address the question, "How will we know what students will be learning?"
3. Statements clarify how the school will respond when students do not learn. (p. 13)

In determining the vision statement, similar criteria must result. Much more than this being "just one more thing we have to do," educators working in a PLC should look at the vision statement as a means of formally communicating the data they are using to chart their path to better meeting student needs. DuFour, Eaker, and Burnette (2002) also state that vision statements should meet the following standards:

1. Statements are research-based.
2. Statements are credible and focus on essentials.
3. Statements are used as a blueprint for improvement.
4. Statements are widely shared through broad collaboration. (p.14)

It is essential that the vision statements, which arise from the conversations about student learning, transfer from paper to practice through deliberate action. When truly implemented, the vision statements become the school's self-imposed criteria for decision-making including staff development, budgeting, and school improvement planning.

Too often, events deemed as shared goal-setting, planning, and collaboration have been fun and exciting activities that have done nothing to impact teacher practice or

student performance. Similarly, being results-oriented has often been interpreted as a laser focus on test scores alone. More important than test scores is the ability to show how and what students have learned.

Professional learning communities call for a proactive means of insuring student learning by focusing on specific, timely interventions during instruction rather than remediation after the fact. DuFour suggests that it is the ongoing, teacher-created formative assessments that are at the core of results-oriented practice. He advocates for common assessments created by teams of teachers with group and individual analysis done in time to impact instruction. Theoretically speaking, it is an example of how performance and professional accountability meld together in a reasonable way.

One example of this incremental goal setting occurred at Northeastern Elementary when a team of second grade teachers met during a common planning time and examined the results of a common assessment on place value. The team had administered a common assessment consisting of ten open-response items designed to gauge understanding of previously taught place value concepts. The teachers shared their students' data, discussed commonalities and differences on sub-skills, and identified instructional strategies to use in the reteaching process. As a team, they set a goal for 90% of their students to demonstrate mastery on a similar assessment over the same concept after the instructional intervention. At their next collaboration meeting, they shared their results, discussed needs of students in need of remediation, and set new goals for the following two weeks. This process created an opportunity for setting short-term, measurable instructional goals, collecting data, and evaluating and reflecting on student performance.

Collective Learning and Application

According to Peter Senge (1990), "Organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it, no organizational learning occurs" (p. 140). Learning individually and collectively should help both the teacher and the organization by fostering a culture among the staff that mirrors the mission of the school: helping learners realize their fullest potential. Like in the classroom, adult learning should be relevant, engaging, and fun. Teachers should be challenged to grow not threatened to change (Combs, et al., 1999).

Once administrators and teachers begin to realize the power of organizational learning to accomplish their goals, it is important to take that notion one step further into collective inquiry. By using research rather than beliefs to guide school improvement efforts, teachers begin to see the value of academic information. Ultimately, it should be the goal of the PLC to blend externally validated research with teacher-initiated "action research" in order to gather specific data of the highest relevance.

Many of the barriers to change decrease because teachers are making decisions based on student learning. Additionally, it is precisely this idea of internal inquiry and validation that forms the basis of why a PLC is so different from traditional school improvement models.

At Northeastern Elementary, the idea of collective learning and application is relevant to both students and adults. When teachers look at data, they focus on the needs of individual students. Classroom teachers have strengthened their communication with specialty teachers, such as gifted and talented, remedial reading, and special education, to discuss tools for addressing individual needs. Many times, this conversation leads to

sharing strategies for the classroom that might have been previously used in a resource setting. When teachers team together in a co-teaching environment, peers have a chance to see another teacher utilize the strategies with students in their own classroom. This experience becomes a powerful tool for moving theoretical discussions into observable actions.

Shared Personal Practice

One of the greatest challenges in designing professional development for teachers is in creating an atmosphere for relevant learning. Because faculty teach different grade levels and subject areas, it is difficult to deliver a program from the state or district level that comes close to meeting the adults' individual needs. To complicate matters further, support staff often sit through the same programs as teachers and feel even farther removed from the topic. Traditionally, school staff has felt that professional development is something that is "done to them."

When professional development is viewed through a different lens, continuous small group collaboration becomes the means to address both relevance and differentiation. Though there is compelling evidence that working collaboratively is more productive, teachers and administrators continue to work largely in isolation. This idea is dependent upon teachers working in teams to share ideas, ask questions, offer encouragement, and seek better ways of increasing student learning. According to DuFour (2004), the success of this component is dependent upon teachers "making public what has been traditionally private—goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, and results" (p. 9). The process demands a focused, results-oriented method of

using the collaborative conversations as a means of problem solving—the ultimate in professional accountability.

Though much is written about shared practice, it is often lacking in actual implementation. Teachers often want to watch other teachers in action; however, it can be intimidating to allow another teacher into his or her domain. Administrators recognize that it is expensive to pay substitute teachers to allow teachers the time to observe in other classrooms. Oftentimes, these initial barriers are enough to squelch the conversation. Fortunately, some schools have continued to make this practice a priority and have creatively scheduled observations during plan times and lunch hours to provide the opportunity without increasing the budget or losing instructional time.

Supportive Conditions

In order for collaboration to become a part of the school culture, several things must both start *and* stop happening. DuFour (2004) states, "Schools must stop pretending that merely presenting teachers with state standards or district curriculum guides will guarantee that all students have access to a common curriculum" (p. 4). Even school districts that devote tremendous time and energy to designing the intended curriculum often pay little attention to the implemented curriculum (what teachers actually teach) and even less to the attained curriculum (what students learn) (Marzano, 2003). Many schools are reluctant to stop doing the same kinds of schedules and professional development inservices that actually prevent teacher collaboration.

Time spent in collaboration with grade level teams provides an excellent opportunity for ongoing instructional and emotional support. At Northeastern

Elementary, teachers and administrators use the time for data-driven decision-making and for "touching base" on issues that need attention from the group.

On a larger scale, it seems that federal legislation, accountability movements, and professional learning communities have little in common. However, accountability mandates, such as *No Child Left Behind*, are designed, in theory, to force schools to take a person-centered approach to maximizing individual student potential (Combs, Miser, and Whitaker, 1999).

The problem, however, lies in the challenge of blending the legislative mandates with the policies and practices that promote a positive learning environment for students and staff alike. Though NCLB does not mandate how schools accomplish this important task, whether or not it becomes a reality largely depends on the culture of the school or district. In the November issue of ASCD's *Education Update,* Sergiovanni focused on the role of the school leader in influencing the means by which schools work to increase student achievement. "If the superintendent tells the principal that your job is on the line because of test scores, then you don't care about constructivism—you work to get the test scores up" (p. 1). The sacrifices made in the quest for improved performance on state tests may come at the expense of professionalism, collaboration, creativity, and/or morale. Consequently, administrators and teachers are searching for a balanced perspective that encourages a reasonable level of accountability while improving both the learning opportunities and school culture.

Evidence supports the importance of collaboration, goal setting, authentic assessment, data analysis, and differentiated learning. School administrators, especially principals, struggle with time to be an "instructional leader" who consults research to

shape decision-making. Oftentimes, the principal results to a "top down" leadership approach due to the lack of time to plan, communicate, and reflect. This outcome is even more likely during a time when the principalship has greater demands than ever.

Now, almost five years since the inception of the NCLB, literature about professional learning communities is beginning to provide a nexus for the demands of accountability and the call for best practices. Because of its roots in sound educational practice, the approach is quickly garnering attention as a way to address accountability and achievement issues. In fact, a recent search of the ERIC database turned up almost 50 articles that have been published in the past four years focusing solely on professional learning communities in educational settings. Though much is known about the theory, few case studies exist in the literature to document how these communities were created or whether they had a relationship in improving student performance. This study seeks to add to the literature in its attempt to tell how one elementary school moved toward becoming a professional learning community.

CHAPTER THREE

A Description of Northeastern Elementary

Subjects

Northeastern Elementary is located in Oklahoma in a large metropolitan city with a population of approximately 390,000. The city, referred to as Greenwood for the purposes of this study, represents a community with promising opportunities for future economic growth. According to its Chamber of Commerce website, the cost of living is 8% below the national average, and the per capita income is 11% above the national average. One of the barriers to future growth has been the lack of a highly-educated workforce to support traditionally "white collar" industries. Data from the 2000 Census indicate that more than 83% of residents have a high school diploma or higher; yet, only 23% have a bachelor's degree and approximately 11% have a master's degree.

In the county, more than 90,000 students receive instruction in 15 independent school districts and a variety of private and parochial schools. The city of Greenwood is home to its own public school district, Greenwood Public Schools. The district, the largest in the state, educates more than 42,000 students at more than 80 school sites. It is one of the state's two urban districts.

In addition, the city of Greenwood also encompasses a part of the attendance area of another public school system, Great Plains Public Schools. Northeastern Elementary, the focus of this study, is a part of the Great Plains district. Though it began as a small rural school system, this district has experienced an increase in commercial and residential development over the past twenty years. It has exhibited demographics consistent with a growing suburban school system.

The district, however, has begun to see a change in its population over the past ten years. This shift has been marked by increasing diversity (namely Hispanic and African American students), decreasing socio-economic conditions, and increasing mobility. While the effects of this change were initially and still are most dramatically felt in Northeastern's attendance area, the district has a whole as begun to see a similar shift across its 17 school sites over the past five years.

Table 1 illustrates the differences and similarities in key data points among three key populations—Greenwood Public Schools, Great Plains Public Schools, and Northeastern Elementary (Oklahoma Office of Accountability, 2000, 2004). These data help to give a contextual understanding to the unique characteristics of each population.

Table 1

Community Demographic Data

	1999-2000			2004-2005		
	Green-wood	**Great Plains**	**North-eastern**	**Green-wood**	**Great Plains**	**North-eastern**
Enrollment	43,604	12,947	647	41,349	13,968	615
Staffing						
Reg Teachers (FTE)	2255	631	40	2163	619	30
Reg Teachers (FTE) with Adv Degrees	30.10%	31.90%	26.60%	27.44%	27.21%	16.57%
Avg Salary (w/ Fringe) of Reg Teachers (FTE)	$30,916	$32,469	$31,089	$38,890	$39,979	$37,193
Avg Years of Experience--Reg Teachers (FTE)	10.5	12.4	9.9	11.0	12.8	8.4
Special Education Teachers (FTE)	461.4	64.4	5.4	396.7	60.9	2.0
Other Professional Staff (FTE)	286.5	66.6	3.5	427.0	134.9	6.9
Teacher Assistants (FTE)	391.9	62.6	5.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
Administrators	151.9	39.9	1.9	200.0	47.1	2.0
Ethnicity						
Caucasian	46%	73%	38%	40%	62%	23%
African American	36%	9%	23%	36%	11%	23%
Asian	2%	5%	4%	1%	5%	3%
Hispanic	8%	6%	24%	14%	11%	39%
Native American	8%	7%	11%	9%	11%	12%
Socioeconomic Data						
Avg property valuation per student	$35,813	$37,015	N/A	$43,150	$42,708	$29,668
Students eligible for free/reduced lunch	61%	16%	61%	78%	26%	84%

Setting the Context for Northeastern Elementary

Northeastern Elementary was built in 1977 and dedicated in 1978. The school is a one-story facility with 31 classrooms that are organized along two main hallways. The school is equipped with a library, cafeteria, gymnasium, science lab, computer lab, and art room. The building is well cared for both inside and out, as evidenced by colorful décor, new carpet, and attractive landscaping at the building entrance. Other shared spaces, such as a faculty lounge, teacher work rooms, and conference rooms, are included. It is clean, freshly painted, and the hallways and commons areas are well decorated with students' artwork as the focus.

Visitors are greeted with signage on the school's exterior doors in both English and Spanish, and a receptionist, although not bilingual, personally greets guests just inside the door. A Spanish-speaking support staff member is available nearby and is often needed to translate for parents and office staff.

There is a waiting area with comfortable seating and reading material for both adults and children. The entry-way has a bulletin board labeled "Northeastern's Data Wall." The wall consists of charts of each grade level's performance on monthly math and reading goals, attendance and tardy data, parent involvement data, and library book checkout rates (Reeves, 2004). It is posted, according to the principal, "to set the tone for the importance of learning and parental involvement right when people walk in the door" (Principal's Notes, 2005).

The school staff consists of 59 certified and support staff, with all instructional staff having met the "highly qualified" requirements as stated by the NCLB criteria.

Because of their move to be a "School-wide Title I" school in 1999, all paraprofessionals had to attain highly qualified status in 2003-04.

Table 2

Northeastern Elementary Staffing Levels
August, 2005

Classification	Positions
Administration	
Principal	1
Assistant Principal	1
Clerical (secretary, receptionist)	2
Instruction	
Classroom teachers	30
Specialty teachers (PE, art, music, ELL, gifted)	6
Special education teachers	4
Classroom paraprofessionals	4
Other	
Counselor	1
Onsite school-based clinical staff (physician's assistant, social worker, nurse)	3
Library staff	2
Custodial/food service	5
Community outreach	1
Total	**59**

Northeastern Elementary School currently provides a Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5 educational program for 615 students, based on the 2004-05 child count data submitted to the Oklahoma State Department of Education (Student Demographic Data Archives, 2005). Once considered a "suburban" school, this area of the city is exhibiting demographic patterns more often associated with urban settings.

In 2004-05, 39% of the students at the school are Hispanic, 23% are African American, 23% are Caucasian, 12% Native American, and 3% Asian. The Hispanic population has seen the greatest change in demographics. In 1996-1997, Hispanic

students represented only 16% of the PreK-5 student population (Student Demographic Data Archives, 2005). This change has created a significant language barrier for school personnel (certified and support), parents, and students. It has caused the school to create a host of additional services to assist Spanish-speaking patrons.

The students live in two local neighborhood areas that are experiencing the difficulties associated with urban poverty, underemployment, and changing work force needs. Six apartment complexes reside within the attendance area. The apartment complexes accommodate 32% of the student population. According to district demographic data, the mobility rate has risen from approximately 20% in the 1996-1997 to approximately 46% in the 2004-2005 school year (Student Demographic Data Archives, 2005). In a two-year projection, this means that a significant percentage of the student body is new to the school each year. Continuity in learning and teaching is challenged by the continual mobility of the student population. As a result, mobility is a significant concern for district and site personnel. The effects of increasing mobility are exacerbated by the rising accountability standards at the state and district level.

The surrounding landscape makes Northeastern an unusual setting for a neighborhood school. All students are either bused or driven to school due to several geographical barriers which separate the neighborhoods from the school building. A large creek flows through the center of the area, splitting the constituency in two. Concrete barriers make up a flood control system that surrounds the school on three sides. A major expressway also provides a physical barrier that separates the attendance areas. Together, the creek and the expressway create significant barriers for students in close proximity to the school. This fact is of particular significance in addressing

transportation issues faced by families wishing to participate in services and events occurring outside the school day.

According to 2000 Census data, an estimated 15% of Northeastern parents have attained a Bachelor's degree or higher; 17% are reported as not attaining a high school diploma (School-wide Title I Plan, 2003). Data suggest that increasing numbers of families at this school are economically-disadvantaged. In the fall of 1999-2000, 61% of the students at Northeastern qualified for the School Lunch Program. By fall of 2004-05, 84% of the current student population qualified for the School Lunch Program–more than three times the number that qualifies for the same program district-wide (Student Demographic Data Archives, 2005).

Most Northeastern families have very limited income and have difficulty providing basic needs. The families represent the conditions typically associated with urban poor:

1. Northeastern families depend on minimum wage jobs for employment.
2. The Northeastern community has a low-skill labor pool.

According to the criteria of the federal government's McKinney-Vento Act or Title X, 7% of the Northeastern student population was classified as "homeless" in SY 2004-05. As a district, 3% of the student population meets the criteria (Student Demographic Archives, 2005). The majority of those identified under this definition are a result of a temporary loss in housing that has caused students to move in with family and friends—a phenomenon known as "doubling up." In this situation and in the more prevalent population, the data suggests that Northeastern's poverty is linked to a lack of human capital. It is an educationally disadvantaged labor force which is unlikely to

attract outside investment or develop new economic opportunities. However, there are data to suggest that the rise in the Hispanic population is beginning to attract business targeted to that specific population. Increasing student achievement through quality education is seen by some in the community as a mitigating factor to offset these conditions.

Special Education referrals are rising and needs for support services are increasing. According to 2004-05 child count data reported to the State Department of Education, 21% of Northeastern's students qualify for special education services, compared to 9% district-wide (Student Demographic Data Archives, 2005). Data indicate that special education identification occurs later for Northeastern students than in the district as a whole. Initial analysis by the district and site staff has shown that student mobility is a factor in late identification.

In an attempt to better serve its families, Northeastern teamed with a state university to provide an onsite health clinic at the school. The clinic, which opened in January of 2005, is located in the main school building near the front office. The clinic currently offers two private exam rooms, a referral room, and offices for the clinic staff. As of May 1, 2005, the clinic was serving 282 students or 52% of the school population. By September 1, 2005, the clinic was providing services to 377 students accounting for 69.8% of Northeastern's total enrollment (Principal's Notes, 2005).

Prior to the opening of the clinic, health services were limited to include annual vision and hearing screenings, classroom education on dental hygiene and nutrition, growth and development seminars, and CPR classes taught to 5th grade students. Other screenings consist of, but are not limited to, asthma screenings with the American Lung

Association and vision screenings from a non-profit agency. The county health department provides immunizations onsite prior to school starting.

In the fall of 2005, the school-based clinic expanded its services to meet the growing needs and interests of the Northeastern community. The clinic currently offers the following services including summer and holiday breaks (Principals Notes, 2005):

- Medical and behavioral health care for Northeastern students and family members
- Prescription medicine
- Telemedicine consultation in conjunction with Regional Medical Center. Services include pulmonary screenings and behavioral health services with a child psychiatrist.
- Two social workers assigned to serve Northeastern families
- Biannual dental screenings through a local dental group (550 students were screened in the spring and fall of 2005.)

Like other schools in the district, Northeastern is fortunate to have a full time RN on-staff. Prior to January 2005, she was the sole provider of medical assistance. To date, three additional full-time personnel, two social workers and a physician's assistant have been funded through the university. In addition, a pediatrician comes to the site two times a week.

A weekly visit by a pediatrician from the sponsoring university is provided through a rotation process. Weekly consultations are also provided electronically from doctors specializing in child psychiatry. As necessary, doctors from other specialty areas are also able to use the camera system to "see patients," view x-rays, and electronically

monitor patients' heart rate, breathing, etc. In total, the clinic provides a comprehensive suite of services to keep Northeastern families healthy and ready for success.

New Challenges, New Ideas

As noted previously, the demographics of the Northeastern community began to look differently from its peer schools located in the Great Plains district. Three distinct data points served to illustrate the change: ethnic distribution, free and reduced lunch participation, and standardized test scores.

Table 3

Percentages of Ethnic Distribution
Northeastern Elementary (NE) and Great Plains District (GPD)
1994-05 to 2004-05

School Year	Asian		Black		Hispanic		Native American		White	
	NE	GPD	NE	GPD	NE	GPD	NE	GPD	NE	GPD
1994-95	3	4	21	7	13	4	6	4	57	82
1995-96	2	4	27	8	13	4	9	4	49	80
1996-97	3	4	24	8	15	5	8	4	49	79
1997-98	3	4	21	9	19	5	10	6	47	76
1998-99	4	5	23	9	25	6	10	7	38	74
1999-00	4	5	23	9	24	6	11	8	38	73
2000-01	3	5	23	9	27	7	14	8	32	71
2001-02	3	6	18	10	31	8	16	9	32	68
2002-03	4	5	22	10	30	9	14	10	31	65
2003-04	3	5	23	11	39	11	12	11	25	62
2004-05	3	6	23	12	39	12	12	11	24	59

The data in Table 3 reflect a distinct difference in the demographic composition of Northeastern compared to the district as a whole (Student Demographic Archives, 2005). Though the percentage of Asian students represents the smallest population, there is half the number of Asian students at Northeastern than in the district as a whole. Conversely, there is almost twice the percentage of African American students at Northeastern. The largest discrepancy occurs within the Hispanic population as there is more than three times the number of students represented at Northeastern than in the district aggregate. Native American students represent the only ethnic group that is very

comparable in both populations. While the distinct majority at the district level, Caucasian students represent less than one fourth of the population at Northeastern. In 1994, Caucasian students represented 57% of the population at Northeastern though the demographic shift remained fairly isolated to that site. Now, eleven years later, the district has seen their total population change from 82% to 59% Caucasian. The effects are felt more broadly and are being addressed at many levels. It is interesting to note, however, that even today the district population comprises 2% more Caucasian students as a whole than Northeastern had eleven years earlier.

Table 4

Free/Reduced Lunch Eligibility
Northeastern Elementary and Great Plains District
1997-98 to 2004-05

School Year	Northeastern Elementary	Great Plains District
1998-99	**66%**	**15%**
1999-00	**62%**	**15%**
2000-01	**69%**	**15%**
2001-02	**72%**	**18%**
2002-03	**72%**	**21%**
2003-04	**85%**	**26%**
2004-05	**89%**	**30%**

One of the common indicators of socio-economic status of a population in an educational setting is eligibility for free or reduced meals. Commonly referred to as the "free and reduced lunch rate," this status also applies to breakfast programs or summer meal programs that may be offered at a school. Eligibility in these programs is based on income guidelines determined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

There are many studies that correlate free and reduced lunch rates, or socio-economic status, to student achievement (Coleman, 1966; Gallagher, 1998;Grissmer, 1994; Orland, 1990; USDE, 1998; USDE, 1996). Generally speaking, data often show that students who come from homes and schools with more financial resources do better in public measurements of school performance, namely standardized tests. These studies reiterate the rationale for subsidizing education via Title I federal funding to offset the effects of access to fewer resources both at home and at school.

Table 4 shows that Northeastern Elementary has continued to serve a population with greater needs. To date, Northeastern has three times the participation in the free and reduced lunch program when compared to the district as a whole (Student Demographic Data Archives, 2005).

The increase in participation in this program has prompted several innovative programs. Northeastern Elementary was the first school in the Great Plains District to implement a “Breakfast in a Bag” program. This program was designed to provide more students with access to the breakfast program by offering items such as bagels, muffins, cold cereal, fresh fruit, juice, and milk to students in a "grab-and-go" bag. Students support the program as it offers them a chance to eat breakfast without having to wake up early. Teachers cite the extra time that is generated when students eat their breakfast in their classroom. Many times, students choose to read or finish homework as soon as they finish eating. Another benefit is that it reduces the chances that students will have a behavior problem during unstructured time in the cafeteria or playground before their classes begin. Prior to the start of the “Breakfast in a Bag” program in 2004, 23% of

student population was eating breakfast at school. In May of 2005, 73% were taking advantage of the program (Principal's Notes, 2005).

Instructional Interventions

In 1998, the Great Plains School Board began to focus on the discrepancies in performance among its elementary school sites. It began to pose questions about the effectiveness of the innovative programs being utilized across the district. In short, they wanted to know which programs and strategies were making a difference in student achievement. Because the state-mandated testing program only tested students in grades 3, 5, 7, and 11, the Board wanted a district assessment system to gauge student performance throughout the year in grades 3-12.

In 1999, the district created a new administrative position, Director of Assessment, to lead that process. In addition to better utilizing state-mandated test data, the goal was to create formative, district-wide assessments to guide instruction. Northeastern Elementary was the pilot for the program. Though district assessments were being developed, the Director of Assessment and the site principal chose commercially-prepared "testlets," small multiple-choice tests of 10-15 items that measured key skills as outlined by the Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS). Teachers taught lessons of their own design that were targeted to the standards and then administered a standardized test to measure student performance. Teachers met every other week in a collaborative planning time during the school day to share their students' progress. These discussions oftentimes elicited a teacher sharing an instructional strategy or demonstrating the use of a mathematics manipulative to teach a particular concept. Many times, teachers brought resources such as lesson plans,

Cuisenaire rods, and Geoboards to share with their peers. This marked a crucial point in which teamwork, collaboration, and the use of data were central to the school improvement process.

In 2000, the district placed a new assistant principal at the school. Though she had won several awards as a teacher in another of the district's Title I schools, this was her first administrative position. Her primary strength was a deep understanding of the teaching and learning process, especially differentiated instruction.

One of her first initiatives was to work with teachers to create "curriculum maps" that outlined the PASS in nine-week increments. These maps focused on the "what," not "how," of teaching. The teacher had discretion to use his or her own resources and creativity to build on students' interest in the topic. However, the maps required teachers to remain mindful of the instructional process of introducing, building on, and assessing students understanding.

In 2001, teachers used their newly-constructed curriculum maps to create their own assessments to be administered every nine weeks. Though the test construction process proved time-consuming, the process focused attention on the skills, how they are "measured," and the level of expectation for mastery. Teachers had an easy time agreeing that the PASS curriculum should be taught; they varied widely in the depth of understanding they required from their students (Principal's Notes, 2003).

Despite the efforts to align curriculum and assessment, Northeastern's fifth grade state tests scores declined sharply in 2001-02. At the fifth grade level, scores fell 12 points in mathematics and 10 points in reading. In third grade, however, scores rose to exceed the district composite score. Though third grade teachers recognized they had an

exceptionally bright group of students, they saw the scores that year as being an anomaly. Rather than celebrating their success, they focused on their perception that next year's class would not fare as well. With the recent passage of NCLB as well as the creation of the state's Academic Performance Index (API), it seemed clear to the staff that Northeastern was in jeopardy of being identified for low test scores in future years.

In 2002, the district had its criterion-referenced testing program in place for grades 3-8. Northeastern teachers used their understanding of test alignment and construction to serve on district-wide committees to facilitate the process. More than ever before, administrators and teachers felt the pressures of high-stakes testing. In that year alone, seven teachers requested to be transferred from the school. Two teachers took a one-year leave of absence (Principal's Notes, 2003).

In 2003-04, the school faced a serious challenge. The school and district were notified by the Oklahoma State Department of Education that Northeastern Elementary did not make Adequate Yearly Progress in one of the fourteen subgroups delineated by Oklahoma's Academic Performance Index (API). The API is the state's formula for meeting the requirements of NCLB to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of demographic subgroups as well as the total population. Under the NCLB Act, each state sets its own performance targets that show incremental improvement through 2014. In 2014, all students in all subgroups must demonstrate proficiency in both reading and mathematics. In the categories of "All Students" and "Regular Students," there must be at least 30 students per subject to receive a math or reading score. All other subgroups must have 52 students per subject to receive a math or reading score. If the minimum number is not met, scores are reported as asterisks in black text.

Table 5 shows API data from Northeastern Elementary's 2003-04 Accountability Report issued by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (SDE, www.sde.state.ok.us).

Table 5

2004 Oklahoma School Accountability Data Report
Northeastern Elementary

Student Group	Mathematics API State Minimum Score 790	Reading API State Minimum Score 768	% Students Tested State Minimum 95%	Total API
Regular Education Students				
Regular Education	907	993	98.8	953
Male	****	****	****	973
Female	****	****	****	934
Black	****	****	****	630
American Indian	****	****	****	****
Hispanic	****	****	****	****
Asian	****	****	****	****
White	****	****	****	****
Other	****	****	****	****
Economically Disadvantaged	****	****	****	902
Migrant	****	****	****	****
English Language Learners				
ELL	906	**638 SH**	100.0	792
Students with Individualized Education Programs				
IEP	****	****	****	324
All Students				
All	824	**738**	98.6	801

Additional Performance Indicator and School Improvement Status					
	Rate	***api***		**Rate**	***api***
Attendance	**93.8**	**976**	**Graduation**	**N/A**	**N/A**
Did your school/district make Adequate Yearly Progress?					**NO**
Is your school/district designated a School Improvement School or District*?					**NO**

In the case of Northeastern, the school had exceeded the state's benchmarks for regular education students (those not served by special education or the English Language Learner program) in both math and reading. Special education students had scored well below the state's benchmark of 790 in mathematics and 768 in reading but had achieved the status of "safe harbor" by increasing their score from the previous year by 10% or more. Scores meeting the Safe Harbor criteria are noted in light grey text.

In 2004, students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) had surpassed the state's benchmark in mathematics with a score of 906. Though they did not meet the state benchmark, ELL students were held in "safe harbor" with a reading score of 638 due to their improvement over the previous year's score. It appeared that all subgroups had either met the mark or shown enough progress in closing the achievement gap that they met the safe harbor criteria. However, when all the subgroup categories were combined into the final category, "All Students," Northeastern's score was 824 in mathematics and 738 in reading. Unfortunately, the total reading score fell 30 points shy of the state's minimum. By missing the mark in this one content area in the one subgroup, the school was placed on notice by the State Department of Education for "not achieving AYP." If the scores fell short the next year in the same area, the school would be placed in "school improvement status" – the first step in the sanctioning process defined by NCLB.

Several meetings ensued with district and site administrators and school staff to discuss how to address the challenges of not making AYP in subgroup population, although scores improved overall. Two issues were identified as top priorities: reducing

mobility and increasing support services to the non-native speakers (Principal's Notes, 2004).

At the district level, conversations focused on the idea of creating a community, or full-service, school as a means of addressing the priorities. According to the Superintendent, "the community school concept was incomplete without dedicated services from existing (social services) agencies." (Personal communication, 1/2/2006). She hosted a meeting with members of the Community Service Council. According to their website, the organization serves as a

> resource for community planning and action to address health and human service needs. Community Service Council (CSC) acts as a trusted neutral convener, bringing diverse organizations and interests together to focus on a common good. Primary functions include community research and planning, policy and resource development, community mobilization, information and referral, and promoting volunteerism.

Consequently, the CSC facilitated the connections between the district and the one of the state's university medical schools. The medical school had opened two school-based clinics in the Greenwood Public Schools District in the previous year. Both the district and the university acted quickly to enable a school-based clinic to be funded at Northeastern.

Good news came in the fall of the 2004-05 school year. The school was notified by the State Department of Education that their improved test scores had enabled the school to meet their AYP benchmark. The staff was elated! Table 6 illustrates Northeastern's performance as compared to the district as a whole.

Table 6

State Department of Education Test Scores
Northeastern Elementary (NE) and Great Plains District (GPD)
1994-05 to 2004-05

School Year	3rd Grade Test				5th Grade Test			
	NE		GPD		NE		GPD	
					Math	Reading	Math	Reading
1994-95	55		74		59	No test	86	No test
1995-96	49		71		58	68	79	83
1996-97	64 (ITBS)		71		65	71	87	88
1997-98	58 (ITBS)		71		75	72	87	86
1998-99	54 (ITBS)		69		86	85	90	90
1999-00	No state test given in 3rd grade				79	68	90	86
2000-01	71 (SAT-9)		79		78	79	82	88
2001-02	74 (SAT-9)		66		66	69	80	83
2002-03	64 (SAT-9)		68		79	74	83	90
2003-04	43 (SAT-9)		67		75	75	84	87
2004-05	New CRT developed by SDE							
	Math	Reading	Math	Reading				
	83	88	92	94	80	82	89	87

With the threat of testing out of the way, preparations were made to open the school-based clinic in January. The goal was to meet the social and emotional needs of families through connections with their school and community resources, and thereby to reduce mobility by providing students with a coherent, continuous instructional program.

At the same time, the role of the assistant principal was being reconceptualized from the traditional one of being in charge of discipline and staffing issues to focusing on providing resources to students and families. Though the school had employed an assistant principal at the school since 1998, there had been high turnover in the position. In the six years prior, there were four different assistants at the school. In 2004, the position was reopened and the three current assistant principals employed by the district were interviewed. The process resulted in yet a different assistant principal being selected for the position.

The change resulted in a refocusing for the existing principal, as well. She took a leadership role in providing resources and support to hone the collaboration time for teachers. As a principal, she had taken part in two book studies at the district level on *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement* and *Instructional Strategies that Work* (Schmoker, 2002). On her own, she began to read the works of Douglas Reeves, Robert Marzano, and Richard DuFour. She led a book study using the *Differentiated Instructional Strategies for Reading in the Content Areas* (Chapman and King, 2003) text to build understanding with staff. Building on the success from the initial study, the staff chose to read *Accountability for Learning* (Reeves, 2004). This book helped staff understand the fundamental principles of a student-centered accountability system by addressing teaching, shared leadership, relevant curricula, and community involvement (Reeves, 2004).

As a result of the book studies, the principal brought in a facilitator from the Center of Performance Assessment in Denver, Colorado who was specifically trained in conducting data meetings with teachers. The focus was beginning to sharpen on

providing holistic resources to the students and their families to address academic and social needs.

It was during this time that the district and site administrators began to recognize some of their self-selected practices as those consistent with Professional Learning Communities (PLC). It is important to note that the school did not initially set out to become a PLC. Conversely, the school set out to years earlier to incorporate key best practices—the use of standards-based instruction, data analysis, collaboration, and shared decision-making—and recognized the similarity of their own strategies for improvement as being cornerstones of a the PLC concept.

In May of 2004, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) had devoted an entire issue of their journal, *Educational Leadership* to PLCs. The edition was entitled, *Schools as Learning Communities*. Three articles from the journal had specific significance for the school.

The first article, *What is a "Professional Learning Community?"* (DuFour, 2004), helped to identify and define the processes that make up a PLC. Many of the components outlined by the author were being implemented at the school without a formal connection to PLC literature or practice. In this article, he outlined the "Big Ideas" that form the basis of a PLC. The first idea, "Ensuring that Students Learn," has been at the core of the changes at Northeastern. The article states that schools must identify what it is that they want students to learn, how to know when they learn it, and how to respond when a student experiences difficulty. Over the past several years, Northeastern had been identifying essential standards for mastery and creating curriculum maps. They had also designed common assessments to gauge student learning and used

flexible grouping to deliver differentiated instruction, remediation, and enrichment based on students' needs.

The second "Big Idea" was to create a "Culture of Collaboration." Northeastern had begun to use common planning time to create an opportunity for teachers to share and learn with one another.

The third "Big Idea" was to "Focus on Results." The primary teams were using data from the district-wide reading portfolios created for each student. They were looking at data by child, teacher, and grade level to chart progress. The intermediate grade level teams were using classroom, district, and state data to benchmark student performance. The results were displayed on the school's "Data Wall" for stakeholders to examine. Over the next three years, this article became the resource used most often to communicate the basic ideas of a professional learning community.

The second article, *Family Literacy Nights…and Other Home-School Connections* (Colombo, 2004) discussed the benefits of a well organized parent outreach program that is linked to increasing student learning and success. The article specifically addressed how the program could be used to empower linguistically diverse families. Similar to the one outlined in the article, Northeastern had begun its own "Nights of Family Learning" or "NFL nights" aimed at increasing communication with its families—especially those who were culturally and linguistically diverse. These evening activities were scheduled throughout the year and gave families the chance to come to school, eat a meal provided by local restaurants, and review their students' reading performance. The article stimulated many other ideas for ways the school could reach out to its parents and community. The sessions became an easy way to make families

feel more comfortable at school while teaching parents how to interact with their children to teach reading and math skills. Some of the activities were as simple as teaching parents and students about how to access the nearby public library.

The third article was most helpful at the district level. *How Community Schools Make a Difference* (Blank, 2004) served as a primer to describe the components, benefits, and possibilities for such a school. The article cut straight to the point. Blank (2004) stated, "Some people may ask whether the logic of strong school/community partnerships is compelling enough to meet the accountability demands that schools face today. Can schools take the time to build relationships when failure to meet federal standards on a single test can label them as underperforming?" (p. 62).

Like the author, district and school administrators and community leaders believed the community school was exactly what was needed to promote student learning. By building relationships with existing community resources, services could be expanded for students and families. By strengthening the relationships between school and home, the school could facilitate a stronger sense of belonging while building relationships, or social capital, among its stakeholders (Hartzler, 2003).

Though these practices were consciously being done to increase student learning, it was not understood that these processes were part of a larger body of literature. The realization of a concept called "professional learning community" enabled the district and site administrator to begin formalizing the philosophy and activities against a conceptual framework.

Key members of the school, including site principals, teacher representatives, and social workers, were invited to a brainstorming meeting with district officials in the

spring of 2005. At that meeting, the Superintendent asked school personnel to prioritize their needs from the district. This meeting was designed to focus on the instructional support teachers needed to help their students achieve to their maximum potential. Again, two priorities emerged from the school faculty. The first was to significantly lower class sizes to facilitate true instructional differentiation. The second priority was for students and their families to broaden their understanding of their environment through rich experiences that encouraged cognitive and social development.

In order for these two goals to be accomplished for the upcoming school year, preparations had to be made in the next few months to facilitate the change under the constraints of both time and money. The committee decided to reprioritize their staff to reduce the number of resource teachers. The change resulted in the gifted teacher, who was fluent in Spanish, teaching a "newcomer" class to non-English speaking students, while serving as an enrichment consultant to the regular classroom teachers. In addition, three of the four remedial reading teachers returned to the classroom, leaving only one to provide pull-out services for students in the greatest need of reading assistance. The result was a projected ratio of one teacher for every fifteen students. The staff was ecstatic about the possibilities for the upcoming year.

In an effort to meet the goal of providing more real-world experiences and language development, the idea for an enrichment summer camp and after school program was launched. Staff from the district's athletic department was included in the process. They offered to coach cheerleading, soccer, physical fitness, and gymnastics classes during the summer. Fine arts teachers signed up to teach drama and jewelry-making. Other classes such as cooking and social skills were balanced by academically

focused classes in reading and mathematics. Breakfast and lunch were served, and student transportation was provided both to and from the summer camp.

The summer of 2005-06 represented a new level of support and service to families. The summer camp was a tremendous success with 300 students participating. In addition, the school-based clinic remained open to serve families during the summer months.

When school started in August of 2005, the goals set by the staff were coming to fruition. The instructional aim of reducing class size was finally realized. In 2005, class sizes averaged 15 students, compared to 19 students the year before. Building on the success of the summer camp, a partnership between the school and the YMCA resulted in an after-school program that balanced academic tutoring with fitness opportunities.

The social support goals of providing adequate health and social resources were materializing, as well. Participation in the school-based clinic had reached 64%. School supplies were provided free of charge for all students. An old school bus was converted into the "Bus Boutique" that came to the school site to provide gently worn clothes for families. Parenting classes were offered through the district's community education program. Both day and evening GED classes were offered onsite with free childcare available.

By December 2005, the school had undergone a transformation. Five years before, it had faced seemingly insurmountable challenges in the wake of growing accountability. Yet, in spite of growing diversity and increasing poverty, the staff felt more confident in their abilities to meet the individual needs of their students and families (Staff interviews, 2005).

Chapter Four will seek to analyze the data from this case to determine how a Professional Learning Community (PLC) was developed and implemented and whether the concepts in PLC model impacted student and faculty learning.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis of Data

Survey Data

The first data obtained were the responses to an anonymous survey of Northeastern staff. The purpose of the survey was to garner data from instructional staff as to whether characteristics of a PLC were indeed in place at the school. The population was purposefully selected to capture feedback from staff members who have been assigned to the school since the beginning of the 2004-05 school year. This allowed for all participants to have been employed at the site for a minimum of fourteen months prior to the survey distribution. Consequently, a possible sample size of 45 staff members was identified. Of that group, 34 responded to the survey for a 76% return rate.

A validated survey was chosen for use in the study. *The Professional Learning Communities Assessment* (Olivier, Huffman, and Hipp, 2003) was selected based on its specific intent to assess stakeholders' perceptions of a professional learning community in a school setting (Appendix E). According to the authors,

> The factor analysis method was used to provide information on the construct validity of the survey. The analyses were conducted on a sample size of 247 respondents. Factor identification consisted of items reflecting the five dimensions of professional learning communities. While selection of the factors resulted from the statistical procedures, a critical choice incorporated the best conceptual and theoretical fit. Cronbach's Alpha internal consistency reliability coefficients were computed for the factored subscales of the measure. For the five factored subscales, the Alpha coefficients ranged from a low .83 (Collected Learning and Application and Supportive Conditions—Relationships and Structures) to a high of .93 (Shared Values and Vision) (pp. 73-74).

Consequently, the survey was deemed to have produced satisfactory internal consistency (Alpha coefficient) reliability for the factored subscales (Oliver, Huffman and Hipp, 2003).

The survey contains statements about practices that occur at the school level. The instrument serves as a descriptive tool of the five dimensions of professional learning communities: shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. Participants were asked to respond to statements about practices occurring at their school that are consistent with those utilized by professional learning communities. The instrument utilizes a four point, forced-choice Likert scale ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree. Descriptive statistics were used to communicate the findings. Data included minimum and maximum values, frequencies, item means, and standard deviations.

Permission to use the survey in this study was obtained by its authors (Appendix D). The 45-question survey was administered using Quia, a web-based data collection tool. The survey was kept intact, using the exact instructions and questions as they appear on the paper-based survey. Five questions relating to participants' demographic data preceded the PLC survey questions. Those questions dealt specifically with respondents' ethnicity, gender, job role, number of year employed at the school, and number of years employed in the education profession. One additional question was added to the end of the standardized survey to gather specific data about the perceptions of a site-based medical clinic at the school.

An electronic distribution was selected to decrease costs, increase response time, and improve convenience for the user. An additional benefit of electronic data collection

was the ease of exporting the data from the survey tool to an Excel spreadsheet for general data analysis purposes.

1. Demographic data

The demographic data revealed interesting information about the staff. Of those completing the survey, 88% are Caucasian, 3% are Hispanic, and 9% are Native American. In addition, 91.2% are female. Though nearly one-fourth of the current student population is African American, there is not a single African American on the instructional staff.

Data from the survey showed that 5.8% are classified as an administrator and 58.8% are classroom teachers. In addition, 17.7% of the population are an "all grade level" teacher (counselor, art, music, or physical education teacher), 11.8% teach special education classes, and 5.88% are office staff.

Question 4 illustrated that the staff is well balanced in its longevity at Northeastern. Data showed that 17.65% reported two or less years, 14.71% with 3-5 years, 23.5% with 6-9 years, 20.6% with 10-12 years, 8.8% with 13-15 years, and 14.7% with more than 15 years at the school.

Data from Question 5 addressed the number of years the participants have been employed in the education profession. While 32.4% of the staff report they have 1-5 years at the school, only 35.3% report having 1-5 years in the profession. This data suggests that teachers in that category started their career at Northeastern and have remained at the school. Conversely, data also suggest that a few of the veteran teachers had experiences at other schools prior to coming to Northeastern. Though 14.7% of the

staff stated they have been at Northeastern for 16-20+ years, 26.5% stated they have 16-20+ years in the profession.

The majority of the additional items in the survey, Questions 6-49, were from the *Professional Learning Communities Assessment* (Olivier, Huffman, and Hipp, 2003). Questions 1-5, 50, and 51 were added by the researcher to capture additional data to inform the study.

A complete report of the survey responses may be found in Appendix F. The following summaries are based on a synthesis of the findings from each of the five dimensions of a PLC that were addressed by the survey.

2. Shared and Supportive Leadership

Shared and supportive leadership was a key factor that emerged from the literature. Ten items, Questions 6-15 from the survey, were directly linked to this category. The mean score for this area was 3.13. However, a question from this subset yielded one of the lowest scores on the survey. The item stated, "Decision making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas." The mean score for that item was 2.91.

3. Shared Values and Vision

Shared values and vision is the second aspect measured by the survey. Eight items, Questions 16-23, were targeted in this area. The total mean was reported as 3.42. Two items from this section resulted in two of the highest scores on the survey. Both statements, "Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision" and "Polices and program are aligned to the school's vision," tallied 3.65 with all respondents choosing "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" as their answer.

4. Collective Learning and Application

Nine items, Questions 24-31, were targeted toward this area. The total mean for the category was 3.35. This area had no items with a mean score of greater than 3.5 or less than 3.0.

5. Shared Personal Practice

Questions 32-39 were focused on this dimension. Overall, questions from the category had a mean score of 3.26. Question 32, "Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement," scored a mean of 2.76. A follow-up question was designed for the interviews to allow staff to expand on this topic.

6. Supportive Conditions

The final category of the survey, Supportive Conditions, was broken into two sub-categories by the creators of the survey: Relationships and Structures.

a. Relationships

   Four items were designed specifically to address the area of "Supportive Conditions: Relationships." Data from Questions 37-40 revealed a total mean score of 3.27, with no individual items scoring below 3.0 or above 3.5.

b. Structures

   Nine items, Questions 41-49 were designed to assess this category. This area achieved a total mean score of 3.35. Question 46, "The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting," yielded a mean score of 3.62. Of the participants, 62% selected "Strongly Agree" while one person chose "Strongly Disagree."

7. Additional Questions:

One additional question was added to assess participants' perceptions of the school-based clinic. Question 50 stated, "The [school-based clinic] has been a positive addition to [Northeastern] Elementary." This item achieved a mean score of 3.65 with 64.7% selecting "Strongly Agree" and 35.3% selecting "Agree." The final question was an open-response item that allowed respondents the option to add written comment.

8. Summary:

The aggregate data from the survey resulted in a total mean score of 3.285. Overall, this score illustrates that the five dimensions of the PLC are present in this case. Individual items, as mentioned previously, point to specific areas of strength and weakness.

Interviews

The professional learning community framework that was utilized in this study was drawn from research that was conducted in North America. Though some differences exist among authors, the literature generally focuses on five basic tenets: a) shared leadership, b) shared values and vision, c) collective learning, d) shared personal practice, and e) supportive conditions. Oliver, Huffman, and Hipp further delineate the "supportive conditions" area into two sub-themes: relationships and structures.

A sixth theme, *Community Resources*, was evident in the interviews yet was not apparent in the American literature. Surprisingly, this dimension is found in PLC research generated in the United Kingdom. Based on the research findings of a report issued by the General Teaching Council of England, *Creating & Sustaining Effective*

Professional Learning Communities (2005), the availability of community resources plays a critical role in the development of a professional learning community.

The seventh theme, *Rethinking Staff Evaluations*, was an additional unexpected thread that was woven through the data. When asked about the shared leadership processes at her school, the principal identified the expected ideas of collaboration and shared decision-making. However, she integrated the concept in another area—staff evaluations. In reference to the "goal-setting process," she explains how she reverses the role of the principal in a traditional evaluation. In this way, she acts as a facilitator to allow the staff member to identify his or her short- and long-term goals and a path to achieve them.

Seven distinct themes emerged from the four data sets. Together, they become a lens for understanding the complex processes, practices, and philosophies that make up a PLC. Quotes from interview participants are organized by theme.

Shared Leadership

In speaking of her first year in the principalship, Lisa said:

> I went out there and looked for who I felt have leadership qualities that just needed the experience to be able to develop and grow. Of course, there were already those leaders that were natural leaders that were out there, but I really tried to focus on those that really hadn't had the opportunity. So I started developing them and giving them leadership roles [in the building], talking to them about presenting [at professional development sessions] because a lot of them had been in the classroom, they were in a closed room and hadn't really done anything. No one had ever encouraged them to do anything. They didn't know they were as good as they were. They were great teachers that never had anyone tell them they were great, and so we started focusing on that.

She spent the initial year of her principalship exposing teachers to opportunities to lead, such as site and district committee involvement as well as participation in the

district's teacher-led professional development sessions. The second year, Lisa focused her efforts on individual goal setting to try to match interests with personal growth opportunities. She explained:

> As the next year came about, then we looked at it more as, professionally, where do you want to go? And that conversation started coming up, so when evaluations were done, everything was absolutely based on their goals. The conversation was never about what I thought about them, but tell me what you want to do. Where to you want to be? What is your vision, and how can you impact these children's lives? I completely took what had always been for me, the reverse of the principal telling you what she thinks about you. I did a complete reverse of, 'Tell me what you think about yourself.'

Lisa's philosophy applied to the non-certified, support staff. She spoke of the importance of quality paraprofessionals that assist in the classrooms and the importance of "professionally developing" them, as well:

> [The assistant principal] and I were discussing the other day, every one of our paraprofessionals is phenomenal. Two of them, there is no reason at all why they should not be teaching in the regular classroom. They have everything it takes and so, for both of them this year, our focus will be getting them the financial assistance they need because that's the issue, to get their bachelor's degree so they can be certified instead of just paras. So you kind of just start taking that list down, little by little and marking it off, and then constantly going back and revisiting to where are they at, and where do they want to be. So, my role is more of a facilitator trying to make the pieces connect instead of being the person that tells you. Because now that they've told me what they want, they've got buy-in and they have empowered themselves, and I have done nothing but try to help them fit the pieces together.

Kelly, who had been at the school for over twenty years, had worked with principals with many other leadership styles. When asked to provide an example of how teachers share in the decision-making process under Lisa's direction, Kelly stated:

> I think probably one of the easiest [examples] is with our collaboration every two weeks, in deciding what we want to focus on. I mean, she sat down and she just said, 'It's up to you. Whatever you think your kids need to focus on, that's what their going to work on.' She left it

> up to us. She could have said, 'I want you to find out their reading scores and do this and this and this and report back and that's what I want you to work on.' But, she trusts us to know our kids well enough that we can find out what they need and work on that and then report back to her.

Michelle, the assistant principal, also identified collaboration time as a tool for sharing leadership. The collaboration time is currently built into the teachers' schedule each week, allowing them 50 minutes of team planning time. The idea was creatively structured to yield the extra time without requiring any additional resources.

Previously, there were five 50-minute plan times throughout each day. Plan times were organized so that teachers in the same grade level had the same plan time. However, there was no expectation for teachers to meet together during that time. In addition, there was no other time set aside for team planning.

In 2004-05, the schedule was changed to 40 minutes of individual plan time each day. By cutting ten minutes off of each grade level's plan time throughout the day, an additional 50 minutes of time remained at the end of the day. This allowed each grade level to have one common plan time (from 2:45-3:30 p.m.) one time each week. For example, first grade teachers met during that time on Mondays, second grade teachers on Tuesday, etc. Students who traditionally had one specialty (art, music or physical education) class during teachers' individual plan time, now went to an additional specialty class at the end of the day when their grade level had common plan (first grade on Monday, second grade on Tuesday, etc.).

As a result, teachers were afforded the extra group plan time while students were actively engaged in meaningful curriculum. Michelle explains her perspective:

> I think that collaboration is a great time when we really sit down together and talk about things. Sometimes things come up besides data at that point, just kind of it does. So I think getting feedback from them [the

> teachers], that's a great time to do it, or lead teacher meetings too. It's not a place where if it's not your idea, you know, if it's not Lisa's or my idea, then it doesn't go. We really try to listen to the staff and think about the ideas they have for changes or anything like that.

When asked about opportunities for shared leadership, Dawn, an upper elementary teacher with about five years experience, explained:

> Lisa creates an environment where we can make our own decisions. I mean, we feel like we are handling what we are doing. She supports us, and she will give us input as needed, but she lets us really lead ourselves, and I just think she is a wonderful person to work for. She is very supportive. She is very helpful. She gives great suggestions, yet she makes us take the responsibility which helps us do a better job, I think.

Teachers also spoke of sharing leadership with students. As a specific example, Dawn described a meeting initiated by a student who was requesting a change in placement from a self-contained special education class to a regular classroom.

> We had a meeting the other day with one of our kids in Special Ed, and he was really wanting to improve his math score, and he really wanted to try the regular classroom. So, he presented his case to all of us, and we talked about it. Well, the first thing that [the assistant principal] said when she sits down in the meeting is, 'So show me some data.' Just the idea of that, using different kinds of information and not straight test scores, it's data that's useful and I didn't realize that. I mean, I always thought of it [data] as a state test, it's information, it's numbers that they need and that's all, it was just numbers.

Ruth, an intermediate teacher who has been at Northeastern for about seven years, also saw the long-term benefits of sharing leadership opportunities with her students.

> Honestly, what's really neat is to see [the students] take ownership in their learning, where that's a problem we run into at Northeastern, and I'm sure that's true in all schools, but here it's been like, why does that matter to me? I don't care that my reading level is a 2.2. I mean, it doesn't mean anything. I mean, I'm not going to get in trouble at home. I'm still doing my class work. [Grades] are marked modified on my report card, but I don't know what that means. You know, just that kind of …where we can really get them to take ownership that I'm responsible for my learning and for what I do in the classroom.

Shared Vision and Values

Lisa's perspective on the development of the vision and values began when she left the classroom and became the assistant principal at Northeastern in 2000. The principal had been at the helm at Northeastern for the past seven years.

Lisa worked at the school as the assistant principal for one year before the site administrator chose to take a principalship at another Title I school. She told how her prior experiences at the school gave her a unique perspective when she took the reins as principal. She said:

> As the assistant principal, in my first year, my job was discipline. I would have about ten students waiting in line throughout the day at a constant rotation through here with white slips for being in trouble for fighting, bullying, and disrespect. I never did anything besides white slips which really wasn't even a white slip. It was a piece of paper with the teacher's notes on it about what she was upset about. Then, in that extra little bit of time I had, that's when we were doing the curriculum maps. Okay, so the next year, at the end of that year, I told the principal then, I said no more of that. There's too many kids in the front office. We need something revitalized. Well, lo and behold, she moves over at the new school and then I got the principalship, so then it worked perfect.

When Lisa was named as the principal, she met with her faculty to discuss the changes they wanted to take place for the upcoming school year. During the interview, she singled out the events of their first staff meeting after the announcement.

> We (the faculty and I) then sat down and went, okay, discipline and character…these are the specifics. This is when you use this orange slip. This is when you use the white slip. This is when you use the good character slip and had specifics so that everyone school-wide had a discipline plan and was on the same page. Now of course in the classroom, I did not want to dictate what the rules were in the classroom. The only thing that I said was that character counts. Here are the pillars. Your rules in your classroom must fall under these pillars. How you set it up, it doesn't matter to me. How many you have, it doesn't matter to me. The conversation came out of how important it was that the children came up with their rules in the classroom, which was great because that's exactly what I'm doing with them [the teachers] is, I gave them instruction and

said, ‘You come up with your rules.’ In turn, they flipped it and said, ‘Okay, the kids come up with the rules.’ So, there were hallway, bathroom, and cafeteria rules – basic things like how we'll walk to set the school climate. That was all set.

When asked about how the vision and values were set for her school, Lisa clearly described the initial meeting with staff as the first step in establishing the vision. When asked if staff felt they were participants in the vision-setting process, the responses varied. One teacher explained:

> I wasn't a part of the initial vision, but I feel like as our vision changes, I mean, we continually add things on that may not have been a part of that initial plan, but I think our vision, basically, is to meet the needs of the students, whether it be academic, social, emotional health, so that they can achieve in their academics. I think that's what our basic vision is, so we continually add things in to meet [students’] needs. I mean, our number one goal is that the students do have academic achievement. You can't get there unless you take care of all these other things first.

Ruth reflected on the many years she had at Northeastern. She shared that the vision for the school came from the staff and the students.

> I think the vision for this school, I think what's caused the vision to come about is the high mobility, and I think that [principal] saw the teachers, I mean the teachers here are really pretty much a dedicated lot, and I think she saw us wearing ourselves out and then [fellow teachers] would be gone. Then you give, you give, you give, you stay after school and you do these things for these kids, and you spend money. I'll buy you books. I'll do whatever it takes, and then you’re out the door, and I’ll not be able to see you grow and to watch you develop. It's like a continual turnover, and I think that has caused the vision to be about what we can do to make the kids want to be here, to make the parents want their kids to be here, to improve attendance, to maybe even if they had a choice, to say, ‘Even if we did move, could we stay at Northeastern?’ You know, that type of thing. So I think Lisa was listening to all that, and I think she just looked for ways, and I think she just listened to us.

Jane also had a unique perspective on the way the vision was established. She had been at the school for almost 20 years. She spoke of the changing needs of the

community and the rising expectations for student achievement. She addressed the emotional side of how the accountability movement affected the staff's morale.

> The vision changed by us just looking for ways for our children to be successful. Like how in the world are we going to…it felt like we were… I mean probably about three years ago and maybe a little longer, but I think it was pretty much school wide, there was like this horrible, just depression, just like, Ugh! Like, we were beating our heads against the wall, and we weren't getting anywhere, so I think that Lisa kind of picked up on that and went with it and said, Okay, what can we do? Instead of just staying there in it or hoping next year will be better. It's just looking for ways. Literally, what can we do to improve this, knowing that we all have such a hard time because the parents either can't or refuse to be as involved as what they can, so I think that was probably the main thing in question – that something needed to be done. Our scores were going down. Teachers were working extremely hard. I don't know. Something had to change.

Since Dawn was one of the entry-year teachers that Lisa hired in her first year as principal, she didn't have the history that others had lived. Northeastern was her first teaching job and Lisa was her first and only principal. In reflecting on how the vision and values have been set and refined, Dawn said:

> I feel this school is a big team. So I know that we kind of all have input and have discussed, especially with all the stuff going on at the clinic and the after-school programs and just the needs that we have. I really feel that the staff works together to kind of set the values for the school. Well, I mean a lot of that has come from above, and these are our goals, but if there is anything that needs changed, she's definitely open to that, and we can give our input and say what we think is most important.

Collective Learning

Opportunities for learning together are a hallmark of a professional learning community. When asked how the staff works and learns together, the assistant principal stated:

> During collaboration, we really sit down and focus on data. Usually what we do is in the beginning, they [teachers] decide who's going

> to be the leader, who is going to be the secretary, who's going to be the timer and then they choose to pick an objective that they think that they, as a team, need to focus on in their grade level. They pick the objective, they talk about how they're going to meet that objective, what kinds of activities they're going to do. They decide what percentage [mastery] do they think is sufficient for that, so they do that and then they go into their class to decide how they are going to assess it and then they do that. They get their data together in their own classroom and then the next two weeks, they come and meet and discuss what their results were. They look and say… 'Okay, well what did you do to reach your goal, and that maybe I didn't, so what do we need to do differently?' So that I think that's different [here] because I know a lot of other schools do collaboration, but it's more of….Oh, it's not data driven. It's more like, almost like a team meeting. When we would just have team meetings, where the principal would come and meet with the team and discuss all the things that are going on. The thing I didn't like when I was at [another school] is that I was the one that was responsible for it. So every day I had to come up with….Well, what are we going to do in collaboration today? It was finding articles that we were going to discuss, finding topics that we were going to discuss, and it just killed me because I couldn't do it. It's too much. So having it be teacher driven, I think that's the success of it.

From the perspective of a Kindergarten teacher, meeting together to review student work serves as a means for benchmarking student growth. An often unexpected benefit is the validation that comes from sharing data and ideas with colleagues. Many, like Molly, expect that the process will yield student learning, but are surprised to see how much they also grow from the process. She noted:

> I think probably one of the biggest strengths that I've noticed from the collaboration is being able to see, like the growth. Because with you asking that sort of thing, you don't always get to see that weekly growth, like, okay… I actually am teaching them something, some of them are actually getting this and so that is an encouraging thing. You know two weeks ago, 11 could rhyme these words and now 17 can rhyme these words and so that is encouraging.

Another Kindergarten teacher discussed how her team shares instructional strategies based on the data:

> It gives us time to, you know, besides like our plan time, to bounce ideas. Because, say if I only have like nine kids master rhyming words,

> and I assessed again and there were only 11 and [another teacher] had a bigger growth, then I would say, what are you doing? Because what I'm doing isn't working as well, and we might bounce ideas off of each other like that.

Another primary teacher stated that a shared team goal to reassess student progress on a district-wide portfolio assessment provided the chance for her to gauge student growth. In addition, she noted the benefits of using ongoing, performance-based assessments to guide instruction:

> Right now [at the end of the first semester], we decided let's just reassess everybody [on the district portfolio assessment], and then we can see, you know, where the big holes are for the second semester. So that's kind of how we are using that. It's been really beneficial. If anything, last year I didn't do the ongoing [portfolio] assessment. So it was just, okay, these are my fall scores, and these are my spring and now I'm seeing, okay, they are getting it. We are making progress, and it kind of makes me feel good, like, okay, I can see this. I'm doing some things right and they're getting it. So that's how we are doing that and it's been really good.

Kelly, a veteran teacher with longevity at Northeastern, identified the benefits of working together in a team to combat the isolationism and growing demands facing teachers. She, too, sees the opportunity to collaborate as an opportunity to learn from her colleagues:

> I think realizing that you're not alone. I mean, you can get in that classroom and think I'm a horrible teacher. Everybody in here is not on grade level and is not where I think they need to be. You think I'm the only one that's having this thing, and then, when you get together and hear [other grade level team members] talk [in collaboration time], you've got, oh it's the same exact thing. Because you just think you're the only one dealing with no parent support, or can't get them to bring their homework back, or they don't care, have no motivation, and then when you get together, you can see, I know we're not the only ones. Pretty much everybody across the board is dealing with that. Plus, I always enjoy hearing what other people are doing. I mean, I would never want to work for a team or in a school where people do not share or they go, 'This works for me, and I don't want you to look as good as I do.' I enjoy listening to what they are doing and applying it. If it will work for me, I'll do it.

The idea of being tightly connected to the team was evident among the fifth grade team. One example of the effects of collaboration was given by one of the fifth grade teachers:

> My team is awesome, so we meet every day. Honestly, I mean it's just a constant, revolving conversation, which is kind of neat because it's not like we meet once every two weeks and that's when we talk about how we're doing. It's that we're daily re-evaluating what we are doing. We flex-group, which I think is the correct term, our kids. We're meeting every day and talking about, 'Hey how is she doing, and how is he doing?' We move kids all the time based on what we see their needs are. So it's a constant conversation for us. The collaboration times are nice because it's just an extra….We have so much to do anyway, so I like having that time because it gives us a time where we can really say, 'Okay, now we can sit down and talk.' Even though we do talk every day, it's nice to have a specified time, and it's really nice when Lisa's there. Again, we get her input, and I know she likes to know what's going on, so it's nice to share with her how we are doing. So, I think it's a great concept and a great idea. It works really well because we have a team that works well together.

Another teacher from the fifth grade, a veteran with over 25 years' experience, corroborates her colleague's perspective on teaming. She addresses the power of collaboration for its ability to focus conversation and action to improve student learning. Like her colleague, she speaks to the importance of teamwork and regular collaboration as a way of teaching. She states:

> We collaborate every day. I have an awesome team, where they are so positive. They have youth, they have energy, and those of us on the team that don't, we get that the team effort just builds you up, and morale is so high, we can't wait to get here. Every time we eat lunch together, every time we have a plan time together, we're in each other's face, and we talk about the students. We talk about what's working, what's not working. So yes, it is very nice to have that extra collaborative time on Friday, so that we can sit down and relax and have that time to plan. So, I'm not saying I don't want that, but we do. We spend a lot of our plan times together, conversing about the children. Since we flex-group, this is what's happening in this class, this is what's….Okay, well maybe we need to move them into a different situation, and we are constantly readjusting our schedules, readjusting where the children are according to their needs. I

> feel like every child we have is on an individual education plan because we spend so much time discussing them. We know them. We build relationships with them. It's an awesome team of people I work with.

Shared Practices

Shared practices refer to the sharing of instructional strategies and materials, common assessments, data, and student work samples. Additionally, shared practices refer to teachers observing one another in the classroom setting. When asked if teachers have the opportunity to observe in each other's classrooms, Jill noted:

> Yeah, that doesn't happen, but I think part of it is that if you're really interested in seeing what's going on in your own grade level, then that's going to be hard because all of us have the same plan time. The easiest time you could do that would be on your planning time just because we don't have the funds to support substitutes to come in, but if you're interested in seeing how maybe the grade below you or something that the grade above you is doing, you know the vertical teaming, I think we could do that at any time they ever wanted to. Observing people that are on your team, though, is going to be a little bit harder. I'm not quite sure how that would work right now just because we don't have….Well, I guess they could probably….You know there's times when [the counselor] comes into the classroom to do things. That could be a time when we could go and observe another classroom.

Another teacher echoed her colleagues' statement about the power of observation.

> I would say that one thing I would like to be able to do is see peers in their classroom situations. I think we may have talked about this a year or so ago. It's so hard, I mean, how do you really get a chance to do that without bringing in a substitute? But, that's one thing that I would love to see is to be able to see how Tina does what she does so well…or another grade level…something like that. I do think, at least in fifth grade, we know each other well enough, we can see what each other is doing and can offer that encouragement. Especially having new, I say new teachers, like [teachers' names], they're both just great. But you know we know enough, and we know what's going on in the class and we can say, 'Hey, I heard that this worked really well,' or 'I knew she was working on fractions.' We were doing something in the lab, and I brought that in with something really silly like number of tables who cleaned up their materials correctly, and we made a fraction, we reduced it, you know and so they went and told her that. So, she was like, 'Thanks so much. You know they didn't get

> it until you did it in your science class.' So we just offer encouragement like that, and I think we know a little bit, especially if our team is close, but I would love to be able to see some of the great teachers. Jane and Kelly, the ones who have been around….but, know what they're doing and are really, really good at it. That would be a nice thing to see.

Most teachers identified a lack of money for substitutes as the reason this practice was not occurring. After some discussion, Barbara remarked that classroom visitations could be done without substitutes by scheduling the observation when other resource personnel come into the classroom for special programs. She said:

> If we have people from the outside that do our nutrition curriculum, "All About Kids," like [the volunteer] coming and doing [the classes] and things like that, that could be a time when a teacher could go and observe another classroom. I think you would just have to be creative and figure out how to do that without spending any money.

When asked about the opportunities that exist to observe other teachers, Dawn remarked:

> I think we forget that. It almost seems like it's not an option because we're here every day, and we can't get out of the class. I mean, I don't even have a chance to go to the bathroom if I need to. So it's like, how would I ever get a chance to observe somebody else? But even going across the district, I would love to see what they [other teachers] do and how they do it with their kids because you can learn so much.

Supportive Conditions

One aspect of a professional learning community is Supportive Conditions. According to Huffman, and Hipp (2003), this area can be further defined as relationships and structures.

Michelle spoke about the importance of the relationship she has with Lisa, the site principal.

> I mean, I think just for myself, just being here has completely changed my life. I mean going from feeling like you're an assistant to…I really don't feel like I'm an assistant at all. That's just because Lisa has just made me feel that way. I don't want to sound like pompous, but bringing me here and the team that Lisa and I have, has really changed things. I

> think the team of Lisa and I, I'm scared that [the Superintendent] is going to think that you can replicate that, but I want to tell her that I don't want her to get her hopes up that's going to happen because I think this is a rarity. Honestly, it's so hard to find somebody you can work with like we do. It's very different than anything I have ever done. I have co-taught and things like that, and it's just the fact that we can do things—she can trust me to do things—has changed a lot. I think her stress level has gone down a lot and I think I'm much happier because I feel like I'm much more fulfilled in my job. So, I think the team of us together has made a difference. I think that togetherness really makes us strong.

When asked about the biggest change that the school has made in the last five years, the teacher with the most seniority keyed in on the relationships among staff:

> It goes back to people. Lisa has such high expectations of her staff, and she is constantly building morale. She is looking for people that will buy into the school's vision and will work with her teachers. Really, two instances, our librarian and our counselor. Wow! These people, I don't know how they get it all done. I know they work 40 hours just like the rest of us do, but what they accomplish in the time they are there, how they know every child in the school. They know their family history. They're easy-going people. They don't get bent out of shape easily. They have very even temperaments. They love our kids. They want the library to be used. That's what it's there for. They want the kids to succeed. They don't set them up for failure and they're there, every time you turn around, they are doing something new for our kids. So people… the people that have come in in the last five years…to me, that's what has made the difference. Programs are great, and I like what's going on, but it's the people that make the difference.

The second aspect to "Supportive Conditions" is the structures that are put into place to support the initiative. Oftentimes, "Structures" deals with changes in the schedule, resource allocation, etc., that has yielded instructional benefits. When asked if there had been any changes that helped them accomplish their goals, several teachers alluded to the change to "Breakfast in a Bag" program. This program allows students to go directly to their classrooms in the morning to eat breakfast. Sharon said:

> I think doing breakfast in the classroom, instead of getting the kids at 8:45, you know we've got kids in our room at 8:30 and breakfast is there

> shortly after. Having the kids earlier and doing the breakfast in our classroom. That's been a big change, and I think it's been very beneficial.

One of the Kindergarten teachers reiterated the idea that the breakfast program was a positive change. She noted that it allowed students more time to do their work without being as hurried as with a traditional breakfast schedule. Ann observed:

> I feel like I'm not as rushed as in the afternoon class because the morning class is there a lot earlier after breakfast. I think in the morning with their journals, they have more time to write in their journals. You know, they can eat and write at the same time, or the kids that come in late can really catch up and so it's not, okay, you came in 30 minutes late, so now you've got to hurry, and now we've got to go do this and this and this. There's that little buffer of time. I just feel it's a little stressful sometimes in the morning because there's so many things going on, that I feel like the kids have a longer chance to do things, so work becomes more quality I think.

Barbara mentioned "Breakfast in a Bag" as well as decreased interruptions on the intercom as having the biggest impact in her classroom.

> I mentioned, I mean it sounds so small, but the interruptions. I mean, that was like the big thing, and she changed the morning gathering, it was this big thing that the whole school started out in the gym and that just started the day off so crazy and you know, even some of us that remember that, we were just like 'Oh my gosh, I can't believe we ever did that,' because it just started the day off crazy, you know. It just got them all riled up first thing in the morning. The breakfast is wonderful because they just come to our rooms, they eat breakfast, and it starts the day out so calmly. I noticed a big change there and just without the interruptions with the intercom has been a big change. I mean, I can't really think of one big thing, but just kind of, I think it took [the principal] coming from the classroom and kind of being able to think you know, 'Well, okay, I do remember that as a teacher,' and that sort of thing. So, lots of changes for the good.

Community Partnerships

Community partnerships was one of the areas emphasized most by Northeastern staff. The school began the process of strengthening its relationships with community partners in 2003-04. In 2004-05, however, the school made a commitment to reorganize

its mission to include more outside services for students and their families. When asked whether the partnerships had impacted student performance in the classroom, one teacher replied:

> I think probably as far as decision-making, now [we] look at more community-wide, instead of just in-school, instead of just looking at the children and looking at the children's families. There are a lot more home visits now to see how they are living, what they're living in, what their needs are there, and see how we can provide it and then in school. So I think they are much more community-based decisions instead of just in-school classroom decisions.

As teachers began to describe the benefits of the community partnerships, three sub-themes emerged: social support, basic needs, and the school-based clinic. In the area of social support, Molly honed in on the expanded resources offered by newly-appointed school personnel:

> I think, especially at the beginning of the year, [the social worker] and [parent liaison] being in the community service room has helped us because they are right across the hall, and they could come in and help us with kids that were crying and didn't know why. They would call parents if they saw something…especially the Hispanic parents that now get brought into the loop because of the language barrier. They really brought them in and explained things that were going on.

Additionally, teachers noted that services were provided through the district's "Clothes Closet." This program provides new or gently worn clothing and shoes to students and their families. Though the program is housed at the middle school, it utilizes an old school bus, referred to as the "Bus Boutique," to transport clothes to Title I schools to allow families to shop at school. One teacher observed:

> The "Bus Boutique" has been good for the kids in giving kids clothes. In the years before, there were kids without clothes and backpacks and it was like, "What do you do?" I think the kids' needs are met a whole lot better now.

Overall, the school-based clinic was mentioned more often than any other community partnership. Its value is indicated by the results of the survey in that 100% either "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" that the clinic has been a "positive addition to the Northeastern community." A majority of the staff members who were interviewed identified one of the many benefits of the school-based clinic:

> When they get sick, they can go right there and you know, get the medical treatment, more than just seeing the school nurse. They can actually see a doctor, and if they are sick, they can just come in and see a doctor at the clinic.

Barbara identified the enormous benefits of the clinic for her students. In addition, she shared that both she and her son had utilized the clinic services. She said:

> The clinic has been wonderful. I've used the clinic myself. I've brought my son, you know we both were sick with Strep throat, and we were able to go without driving across town to another doctor, and we were able to bring him after school and go home with prescriptions. Like I said, I have gone in about three times for preventative things, not having to leave [during school] and go to the doctor. I have students that, on a Friday afternoon, are not feeling well and come back with prescriptions that they had an ear infection or something like that, and that's been wonderful. You just think, they would have been in the Emergency Room the next day or just suffered through it all.

While addressing the immediate benefits of having a clinic within the school, Sue recognized the long-term effects of increased service to students and their families. She saw the dedication of additional health-related resources as an expression of the school's devotion to their students. She said:

> We have these kids and we're making a statement for their parents, for their older brothers and sisters, for people who are coming in new to the community. It's just like we're family. The children are buying into the education system, their parents are buying into it because we're more valuable to them than we have been in the past. We offer things that we never offered before and so they are up here when we have a need with a child. They come and they say, 'Okay, I know how much you care about my kids because you do this, feed them breakfast, feed them lunch, make

> sure they get a bus, get extra tutoring, make sure they have clothing, make sure they're having anger management, make sure that…' Oh, the list just goes on.

One teacher alluded to the uncertainty that grew from the reorganization of the assistant principal's role that focused on growing partnerships within the community. Jane explained:

> I was a little concerned at first when she came on because most of our assistant principals have dealt with discipline, which is no picnic. Nobody ever wants to do that, and I understand that. I was a little concerned that it was going to take her whole time, that she would be so wrapped up in the community school and the health situation that she really wouldn't be there to help Lisa with the discipline. So that was a big concern of mine at first. But, as Michelle and Lisa worked together, it was more of a collaborative team effort. I could see that they would pick up the slack for one another. It was total buy-in. It was a total team effort. So, I was alleviated when …. I felt relieved when I learned that she wasn't just going to do the health and community center at the clinic and that she was buying into the whole program that extended out into our discipline, anger management, speaking to ER-1 [special education] students and being in on the IEP meetings and all, that she has definitely bought into all of it. With the clinic being here, of course, that does take the focus of her attention. So, my concerns are gone. I am very pleased with the team effort from the office.

Observations

Observations were conducted during collaboration time. These sessions, which occur the last 50 minutes of the day, allow for a grade level team or specialty group to plan together one day every other week. The teams have a set agenda format that is followed at each meeting. Responsibilities are defined for the following roles: facilitator/agenda preparer, recorder, process checker, and timekeeper. The roles are rotated among the members of the team. The principal and assistant principal did not assume any of these roles. They remained in the meeting, when schedules permitted, and

actively listened and contributed when appropriate. They did not, however, take a leadership role in the process.

The meeting began by reviewing the goal set at the previous meeting. Teachers brought student level data (namely, test results and observational checklists) from the common assessment the team had created. They shared their results from their own class. Teachers asked questions of their colleagues about activities and strategies used in the instructional process. Each time, they discussed what to do with students who did not master the skills or concepts. In two of the five meetings that were observed, a teacher whose students did not do as well as the group began to express discouragement in their data. In both instances, teachers from the team encouraged their colleague. In one meeting of primary teachers, one of the new teachers to the team expressed some doubt in the way she taught a particular concept. Each of the three remaining teachers gave specific feedback citing an observation they made of her teaching lesson or remark made from a student regarding their excitement for the content (working with money) to reinforce her efficacy. The remainder of the meetings was spent discussing remediation, setting goals for the next meeting, and discussing their common assessment for the next concept. Though the dynamics of each team were different, the format for each meeting was very similar.

The focus of the meetings was on the creation of common assessments, analyzing student work/performance, strategies for instruction and remediation, and resources needed to re-teach a lesson. In the older grades, the conversations included discussions about the performance of specific students. This was pertinent as these teachers use flexible grouping to differentiate instruction for students who are in need of remediation

or enrichment. In at least one instance, students were moved from a group as a result of the data discussed in the meeting.

In summary, data were presented in Chapter Four from the survey, interviews, observations, and document analysis. Chapter Five will attempt to blend both quantitative and qualitative sources to understand the evolution of the professional learning community processes at Northeastern Elementary. The research questions will be explored by examining broad numeric trends from the survey and document analysis while illuminating individual perspectives via interviews and observations.

CHAPTER FIVE

Interpretations and Implications

Purpose of the Study

This study focused on the story of how a professional learning community developed at an elementary school in Oklahoma. The study explored how the processes of a PLC evolved from the challenges facing the Title I school in a rapidly changing community. Specifically, the study investigated how the PLC affected both staff and student learning.

It is the hope of the researcher that the information gleaned from this study can inform the complex processes and decisions that result from a developing PLC. Though it is important to understand that each PLC is as unique as the school in which it evolves, there may be lessons to be learned. These lessons may be relevant at the school and district level as educators seek to explore the viability of PLCs as a response to growing accountability pressures.

By increasing what is known about professional accountability models, schools can consider another model for increasing learning. The researcher selected a mixed method to capture both quantitative and qualitative data to develop the story of one school's journey toward becoming a PLC.

Research Questions

1. How was a Professional Learning Community (PLC) developed and implemented in this case?
2. What, if any, concepts in the PLC model impacted student and faculty learning?

Summary of Findings

Many components of the PLC resulted from a changing student population that needed more support than the traditional school curricula and its services could provide. Growing accountability requirements served as an additional pressure to expedite the change both at the district and site level. Though federal and state accountability mandates were factors in the decision-making process, it seems that neither the district nor the school viewed student performance on the state exams as the "end result." Their plan incorporated many of the best instructional practices that have been recommended long before NCLB.

A few years before the administration and faculty learned of the formal construct for professional learning communities, they were already developing many of the aspects that are consistent with the PLC process. The staff began by addressing what was taught and discussing how students would demonstrate what they learned. They continued to use data to chart student learning as well as participation in support programs, such as summer school, tutoring, social service, and the school-based clinic. The notion of being "data driven" began to impact their thinking at a systems level. This idea was evident in the data they collected and reviewed in the decision-making processes that led to them becoming a PLC.

In summary, the data suggest that a PLC is evident in this case. Additionally, the data support that the PLC environment enabled teachers to use collaboration time as a tool for individualizing instruction for their students as well as a consensus-building tool for staff. Though more data are needed to establish a longitudinal trend for student performance, test scores from both teacher-made and state-mandated tests have begun to

improve. Additionally, teachers reported sharing and learning strategies and information with one another as a result of the PLC initiatives. Together, these data suggest that the PLC encouraged both staff and student learning.

Interpretations of Themes

Upon completion of the study, it was apparent that the five components of the PLC identified by Olivier, Huffman, and Hipp were not fully implemented. Based on the data gathered in this study, the components of shared values and vision and collective learning were most evident. Shared leadership was recognized by some of the most connected staff, but others indicated they were not integrally involved in the decision-making process. The indicators from the shared practices domain were reported and observed less often than other components of the PLC process. Two new themes were identified in the data: community partnerships and rethinking staff evaluation. Interpretations of data from each of the seven themes are discussed below.

Shared and Supportive Leadership

In defining effective leadership, Reeves (2002) states that "leaders are the architects of improved individual and organizational performance" (p. 12). This analogy is particularly consistent with Lisa's leadership style. When asked how she began to develop leadership among her staff, the principal described a conscious effort to cultivate teacher leaders. This statement is corroborated by the number of teachers emerging as equal partners in school governance, presenting at district-wide professional development sessions, and transitioning into administrative positions. Two teachers with more than ten years at Northeastern have recently been hired as a principal or assistant principal at other elementary schools within the district.

From the assistant principal's point of view, shared leadership is evident. Because Michelle had served in the role of an assistant under other administrators with different philosophies, she had a perspective of how this structure was different from others in the same school district. When asked about her current role, Michelle remarked, "Well, Lisa treats me like a co-principal, so anything I have ever wanted to do, she has supported me, and we make almost all of the decisions together and talk about things together before we ever do anything."

It was interesting to note that the assistant principal's role was not actualized at the site in the way in which it was conceptualized by the superintendent and other district officials (Personal communication, 2006). The original notion was to put an assistant principal in charge of the social support responsibilities to enable the principal to focus solely on instructional issues. Lisa and Michelle refuted that idea and opted to share the roles and responsibilities equally. The resulting model is much more consistent with the ideals of shared leadership.

Teachers also reiterated the presence of shared power with the administrative team. Data strongly supported this claim in the interviews, as every participant gave examples of this practice. Shared leadership was also apparent during the observations of teacher teams working during their grade level collaboration time. Small numbers (4-5 grade level teachers per team) enabled decisions to be reached by consensus. Additionally, document analysis supported this claim as the principal produced agendas for meetings held at the school and district level that provided an opportunity for staff to present their ideas for improving the school. One meeting with the Superintendent and other district directors yielded the blueprint for the increasing services for ELL students,

initiating a school-based clinic, expanding the after-school and summer programs, and lowering class sizes by returning specialty teachers to the classroom. Barriers for implementation of these changes seemed to be reduced because the ideas generated from conversations with the staff.

A few of the staff participating in the interview process responded in a surprising way regarding shared leadership. In speaking of instances of shared leadership at Northeastern, they gave examples of how decision making is shared from principal to teacher and from teacher to student.

Two teachers discussed examples when students were allowed to make decisions about their education that would traditionally be reserved for educators. The teachers' statements revealed more than shared leadership. They incorporated the use of relevant data, not just test scores, in the decision-making process. This is a key idea that is central to the collaboration meeting process and serves as evidence that they are internalizing and applying many of the PLC concepts.

It was interesting to see the relationship between personal goal setting and shared leadership. Both concepts were identified in the interviews as being a strategy for principals to share power with staff and for teachers to share power for students. In each situation, it is worth noting that the goal was empowerment.

It is interesting to note, however, that the survey statement (Question 12), pertaining to the principal sharing power and authority with staff, had one of the lower scores on the survey. Five staff members chose "Disagree" while 17 selected "Agree" and 10 chose "Strongly Agree." There seems to be two explanations for this discrepancy. One explanation seems to suggest that those staff who felt the principal did

not share power were not among those selected for interview. Another explanation might suggest that staff were less inhibited to report their true feelings in an anonymous survey.

It is apparent from the interviews that the administration uses collaboration time as an opportunity for face-to-face communication. However, the survey question under the *Shared Leadership* domain asked whether the staff had access to key information. Three staff members selected "Disagree," 19 selected "Agree," and 11 chose "Strongly Agree." This question yielded a mean score of 3.06. Since the survey was anonymous, there is no way to determine if the staff involved in collaboration had a more positive response to the question than other faculty, such as the media specialist, teachers' assistants, or counselor, who do not participate in collaboration time.

Ultimately, the idea of sharing leadership should place the leader in the role of a guide to enable the school to benefit from the collective talents and wisdom of the group. Reeves notes in his book, *The Daily Disciplines of Leadership* (2002), that "one of the most critical roles every leader plays is that of the teacher" (p. 29). Similar to students in a classroom, faculty members have different belief systems, levels of motivation, and knowledge bases. It is up to the principal as the lead teacher to meet those staff members where they are and give the resources and nurturing to continue to grow. Once the learner begins to engage actively in leading his or her own learning, both the individual learner and the organization are likely to benefit over time. Reeves (2002) says, "In this context, teaching and learning takes time, as so it is when leaders teach their colleagues about new values, visions, principles, and techniques" (p. 29).

Shared Values and Vision

Reeves (2002) writes that "a successful leader is, by definition, dissatisfied with the status quo" (p. 12). The success of the leader, however, is often predicated on his or her ability to allow the vision for change to include input from their stakeholders. Leaders anxious to see results often rush the process only to find that its effects were mitigated by their impatience and dominance.

The experience of serving as the assistant principal gave Lisa a unique opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the school while building trust with the staff. Though an administrator, she came to the assistant's role straight from the classroom of another Title school. This may have contributed to her being viewed as "one of them." When she was unexpectedly given the opportunity to lead the school after one year, she was well-situated to guide the process. While she already had ideas about things that needed to change, she had established the trust and credibility to begin the tough conversations.

In her first meeting as site principal, she asked for their input from the staff. Together, they identified processes that were working and those that were not. She instinctively asked for input and set the tone for her leadership style. In addition, she addressed organizational issues that would allow the school to run more smoothly.

Though many of the initial changes mentioned most by staff (discipline procedures, school rules, and judicious use of the intercom) appeared to be structural in nature, the goal in each of the rules seemed to be to establish high expectations for students, determine efficient processes for teachers, and establish a climate of respect,

consistency, and fairness. By getting the basics out of the way, the real efforts could be devoted to student learning.

Key events in 2002 seemed to serve as the tipping point for the change process. Staff morale and student learning were both headed in the wrong direction. The Academic Performance Index was ranking schools' performance, and the results were being published in newspapers across the state. The district's formative assessment program was testing students against curriculum benchmarks. Teachers were desperately trying to teach the most challenging and highly mobile students they had ever faced. Though some additional staff and instructional resources had been allocated to the school, it was still operating under an old paradigm. The most important variable that was yet unknown hinged on how the new principal would facilitate the inevitable.

When teachers were asked about how the vision was set for the school, many of them focused on the district office's involvement in changing the level of resources that were allocated to the school through community partnerships. Others attributed the establishment of a new vision as a response to the changing needs of the stakeholder. Regardless, the modification in resources allowed for the school to change its focus to becoming more student-centered. Most saw themselves as implementers of the vision and values. Though they identified the vision as "serving students academically, socially, and emotionally," they could not distinguish between the vision itself and the services needed to implement the vision.

Though the overall benefits of shared vision and values are numerous, it is important to acknowledge that the participatory role often takes more effort from the teacher. The reward, however, is worth the investment. Senge (1990) states, "When

there is a genuine vision (as opposed to the all-too-familiar 'vision statement'), people excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to" (p. 9). At the conclusion of one interview, Dawn summarized Senge's statement by saying "This is the first year I have seen it really kind of blatant-like…I know what I'm doing. I want to work at this level for myself."

Collective Learning and Application

The second theme is *Collective Learning and Application*. Though researchers such as Senge, Reeves, and Marzano have documented the many benefits of this practice, the opportunity for learning together in schools is often almost non-existent. Professional development, education's traditional approach to collective learning, is often far-removed and too infrequent to address the relevant issues facing educators. In addition, professional development initiatives often become a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum for adults that does not differentiate among individual learners. As a result of these challenges, Northeastern's staff looked beyond the five professional development days mandated by the state to create an ongoing opportunity to collaborate in grade level teams.

The assistant principal noted many of the key elements in the collaboration process. First, teachers decide on the goals and assessments to gauge student mastery. Second, the data must be relevant and timely to impact the instructional process. The Northeastern teachers look at classroom assessment data every two weeks. The process keeps the data both relevant (teachers decide how to measure mastery) and timely (teachers match the assessment to their instruction). In addition, teachers collectively

discuss instructional approaches and decide on the remediation strategies. By giving teachers control over these aspects of the data meeting, many missteps are avoided.

Though each of the grade levels were slightly different in their approach, each came with an agenda for the meeting that included role assignments (recorder, time-keeper, etc.), measurable goals that were time-bound, and data from the last meeting to gauge student mastery of the goals. An example of one agenda from a second grade team meeting can be found in Appendix H. By establishing and following an agenda school-wide, the meetings ran very efficiently and were viewed as productive by the staff.

Though teachers are accustomed to scoring their students' work, it is interesting to note that teachers often do not spend time reflecting on their own performance as evidenced by individual student mastery of the skills they are teaching. The collaboration process allows teachers the opportunity to examine their own data as well as discuss their class performance in the context of other classes. Oftentimes, this discussion turns to an instructional conversation rather than one merely about student scores.

The feedback about collaboration that came from the interview and survey held true in the observations of the team planning time. When the researcher initially explained the project to the faculty, it was clear that the researcher would be visiting each grade level. However, specific dates were not given to the teachers in advance. This was done in an attempt to capture a more authentic understanding of how the time was planned and spent.

Kindergarten teachers were the only group that identified a negative aspect to collaboration time. Both teachers expressed that time is a barrier in the collaboration process. Because they currently teach two sections of Kindergarten each day, they are

reluctant to give up time to plan together during the school day. One teacher stated, "With half-day (classes), just having the kids just 2 1/2 hours a day, the time is valuable, but sometimes just missing that 40 minutes (for collaboration) is hard." This is a valid concern, as the time spent in collaboration always affects their afternoon classes. As a result, they report being somewhat frustrated with losing the time with their students. One solution might be to alternate the schedule so collaboration occurs one week in the morning and the next week in the afternoon.

Other teams reported that they meet on a daily basis as an outgrowth of the collaboration process. To them, working collectively is the way they function as an individual. Senge (1990) states that "when you ask people about what it is like being part of a great team, what is most striking is the meaningfulness of the experience. People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative" (p.13).

It is interesting to note that faculty and administration did not express the common complaint of needing to "teach to the test" to increase achievement. This is especially surprising for two distinct reasons. First, teacher-designed tests and data analysis play an integral part in their PLC process. Second, Northeastern was cited in 2002 for not making AYP. One might guess the teachers would be very test-driven. Instead, they spoke of giving students and families the resources they need to improve. The concept of addressing the needs of the "whole child" was expressed more than once as their mission and they, for the first time in the school's history, felt more supported to achieve their goals.

Collectively, the data sets indicate that Lisa has done a lot to facilitate and nurture the collective learning process. Even in the hiring process, she uses a team approach to interview prospective staff. By doing so, she reiterates the importance of shared leadership and validates the wisdom of the existing staff to inform the selection process. By allowing teachers to have input in who is selected, the staff has a stake in their colleague's success. In addition, the value of teamwork is modeled for the new hire from the beginning as evidenced by how the staff conducts business.

Again, a movement toward working together is a huge shift away from the isolationism that is the norm in most schools. Senge (1990) reports, "It becomes quite clear that, for many, their experiences as part of truly great teams stand out as singular periods of life lived to the fullest. Some spend the rest of their lives looking for ways to recapture that spirit" (p. 13). Jane reiterates what Senge reports. "As a team, it was like, we chose these people. How could you not buy into who they are? It's just developed into being a beautiful friendship."

Shared Personal Practice

One of the key aspects of a professional learning community, *Shared Practices*, was not as evident in this case. The survey data showed approximately 25% indicated that they "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree" that "opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement." However, only 11% responded negatively to the statement "staff provides feedback to peers related to instructional practice." One explanation of that discrepancy comes from the interview data. Most teachers reported that collaboration time offered a time for teachers to provide feedback about issues raised during the meeting. When asked about the opportunity to observe the issue as it is

occurring rather than responding to the teacher's interpretation, only some of the teachers saw value in the observation process. When asked if teachers had an interest in observing others' teaching, several expressed interest, but few reported having the opportunity to do so.

While it may be unrealistic to assume that any school can implement all aspects of a PLC at one time, there is a delicate balance in facilitating change. It is important to remain sensitive to teachers' readiness levels without pushing all aspects of reform. Yet, it is important to make available resources when the staff is ready to embrace a new challenge.

It was interesting to note that, although the staff discusses curriculum issues with the grade levels above and below them, they hadn't really considered the value of watching the teacher teach a lesson. It was clear that, while they have been immersed in the many other aspects of a professional learning community, there was not a real readiness to commit to the process of shared practices.

Lisa concurred that teachers rarely, if ever, asked if she could assist them in arrangements to allow them to visit another classroom. In the interview, two follow-up questions were asked to understand why the practice was not occurring. Components of shared practice—specifically teachers observing colleagues during instruction—were the least evident. Interviews illuminated that most teachers were not quite ready to delve into this practice. While survey data showed they were quite comfortable talking about their teaching with colleagues, they were a bit intimidated by their colleagues actually observing the instructional process. As trust develops with staff and the collaboration

process becomes more transparent, the faculty may begin to seek out opportunities to watch each other teach.

Supportive Conditions

Supportive Conditions refers to the presence of a social and physical infrastructure to promote the PLC process. In the survey, this theme is divided into two sections: *Relationships* and *Structures*.

Data regarding the existence of strong relationships were evidenced in the survey, interviews, and observations. Many references to relationships appear as the direct quotes from teachers and administrators that are interwoven into responses about shared leadership and collective learning and application.

Relationships play a key role in the shared leadership between the site principal and assistant principal. It is clear that their relationship promotes efficiency and effectiveness. Their responses to interview questions indicate they have a lot of trust in and respect for one another. Informal observations of their interaction in the office and in collaboration meetings corroborate this finding. In addition, each spoke about the other's strong work ethic as a motivator to do her personal best.

One of the surprising issues raised by teachers was their concern about the redefining of the assistant principal's role. Initially, teachers were initially worried about the change. As shared by one teacher in the interview, there was an initial fear that the administrators would be less available to address their needs regarding curriculum and discipline issues. In this case, the principals remained mindful of the concern and worked hard to maintain their availability for the staff.

When asked about a change that has occurred in the last five years that has been perceived as a hindrance, a clear theme did not emerge from the responses. Two teachers identified the difficulty of implementing new programs as a hindrance. Though both articulated the importance of an evolving vision that responds to student needs, they each described symptoms of "initiative fatigue." One teacher in particular attributed this phenomenon as an outgrowth of being on the staff of an innovative school in a cutting-edge district. Consequently, administrators and policymakers need to be cognizant of the energy and time it takes for teachers to internalize new programs.

Though not mentioned in interviews or observations, staff responses to the survey indicate that some staff members are dissatisfied with the communication among district, school, and home. The data seem to suggest that the issue is not among staff at the school, but rather a lack of communication with either the district or home. To the statement, "Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff," only one participant indicated they "Disagree," 21 selected "Agree," and 11 chose "Strongly Agree." The next statement, "Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members," four participants selected "Disagree," 20 chose "Agree," and nine indicated they "Strongly Disagree." Data from this area should be considered by the principal to garner staff input regarding strengthening the communication process.

Two new themes not prevalent in the PLC literature emerged from the study. The first, *Community Partnerships*, was a major component in Northeastern's PLC. Because of its unique demographics, the PLC is strengthened immensely by the tremendous resources the community provides to the school. Another theme developed around the concept of a *Rethinking Staff Evaluations* model to be used within a PLC. Each of these themes contributes new information to the existing literature.

Community Partnerships

In regards to community partnerships, evidence in this case suggests that strong community partnerships played an integral part in the development of the PLC. Through the school-based clinic, social services agencies, and community health and wellness organizations, Northeastern can offer much needed services for students and their families. By sharing responsibility with the community partners, the school staff can hone in on the academic requirements of the students without neglecting their social and emotional needs.

This aspect proved to be critical in reducing the amount of stress felt by both administrators and teachers. Though it was evident that they understood the rising expectations for student achievement, they conveyed a new sense of empowerment to meet the challenge.

Since *Community Partnerships* was not a part of the PLC literature, none of the questions on the validated survey from Olivier, Hipp and Huffman were directed toward community partnerships. One question was added by the researcher. To the statement, "The [school-based clinic] has been a positive addition to Northeastern Elementary," 12 respondents selected "Agree," and the remaining 22 chose "Strongly Agree." The mean

for this item was 3.65 on a four-point scale. Quotes from staff during the interview process also pointed to the effectiveness of the clinic. Other community partnerships linked to the after- and summer school as well as the summer feeding program and "Bus Boutique." Other less intense relationships were also valued. One example was the new partnership between the school and a local Rotary club. Through a brainstorming meeting with school staff and Rotary leadership, they identified the need for volunteers to serve as "homeroom parents" for the school. This commitment consisted of the Rotarians assisting with winter and spring class parties by providing snacks and assisting the teacher during the party. The arrangement is a small investment in time and resources by the organization. However, teachers expressed a great amount of appreciation for the extra assistance that reduced both stress and expense for the staff.

Rethinking Staff Evaluations

The second emerging theme, *Rethinking Staff Evaluations*, grew primarily from responses by the principal and teachers to the interview questions. Though teacher evaluation models are not highlighted in the PLC literature, it becomes apparent that the traditional teacher evaluation model is inconsistent with the philosophy of the PLC. While some of DuFour's work mentions that teachers should be evaluated as to the contributions they make to their collaborative team, the principal remains in the conventional role of evaluator.

At Northeastern, however, the data suggest that the teacher evaluation model takes on a completely different format that resonates with the goals of the PLC. Rather than the principal telling the teacher how she thinks she is doing in meeting the principal or district-defined goals, Lisa asks the teacher what her goals are and how she wants to

achieve them. She stated in her interview that she attempts to "reverse" the traditional role by asking teachers to use self-reflection as the catalyst for goal setting and improvement.

Recommendations for Future Research

One of the recommendations for future research centers on the sustainability of the professional learning community, especially those that incorporate community partners. Although the school district and site have control over many of the aspects of the PLC, the stability of the community partnership component is based on many different variables. While this study did not focus particularly on the resources required to garner commitments from outside agencies, it is clear that it took a strong effort from the district office and, specifically, the assistant principal in order to establish the relationships. Future research could explore how the relationships and funding sources evolve and how time affects both the stability and quality of the services offered by community partners.

The implications for teacher evaluations would also be an interesting extension of this study. Because the entire PLC framework grew from the combination of several best practices, it would seem logical to incorporate the research being done in the area of authentic teacher evaluation. Work in this area would add another facet to the PLC literature by addressing a teacher accountability system that is consistent with the philosophical tenets of the process.

Another aspect for future consideration would be one focused on the selection and/or professional development of principals and teachers for a school that is working to become a PLC. The philosophy and practices of principals who are able to lead a faculty

that governs in this manner are complex. Though much has been written about both the instructional and democratic leader, is there yet another skill set that is necessary to thrive in the PLC environment?

Though parents were not included in the scope of this study, it would be interesting to conduct a study of their perceptions of the PLC. A study could explore their insights about the usefulness of the current program offerings for parents, such as onsite GED, health/wellness, and English language classes, and gather ideas for improvement. Specifically, one could examine parents' perspective of whether the benefits of the expanded services and eligibility for them would affect their decision to keep their children enrolled in the school.

An unusual opportunity exists for a comparative study of Northeastern Elementary in the Great Plains District and another elementary school in the Greenwood District. Both schools share similar demographics and offer many of the same structural services such as a school-based clinic, "Breakfast in a Bag," summer feeding programs, before- and after-care, and parent education classes. Due to their close proximity, they even share many of the same community partners. Starkly different, however, are the curricular programs that are being used to address student learning. While a PLC is evident at Northeastern, the other school district has purchased an external accountability system to focus the instructional process. A comparative study could examine whether the two different philosophies produced different results in staff and student learning.

While a PLC model was used to frame this study, a fresh perspective might be gained by reexamining the school without the use of a theoretical framework. Models can sometimes frame problems in a way that "offers preferred solutions that exclude

other, perhaps more promising, possibilities for understanding" (Bullough and Baughman, 1997). A more phenomenological approach may produce a new and different understanding of the PLC process.

Conclusions

According to Senge (1990), "the basic rationale for such organizations is that, in situations of rapid change, only those that are flexible, adaptive, and productive will excel. For this to happen, it is argued, organizations need to discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at *all* levels" (p. 4).

At Northeastern Elementary, the professional learning community process has been instrumental in facilitating this goal. The leadership naturally employs many of the practices that define a PLC, and the process, therefore, has been a relatively easy one for them to embrace. Teachers, however, were a bit more skeptical. Since the school has undergone significant change in the past five years, it is understandable that the staff would be less enamored by yet "one more thing." The data suggest that teachers are positive about the change because they recognize real value in utilizing the wisdom of their colleagues to meet the instructional needs of their students. In addition, they acknowledge the benefit that the community partnership services provide as being truly helpful to students and their families.

Because of the principals' leadership and successes at Northeastern, it is reasonable to expect that both the site principal and the assistant principal will have many opportunities for career advancement. Because of the unique challenges faced by the school and the unconventional means used to address them, it will be difficult for the district to replace the administrative team. Hopefully, the PLC will be strong enough for

the staff to sustain a succession in leadership. The assistant principal and one of the many emerging teacher leaders seem most likely to understand, continue, and further the important work that has been done at Northeastern.

Clearly, the evolution of becoming a PLC with strong community partnerships has had a greater impact than previous reform efforts. Data from the study suggest that the practices innate to the PLC have increased test scores and improved teacher morale. Though the curriculum maps and formative assessments help provide the standards and benchmarks for gauging student growth, one can see that the true strength of the PLC lies in the teacher-driven processes that respect the wisdom of the teachers and individuality of the learner.

Other districts and schools have begun to hear about "the change" occurring at Northeastern. It was first noticed when the school was not listed as last in test score rankings in the local newspaper. It has been reinforced by the staff sharing what they do in district and statewide professional development. Even when the staff focuses on the power of sharing leadership, providing additional time for teacher collaboration, and investing in community partnerships, inquiring school districts from across the state often ask, "Can we buy the tests you have developed?" When it is explained that the tests themselves are a very small part of the larger and more meaningful process, districts often lose interest.

Sadly, we have become a profession that seeks solutions to the many challenges we face by looking out the window when the real answers are found by looking in the mirror. Professional learning communities are the antithesis of the educational "silver bullet." They are built on the premise that both teaching and learning is best

accomplished when both the teacher and the learner are respected, empowered, and challenged to grow. It appears that, at least in this case, the PLC process is a catalyst for staff to seek wisdom and strength from one another to meet their students' individual needs.

The external pressures exerted on public schools have never been greater and the stakes have never been higher. The challenges are too great for schools to continue to act alone in finding real and sustainable solutions to meet the growing needs of students and their families. It is my hope that educators, teacher education institutions, and community leaders will look to the PLC concept for guidance in how we address the complex issues that are made even more difficult by a laser focus on school accountability.

By nature, the PLC framework respects the process of working together to respond to the unique needs of the learning community. I believe the investment of resources, understanding, respect, and collaboration can only serve to create the kind of school and community that truly leaves no child behind.

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APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

Mixed Methods Research

The researcher used a mixed method methodology to investigate the development and implementation of a professional learning community (PLC) to increase student and faculty learning within the demands of increasing school and teacher accountability. According to Creswell (1998), one of the most difficult tasks for a novice researcher lies in selecting the appropriate tradition, or strategies, for framing the study.

In this case, a mixed method study seemed most appropriate to examine the complex interactions in an elementary school serving diverse and highly mobile students. Mixed method studies are designed to incorporate the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to more fully describe the data being collected. Creswell (2003) states that by using this approach, the researcher "bases the inquiry on the assumption that collecting diverse types of data best provides an understanding of a research problem" (p. 21). By allowing for qualitative and quantitative data to be gathered and relying on varied strategies for analysis, a richer and more balanced picture of the processes, practices, and events is more likely to emerge.

A multiple method study was used to answer the research questions. This design is well suited for the topic as it allows for both numerical and contextual strategies to be applied in data collection and analysis. According to Stake (1995), mixed methodology studies are particularly appropriate as the "biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods" (p. 15). As a result, new means of determining congruence among data sets have resulted.

Both Yin and Stake have developed protocols that contribute to their validity and reliability. Stake (1995) stated that the strategies used to ensure accuracy and alternative explanations in case study are called triangulation. The need for triangulation arises from the ethical need to confirm the validity of the processes.

According to Stake (1995), a mixed method approach is designed to allow for:

- Both predetermined and emerging methods
- Both open and closed-ended questions
- Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities
- Statistical and text analysis (p.17)

Additionally, Creswell (2003) concludes that the mixed method design allows for the researcher to "base knowledge claims on pragmatic grounds (e.g. consequence-oriented, problem-centered, and pluralistic). It employs strategies of inquiry that involve data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems" (p. 18). In this case, the researcher used a concurrent triangulation strategy within a mixed method study to elaborate on the findings of a quantitative survey with three sources of qualitative data (interview, observation, and document analysis). The study began with a survey to provide broad data and then focused on a more personalized account of the results to give voice to the participants.

Statement and Significance of the Problem

As a result of increasing federal, state, and district accountability initiatives, school administrators and teachers are feeling the pressure to improve student achievement while using sound educational practices to promote overall student learning.

Oftentimes, educators have felt that these two initiatives are in conflict with one another. As a result, they have struggled with how to deliver on both commitments.

This study attempts to illuminate how one school created a professional learning community as a forum for increasing both staff and student learning opportunities. This study sought to determine if the establishment of professional learning communities may be a viable strategy for addressing accountability demands while encouraging the use of best instructional practices.

A mixed method study was conducted to determine both how a professional learning community was created in this school and whether it affected student and faculty learning. The researcher studied the school setting, site administration, school climate, and instructional processes for the students. The researcher examined archival documents, including test scores, state-mandated reports, and Title I plans. The study utilized data gathered from three additional sources—formal survey, group observation, and semi-structured interview.

Two specific research questions were designed to focus the study:

1. How was a Professional Learning Community (PLC) developed and implemented in this case?
2. What, if any, concepts in the PLC model impacted student and faculty learning?

These questions have implications for the historical and political context in which accountability models are examined. It will attempt to describe one site's efforts to cope with a high accountability culture that promotes student-centered learning through professional collaboration and reflection.

Though accountability has always been a force in education policy, the degree to which it impacted individual schools and districts changed drastically with a new federal agenda in 2000. In 2001, the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act became the most far-reaching federal education bill since the 1960s. Though touted as revolutionary for its provisions for parent choice, flexibility, and research-based instruction, the major policy value of the bill is definitely one of school accountability and educational excellence. The accountability focus of the bill is primarily tied to student performance on high-stakes tests. The consequences of students not achieving "adequate yearly progress" (AYP) are severe: districts paying to transport students to achieving schools, paying for student supplemental services, firing administrators and teachers, and ultimately, the loss in federal funding.

Juxtaposed to the accountability-driven system of sanctions is a requirement for districts to utilize research-based, best practices to achieve student success. Since schools targeted as having an "achievement gap" usually serve students of diverse and often disparate backgrounds, the one-size-fits-all strategies, that are often employed to diminish the gap, can actually serve to widen it. As a result, districts and schools are searching for models that are an appropriate "means to the end" of increasing learning for each individual student.

The divergence of two philosophical models, specifically bureaucratic and professional accountability, represents a current struggle of many educators who do not wish to sacrifice student-centered learning for standards-based instruction and assessment. Though the question would be bounded in scope by its focus on one

elementary school, the findings that result may have aspects that are able to be generalized to other schools in the district as well as other school systems.

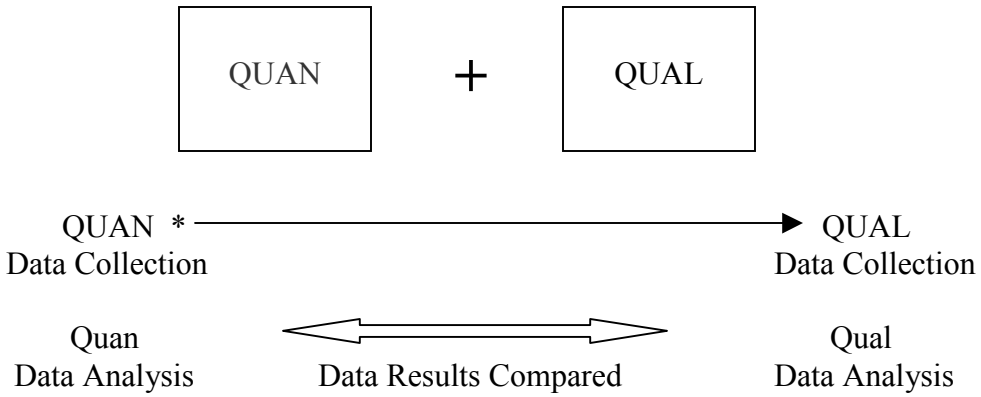
Procedures and Time Frame

This case study examined a Title I school that, over the past ten years, has been the site for several school improvement initiatives with a varying record of student achievement. From 2002-2005, the school has been working toward the idea of becoming a professional learning community as a means for better meeting the needs of the students they serve. The researcher used a survey, observations, interviews, and document analysis as a means of communicating and understanding their strategies, processes, values and beliefs. Observations and interviews occurred from October 15 through December 31, 2005. Document analysis was used throughout the scope of the study. Descriptive statistics were used to examine standardized test scores from the Oklahoma School Testing Program from 2000-2005.

Data Collection Sources and Methods

The researcher was granted verbal and written permission by the district superintendent to conduct the case study at this elementary school. Written permission was easily obtained as the scope of this study meets the criteria for doctoral level research as outlined by local board policy. The school principal was contacted in person, and she expressed a desire for her site to participate in the study.

The mixed method study utilized data collection techniques of observation, semi-structured interview, document analysis, and a formal survey instrument. Data were gathered and analyzed using a model based primarily on the concurrent triangulation strategy as indicated by the following figure (Creswell, 2003):



The arrow denoted by the asterisk was added by the researcher to emphasize the sequence in which the data were collected. In this case, a quantitative survey was given first and then survey data were analyzed. One aspect of the qualitative data, interviews, was based on the findings of the survey. The interview questions were designed to enable the participants to respond to particular issues that were illuminated by the survey. The second source of qualitative data, observations, was not based on the survey findings but on the themes emerging from the literature review and interviews. In the data analysis process, however, the quantitative data were held in equal priority to the qualitative data. This new way of interpreting data produced a strategy that was a hybrid of a particular model, concurrent triangulation strategy, presented by Creswell (2003).

To make a case for the research problem, many sources of data were gleaned from archived primary source documents such as federal law, policy statements, and existing research. This research formed the basis of the literature review. A mixed method study was used to gain insight into the research questions. Four main data sets were utilized: survey, interviews, observation, and document analysis.

Survey

A statistically validated survey was used to gauge the presence of components of a professional learning community at the site. As suggested by Creswell (2003), the researcher chose to survey a large number of individuals and follow up with a few of them to obtain their specific language and voices about the topic.

The sample population included the school principal, assistant principal, classroom teachers, and resource personnel. *The Professional Learning Communities Assessment* (Olivier, Huffman, and Hipp, 2003) was utilized as the survey instrument, as it was already shown to be a valid tool.

The survey contains statements about practices that occur at the school level. The instrument served as a descriptive tool of the five dimensions of professional learning communities: shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. Participants were asked to respond to statements about practices occurring at their school that are consistent with those employed by professional learning communities. The instrument uses a four point, forced-choice Likert scale ranging from 1=Strongly Disagree to 4=Strongly Agree. Descriptive statistics were used to communicate the findings. Data included minimum and maximum values, frequencies, item means, and standard deviations.

The survey questions were administered online using the district email accounts and Quia, a web-based survey tool, to gather and warehouse the data. Surveys were sent to staff that had been employed at the school since August 2004 or longer.

A return rate of 80% was desired (Dillman, 1999). Since the survey was anonymous, follow-up emails were sent to all staff members encouraging them to

respond within the two-week time frame. After two weeks, only 56% of the population had responded. After allowing for an additional two-week response time, 34 of 45 possible participants had responded yielding a 76% return rate.

Surveys were anonymous and self-administered via an online survey instrument. Sampling error was reduced by including both administrators and all certified staff meeting the selection criteria (employment since August 2004). Coverage error was reduced by each participant already having their own computer and email account. In addition, several other surveys have been administered online by the district, so the concept is not foreign to existing staff.

Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with site administrators and two teachers per grade level in Kindergarten through fifth grade. Participants were purposively sampled from administrators, teachers, and support staff that have been at the school for at least the past two years.

The interview questions for principals and teachers were developed to address the specific research questions of this study as well as provide follow-up to the questions posed in the survey instrument. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, and permission was obtained to audiotape the entire interview process. Prior to concluding the interview session, the researcher asked for clarification of the responses if needed. Additionally, participants were provided with the opportunity to clarify and comment on any of the issues discussed during the interview process.

Document Analysis

Document analysis consisted of primarily public documents, such as the Title I plan, State Department of Education reports, demographic information as published in the district's Annual Report, aggregate free/reduced lunch data, and group standardized test scores. The district and site demographic data were obtained from Great Plains' Executive Director of Pupil Accounting. Data points, such as demographics information, are already being tracked and stored in the district's student management program. Many of the demographic categories are determined by the information given by parents at enrollment and updated on an annual basis. Additional documents, such as the School-wide Title I Plan, were obtained from the site principal.

School accountability data as well as district and site demographic data were obtained from websites from the Oklahoma Office of Accountability (www.schoolreportcard.org) and the Oklahoma State Department of Education (www.sde.state.ok.us). Additional quantitative data were obtained from the test results from the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Tests (OCCT), state-mandated annual reports, and district demographic reports.

Using the OCCT, individual student scores on the reading and mathematics assessments place achievement levels into one of four performance levels: advanced, satisfactory, limited knowledge, and unsatisfactory. Students scoring advanced or satisfactory are deemed to have "passed" the test. One of the barriers to fully utilizing test data as an indicator of student achievement is the lack of consistency among test types across school years. In the case of 3rd grade, the test format has changed three times over the past five years. In 1999, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills was used by the

state. In 2000, no third grade test was administered at the state level. In 2002, 2003, and 2004, the Stanford-9 norm-referenced test was used. In 2005, the state implemented its first criterion-referenced test for third grade. With the exception of 1999-2000 when no test was administered, scores for third grade were reported in National Percentile Rankings prior to 2004-2005. In 2005, scores are reported as "percent scoring satisfactory and advanced" against the state-defined performance benchmark.

Though the scenario described above presents a significant barrier to longitudinal analysis, standardized test data represents a snapshot of student learning on one indicator. Even when test formats remain consistent over time, student groups change from year to year making it difficult to attribute change in scores solely to one factor or another.

Observations

Direct observation of group interactions were conducted to record, in a consistent and structured manner, what the researcher observed while informally visiting faculty meetings and grade level meetings. Observations were conducted to investigate how the processes of professional learning communities are present in the group interactions at the site. Data were recorded by careful note-taking instead of audio-taping. Rather than attributing quotes or behaviors to specific individuals, the researcher focused on the events and processes occurring in the group dynamics of the meeting. In short, the researcher sought evidence of the five dimensions of professional learning communities: supportive and shared leadership, shared values and norms, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions (Huffman and Hipp, 2004).

An open-ended, narrative type of observation was utilized to insure that every event could be deemed worthy of documentation. The informal observations allowed the researcher to record group interactions, language, and physical setting. The role of the researcher is one of observer. Observations were coded and themed in order to generate assumptions. Observations occurred from October 15 through December 31.

Data Analyses/Interpretation

Once the data were collected, the next step was assimilation and analysis. Since the study was based on a mixed method design, procedures consistent with this model were employed to analyze multiple data sets. The benefits of doing a mixed method study is that narrative, contextual information can be gleaned from a variety of sources around a bounded case. This methodology allows for an emergent design that flows from a real-world situation.

Using data transformation, the researcher attempted to quantify much of the qualitative data resulting from both the interviews and observations. Coding was used as a means of conceptualizing – not merely summarizing – the data (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The researcher used coding to ask questions about the data, identifying and naming initial categories, and labeling and grouping specific events to form themes across the data. Though several of the emerging themes were consistent with the PLC literature, new and unexpected themes developed from the interviews.

As a component of the study's design, data from interviews, documents, and observations were triangulated to decrease the dependence on a single source of data. By using triangulation of multiple data sources, the likelihood of producing a valid finding was dramatically increased.

One issue of relevance would be the presence of self-biases and its effect on trustworthiness. The question examines the school culture of site within the district for where the researcher is employed as a central office administrator. Since the researcher is vested in the processes that are utilized within the district, she made a conscious transition into the role of researcher as observer. This effect was mitigated by scrupulous record-keeping and impartial analysis. Regardless, the researcher remained open in addressing biases in interpreting the data.

The reliability of the data could become a limitation of the study. Since the researcher holds an administrative position in the Teaching and Learning department at the district office, it is important to neutralize the degree in which the researcher's social/professional position colors the data as it is provided by the school staff.

One of the additional concerns, internal validity, was addressed by the use of survey questions created outside of this study. Finally, the limitations in generalizability of findings from this study should be recognized. Since "generalization is not a fundamental component of this type of research," the researcher should not be bothered by this limitation (Anderson, 1998).

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEWS

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Project
Conducted under the Guidelines of the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus

This is a study conducted by Kathy Dodd, graduate student at the University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus. This study's title is "It's the process, not the test: A case study of one elementary school in Oklahoma." The purpose of this study is to examine how one school incorporated the tenets of a professional learning community (PLC) to address growing accountability demands. Participants will be interviewed and asked questions about how their school has utilized the dimensions of a PLC over the past two years. Dimension topics will include: shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. Interviews will last up to 45 minutes and will be audiotape recorded with permission. Breaks will be provided as needed. Participants will be provided with a transcript of the interview to indicate anything that cannot be quoted. Participation is voluntary, and there will be no penalty for refusing to participate. Participation may be discontinued at any time without penalty.

All participants will be assigned a pseudonym under which all interview tapes and transcriptions will be noted. No reference will be made to name, address, email, or phone number. Interview tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, and transcripts will be saved on a secure password protected computer hard drive. As a participant, you will have the benefit of sharing your educational experiences in becoming a part of a professional learning community. If the interviews bring out any memories that cause stress or discomfort, you will be referred to a counseling agency.

This research is being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma Norman Campus. If you have questions regarding the project please contact Kathy Dodd, 918.814.7748. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Administration at 405.325.8110.

Please check below to indicate your preference:

_____ I consent to being audio taped.

____ I consent to being quoted.

____ I do not consent to being audio taped and quoted.

I hereby agree to participate in the above-described research. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may discontinue at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. Please sign and date below indicating your understanding of the above information.

_____ _____
Signature Date

_____
Printed Name

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FOR SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Informed Consent for Survey Instrument

Dear Educator:

I invite you to participate in a research study being conducted under the auspices of the University of Oklahoma-Norman campus titled "It's the process, not the test". The survey is one component of a case study I am conducting at your school. The survey will include 50 questions related to your background and professional experiences at Northeastern Elementary and will focus on how your school has used many of the processes of professional learning communities. It will take approximately 20 minutes to complete, and the findings from this project will provide information on how school districts and sites may use strategies such as collaboration and shared decision making as a means of addressing growing accountability concerns. If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to contact me at 918.814.7748 or dodd.kathy@unionps.org.

To agree to participate, click on the link below:

http://www.quia.com/sv/65468.html

APPENDIX D: PERMISSION TO USE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

-----Original Message-----
From: Janie Huffman [mailto:huffman@unt.edu]
Sent: Tuesday, September 06, 2005 2:43 PM
To: Dodd, Kathy
Subject: Re: FW: Request to Use Instrument

Kathy,
Hello. I am pleased you are able to incorporate our research and the PLCA in your case study. You have permission to use the PLCA and I am attaching it. Please let me know how you are using it and the results you achieve.

Thanks,
Janie Huffman

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APPENDIX E: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES ASSESSMENT

Professional Learning Communities Assessment

NOTE: Survey is actually delivered via an online survey tool. The questions appear as below, with a radio button used to select a response.

Directions:

This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the five dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. There are no right or wrong responses. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Shade the appropriate oval provided to the right of each statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement.

Key Terms:

Principal	=	Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal
Staff	=	All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students
Stakeholders	=	Parents and community members

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)
2 = Disagree (D)
3 = Agree (A)
4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

Professional Learning Community Assessment

Item		Statements	Scale			
			SD	D	A	SA
*1.	Respondent Details	Ethnicity	N/A			
*2.		Gender				
*3.		Role				
*4.		Number of years employed at Northeastern Elementary				
*5.		Number of years in education profession				
6.	Shared and Supportive Leadership	The staff is consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0	0	0	0
7.		The principal incorporates advice from staff to make decisions.	0	0	0	0
8.		The staff has accessibility to key information.	0	0	0	0
9.		The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0	0	0	0
10.		Opportunities are provided for staff to initiate change.	0	0	0	0
11.		The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0	0	0	0
12.		The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	0	0	0	0
13.		Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff.	0	0	0	0
14.		Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	0	0	0	0
15.		Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	0	0	0	0
16.	Shared Values and Vision	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	0	0	0	0
17.		Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
18.		The staff shares visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	0	0	0	0
19.		Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	0	0	0	0
20.		A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	0	0	0	0

Item		Statements	Scale			
			SD	D	A	SA
21.	Shared Values and Vision	School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0	0	0	0
22.		Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	0	0	0	0
23.		Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
24.	Collective Learning and Application	The staff work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0	0	0	0
25.		Collegial relationships exist among staff that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	0	0	0
26.		The staff plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0	0	0	0
27.		A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	0	0	0	0
28.		The staff engages in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0	0	0	0
29.		Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
30.		School staff and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	0	0	0	0
31.		School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning.	0	0	0	0
32.	Shared Personal Practice	Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	0	0	0
33.		The staff provides feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
34.		The staff informally shares ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0	0	0	0
35.		The staff collaboratively reviews student work to share and improve instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
36.		Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0	0	0	0
37.		Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0	0	0	0

Item		Statements	Scale			
			SD	D	A	SA
38.	Supportive Conditions – Relationships	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	0	0	0
39.		A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0	0	0	0
40.		Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	0	0	0	0
41.		School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0	0	0	0
42.	Supportive Conditions – Structures	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	0	0	0
43.		The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	0	0	0	0
44.		Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	0	0	0	0
45.		Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	0	0	0
46.		Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0	0	0	0
47.		The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting.	0	0	0	0
48.		The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	0	0	0	0
49.		Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff.	0	0	0	0
50.		Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	0	0	0	0
*51.		Additional Question	0	0	0	0
*52.		Additional Information from Respondents	0	0	0	0

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Source: Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2003). Professional learning community assessment. In J. B. Huffman & K. K. Hipp (Eds.). *Reculturing schools as professional learning communities.* Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.

*Items 1-5 and 51-52 were added by the researcher.

APPENDIX F: NORTHEASTERN INSTRUCTIONAL STAFF SURVEY

Professional Learning Community Assessment

Item		Ethnicity	Count	Percentage	Mean		
1.	Respondent Details	African American or Black	0	0.00%			
		Asian or Pacific Islander	0	0.00%			
		Caucasian or White	30	88.24%			
		Hispanic/Mexican American	1	2.94%			
		Native American or American Indian	3	8.82%			
		Total	34				
2.		**Gender**	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Female	31	91.18%			
		Male	3	8.82%			
		Total	34				
3.		**Role**	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Administrator	2	5.88%			
		PK-2nd Grade Teacher	6	17.65%			
		3-5th Grade Teacher	14	41.18%			
		All Grade Levels Teacher (ex: counselor, art, music and PE)	6	17.65%			
		Special Population Teacher (ex: gifted, ELL, special education)	4	11.76%			
		Support Staff (office staff and paraprofessionals)	2	5.88%			
		Total	34				
4.		**Number of Years Employed at Northeastern Elementary**	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		One to Two Years	6	17.65%			
		Three to Five Years	5	14.71%			
		Six to Eight Years	8	23.53%			
		Ten to Twelve Years	7	20.59%			
		Thirteen to Fifteen Years	3	8.82%			
		Sixteen to Twenty Years	3	8.82%			
		Twenty Years or More	2	5.88%			
		Total	34				
5.		**Number of Years in Education Profession**	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		One to Two Years	6	17.65%			
		Three to Five Years	6	17.65%			
		Six to Eight Years	4	11.76%			
		Ten to Twelve Years	8	23.53%			
		Thirteen to Fifteen Years	1	2.94%			
		Sixteen to Twenty Years	4	11.76%			
		Twenty Years or More	5	14.71%			
		Total	34				

Item		Statements/Data					
6.	Shared and Supportive Leadership	**The staff is consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	3	8.82%	3		
		Agree	19	55.88%	57		
		Strongly Agree	12	35.29%	48		
				Mean:	3.18	3.18	
7.		**The principal incorporates advice from staff to make decisions.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	2	6.06%	2		
		Agree	15	45.45%	45		
		Strongly Agree	16	48.48%	64		
				Mean:	3.26	3.26	
8.		**The staff has accessibility to key information.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	3	9.09%	3		
		Agree	19	57.58%	57		
		Strongly Agree	11	33.33%	44		
				Mean:	3.06	3.06	
9.		**The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Disagree	2	6.06%	2		
		Agree	8	24.24%	24		
		Strongly Agree	22	66.67%	88		
				Mean:	3.38	3.38	
10.		**Opportunities are provided for staff to initiate change.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	3	9.09%	3		
		Agree	15	45.45%	45		
		Strongly Agree	15	45.45%	60		
				Mean:	3.18	3.18	
11.		**The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Disagree	3	8.82%	3		
		Agree	14	41.18%	42		
		Strongly Agree	16	47.06%	64		
				Mean:	3.24	3.24	

Item		Statements/Data					
12.	Shared and Supportive Leadership	**The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	5	15.62%	5		
		Agree	17	53.12%	51		
		Strongly Agree	10	31.25%	40		
				Mean:	2.82	2.82	
13.		**Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	2	6.06%	2		
		Agree	17	51.52%	51		
		Strongly Agree	14	42.42%	56		
				Mean:	3.21	3.21	
14.		**Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	5	15.62%	5		
		Agree	14	43.75%	42		
		Strongly Agree	13	40.62%	52		
				Mean:	2.91	2.91	
15.		**Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	1	3.12%	1		
		Agree	22	68.75%	66		
		Strongly Agree	9	28.12%	36		
				Mean:	3.03	3.03	
					Shared and Supportive Leadership Mean:		**3.13**
16.	Shared Values and Vision	**A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	18	56.25%	54		
		Strongly Agree	14	43.75%	56		
				Mean:	3.24	3.24	

Item		Statements/Data					
17.	Shared Values and Vision	**Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	23	69.70%	69		
		Strongly Agree	10	30.30%	40		
				Mean:	3.21	3.21	
18.		**The staff shares visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	16	47.06%	48		
		Strongly Agree	17	50.00%	68		
				Mean:	3.44	3.44	
19.		**Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	12	35.29%	36		
		Strongly Agree	22	64.71%	88		
				Mean:	3.65	3.65	
20.		**A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Agree	14	41.18%	42		
		Strongly Agree	19	55.88%	76		
				Mean:	3.50	3.50	
21.		**School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	12	35.29%	36		
		Strongly Agree	21	61.76%	84		
				Mean:	3.56	3.56	

Item		Statements/Data					
22.	Shared Values and Vision	**Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	12	35.29%	36		
		Strongly Agree	22	64.71%	88		
				Mean:	3.65	3.65	
23.		**Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	3	8.82%	3		
		Agree	21	61.76%	63		
		Strongly Agree	10	29.41%	40		
				Mean:	3.12	3.12	
						Shared Values and Vision Mean:	**3.42**
24.	Collective Learning and Application	**The staff work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Agree	15	45.45%	45		
		Strongly Agree	16	48.48%	64		
				Mean:	3.26	3.26	
25.		**Collegial relationships exist among staff that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Agree	17	51.52%	51		
		Strongly Agree	14	42.42%	56		
				Mean:	3.21	3.21	
26.		**The staff plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	16	47.06%	48		
		Strongly Agree	18	52.94%	72		
				Mean:	3.53	3.53	

Item		Statements/Data					
27.	Collective Learning and Application	**A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Agree	17	50.00%	51		
		Strongly Agree	16	47.06%	64		
				Mean:	3.41	3.41	
28.		**The staff engages in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	2	5.88%	2		
		Agree	17	50.00%	51		
		Strongly Agree	15	44.12%	60		
				Mean:	3.32	3.32	
29.		**Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	19	57.58%	57		
		Strongly Agree	14	42.42%	56		
				Mean:	3.32	3.32	
30.		**School staff and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Agree	21	63.64%	63		
		Strongly Agree	11	33.33%	44		
				Mean:	3.18	3.18	
31.		**School staff is committed to programs that enhance learning.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	14	41.18%	42		
		Strongly Agree	20	58.82%	80		
				Mean:	3.59	3.59	
Collective Learning and Application Mean:							3.35

Item		Statements/Data					
32.	Shared Personal Practice	**Opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Disagree	8	23.53%	8		
		Agree	15	44.12%	45		
		Strongly Agree	10	29.41%	40		
				Mean:	2.76	2.76	
33.		**The staff provides feedback to peers related to instructional practices.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	4	11.76%	4		
		Agree	19	55.88%	57		
		Strongly Agree	11	32.35%	44		
				Mean:	3.09	3.09	
34.		**The staff informally shares ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	13	38.24%	39		
		Strongly Agree	21	61.76%	84		
				Mean:	3.62	3.62	
35.		**The staff collaboratively reviews student work to share and improve instructional practices.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	14	38.24%	42		
		Strongly Agree	20	61.76%	80		
				Mean:	3.59	3.59	
36.		**Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	1	3.12%	1		
		Agree	22	68.75%	66		
		Strongly Agree	9	28.12%	36		
				Mean:	3.03	3.03	

Item		Statements/Data					
37.	Shared Personal Practice	**Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	19	55.88%	57		
		Strongly Agree	15	44.12%	60		
				Mean:	3.44	3.44	
					Shared Personal Practice Mean:		**3.26**
38.	Supportive Conditions: Relationships	**Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Agree	13	38.24%	39		
		Strongly Agree	19	55.88%	76		
				Mean:	3.44	3.44	
39.		**A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Agree	16	48.48%	48		
		Strongly Agree	15	45.45%	60		
				Mean:	3.24	3.24	
40.		**Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	4	11.76%	4		
		Agree	13	38.24%	39		
		Strongly Agree	17	50.00%	68		
				Mean:	3.26	3.26	
41.		**School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	2	6.06%	2		
		Agree	20	60.61%	60		
		Strongly Agree	11	33.33%	44		
				Mean:	3.12	3.12	
					Supportive Conditions: Relationships Mean:		3.27

Item		Statements/Data					
42.	Supportive Conditions: Structures	**Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	2	5.88%	2		
		Agree	14	41.18%	42		
		Strongly Agree	18	52.94%	72		
				Mean:	3.41	3.41	
43.		**The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	18	52.94%	54		
		Strongly Agree	16	47.06%	64		
				Mean:	3.47	3.47	
44.		**Fiscal resources are available for professional development.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Agree	17	50.00%	51		
		Strongly Agree	16	47.06%	64		
				Mean:	3.41	3.41	
45.		**Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	2	5.88%	2		
		Agree	18	52.94%	54		
		Strongly Agree	14	41.18%	56		
				Mean:	3.29	3.29	
46.		**Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	19	55.88%	57		
		Strongly Agree	15	44.12%	60		
				Mean:	3.44	3.44	

Item		Statements/Data					
47.	Supportive Conditions: Structures	**The school facility is clean, attractive, and inviting.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	10	29.41%	30		
		Strongly Agree	23	67.65%	92		
				Mean:	3.62	3.62	
48.		**The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	1	2.94%	1		
		Disagree	3	8.82%	3		
		Agree	16	47.06%	48		
		Strongly Agree	14	41.18%	56		
				Mean:	3.18	3.18	
49.		**Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	1	3.03%	1		
		Agree	21	63.64%	63		
		Strongly Agree	11	33.33%	44		
				Mean:	3.18	3.18	
50.		**Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	4	12.12%	4		
		Agree	20	60.61%	60		
		Strongly Agree	9	27.27%	36		
				Mean:	2.94	2.94	
						Supportive Conditions: Structures Mean:	**3.35**
51	Additional Question	**The Bedlam Clinic has been a positive addition to Northeastern Elementary.**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		Strongly Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Disagree	0	0.00%	0		
		Agree	12	35.29%	36		
		Strongly Agree	22	64.71%	88		
				Mean:	3.65	3.65	
						Additional Question (Bedlam Clinic) Mean:	3.65

Item		Statements/Data					
51.	Additional Information	**Is there any additional information you would like to provide?**					
		Position	**Count**	**Percentage**	**Mean**		
		#12-Democratic does not mean sharing power and authority (I feel). A principal must have the power and authority to maintain the school.	1	25.00%			
		Northeastern has a very positive role model through the office staff, and this keeps up the morale of the faculty and staff.	1	25.00%			
		Northeastern Rocks!	1	25.00%			
		It would be nice if there was more time for collaboration. We meet once every two weeks, but many times we have special events/days off that keep us from meeting. I think my team has had a collaboration time three times this entire school year.	1	25.00%			

Summary Data	
SHARED AND SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP	3.13
SHARED VISION AND VALUES	3.42
COLLECTIVE LEARNING AND APPLICATION	3.35
SHARED PERSONAL PRACTICE	3.26
SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS: RELATIONSHIPS	3.27
SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS: STRUCTURES	3.35
TOTAL	3.30

APPENDIX G: TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

Teacher/Grade Level:
Date/Time:
Interviewer: Kathy Dodd

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The purpose of this interview is to glean information about the processes and programs that affect student achievement at your school. This interview constitutes part of my research about your school for use in a doctoral dissertation through the University of Oklahoma. Please know that your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Your name will not be associated in any way to your responses.

Before we begin, I would like to ask your permission to audiotape this interview. The tape will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. I have nine questions for you. Please stop me at any time if I need to clarify or restate the question.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Tell me about how you decided to teach at Northeastern.
2. Describe the principal's role in establishing shared and supportive leadership. Can you give me an example?
3. Describe the assistant principal's focus on community resources.
4. Tell me how collaboration time is spent in your grade level. Tell me about its strengths and weaknesses.
5. Were you involved in setting the vision and values of your school? If yes, how so? If not, why was that the case?
6. Do opportunities exist for staff to observe peers and offer encouragement? How could we give more opportunities for this practice?
7. Much has changed at Northeastern over the past five years. Tell me about the decision-making process that has led to that change.
8. Has there been any one change that has occurred over the past five years (schedule, communication tool, resource, etc.) that has been the most helpful to you? Has there been one that has become a hindrance? If so, why?
9. Tell me about the community partnerships at your school. What has been their impact on your classroom?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we haven't discussed?

Do you have any questions? Do you wish to clarify any of your answers? Again, thank you for your participation.

Concluding time_____

APPENDIX H: AGENDA FOR 2ND GRADE COLLABORATION

11-29-03

Math Focus Areas:

1. Money-value/name of coins, count value of like and mixed coin amounts

2. Place Value- knows value of each flats, longs and cubes (place value blocks); Write a given number in standard form up to hundreds place and identify place value.

Goal Statement: 85% of 2nd grade students will achieve 80% accuracy on the money and place value post assessment by December 20, 2005.

Time Frame: November 22, 2005 - December 20, 2005

Pre and Post Test: Teacher created assessment based on Secure Goals from EDM series and verified PASS objectives.

Mastery: 80% on given assessment

Record and Discuss results of money and place value pre-assessment data.

Brainstorm Instructional Strategies for Math Focus Areas:

Money-
1. Nonlinguistic Representation-Touch Math Coins
2. Cooperative Learning groups-EDM $$ math games
3. Identify similarities and differences of coins- EDM $$ card games-concentration and war and connections of place value to money, $$ dominoes.

Place Value-
1. Cooperative Learning- EDM Place Value Math Game/ (caterpillar/ butterfly game)
2. Nonlinguistic Representations-color coded movement game of place values. Use place value blocks to name various numbers.
3. Similarities and Differences-Graphic organizers of different places in numbers and their values.