2012

Professional Learning Communities in Improved Illinois Elementary Schools: The Value of Professional Learning Communities for Leaders of Illinois Elementary Schools Formerly in "no Child Left Behind" Status

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN IMPROVED ILLINOIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS: THE VALUE OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR LEADERS OF ILLINOIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS FORMERLY IN “NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND” STATUS

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN ADMINISTRATION AND SUPERVISION

BY STEVEN JAMES THOMAS

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

DECEMBER 2012
To Noah, Ethan and Sherri
For your constant encouragement
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: ACCOUNTABILITY</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEARCH</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: DATA FROM ILLINOIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEADERS</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: ILLINI EQUAL STEPS MODEL</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: ELECTRONIC SURVEY TOOL</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCE LIST</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Respondents Location Counts and Expected Counts .............................................48
Table 2. Respondents Enrollment Counts and Expected Counts ...........................................49
Table 3. Responding Schools Self-Reported Grades Served ..............................................50
Table 4. Structural Reforms for Reading and Math Performance and Professional Learning Communities Elements ..................................................................................51
Table 5. Structural Reforms for Reading Performance ....................................................52
Table 6. Structural Reforms for Mathematics Performance .............................................53
Table 7. Professional Learning Communities Knowledge, Implementation and Value .......53
Table 8. The Value of Professional Learning Communities Elements by School Group .55
Table 9. Components of the Three Value Indices ..............................................................56
Table 10. Cronbach Alpha Tests on Structural Reforms and PLC Element Indices .........57
Table 11. Values for PLC Elements and Structural Reforms in Reading and Math by School Group ........................................................................................................58
Table 12. Research Question 1 - Paired Samples Test with Successful School Leaders Value of PLC Elements and Value of Structural Reforms in Reading ....................59
Table 13. Research Question 1 - Paired Samples Test Successful School Leaders Value of PLC Elements and Value of Structural Reforms in Mathematics .........................60
Table 14. Research Question 2 - Paired Samples Test Restructuring School Leaders Value of PLC Elements and Value of Structural Reforms in Reading .........................61
Table 15. Research Question 2 - Paired Samples Test Restructuring School Leaders Value of PLC Elements and Value of Structural Reforms in Mathematics .....................62
Table 16. Research Question 3 – Successful School Leaders and Restructuring School Leaders Value of PLC Elements .................................................................63

Table 17. Research Question 3 - Independent Samples Test Successful School Leaders and Restructuring School Leaders Value of PLC Elements ...........................................64

Table 18. Research Question 4 - Successful School Leaders and Restructuring School Leaders and Value of Structural Reforms .......................................................................66

Table 19. Research Question 4 - Independent Samples Test Successful School Leaders and Restructuring School Leaders Value of Structural Reforms ........................................66

Table 20. Responding Schools Self-Reported Demographics .........................................................68

Table 21. Enrollments Condensed to School Sizes up to 500 Students and More Than 500 Students .................................................................................................................69

Table 22. Responding Schools Self-Reported Grades Served ........................................................70

Table 23. Structural Reforms for Reading Performance ............................................................71

Table 24. Structural Reforms for Mathematics Performance ......................................................72

Table 25. Professional Learning Communities Knowledge, Implementation and Value ..................72

Table 26. The Value of Professional Learning Communities Elements by School Group ..................73

Table 27. ANOVA Analysis of Significant PLC Elements ............................................................74

Table 28. Mean Values for Structural Reforms and PLC Elements by School Group ......75
CHAPTER ONE
ACCOUNTABILITY

No Child Left Behind

Children in Illinois are increasingly attending failing schools. When measured by the Federal and Illinois accountability tool Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), more Illinois schools are unable to meet the benchmark than can meet the standard. Not only is the AYP bar high, it is still climbing. It will continue to climb higher and higher until every student in every school is expected to be at grade level proficiency. Every student is expected to be proficient regardless of the student’s innate academic abilities, disabilities or native language. This climbing expectation will result in more and more Illinois schools being defined as failing. The probability that an Illinois child is in a failing school will continue to approach 100%.

Adequate Yearly Progress is the evaluation system established by the federal law “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB). This law has driven educational reform since its signing in 2001. This law created a bipartisan cease fire, allowing the president, George Bush, the leading Republican at the time, to shake hands with one of the senior Democrats, the late Senator Edward Kennedy. Laws that receive this kind of cross aisle agreement often address common concerns in America. The competitiveness of American youth in a global society is at issue. Eleven years later, in 2012, while
partisanship continues in Washington the accountability of our education system and
global competitiveness of graduates remains a common goal for each party.

NCLB requires schools to demonstrate that they are providing quality instruction
for students through annual reading and math proficiency tests in 3rd through 8th grade,
elementary grades, and then again in high school’s 11th grade. The results of these tests
are published yearly under strict federal and state guidelines. Ultimately, the law requires
that every student must be proficient by 2014. In 2011, 85% of all tested Illinois students
must be proficient. Schools which meet the yearly proficiency targets are said to make
Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Schools not meeting in each and every subgroup, or
overall in both math and reading, did not make AYP. The media as well as government
officials often refer to these schools as “failing”.

Not only must 85% of all students be proficient, but 85% of the students in each
of nine overlapping subgroups must also be proficient for a school to make AYP. It is
with these subgroups that otherwise commonly known successful schools in Illinois run
into trouble. Schools that are successful by measures such as average ACT scores, AP
class participation, graduation rates and college admissions, cannot always have the same
success for each subgroup. US News and World Reports Magazine develops an annual
list of the Best High Schools (in America). Illinois has 72 high schools awarded either a
Gold, Silver or Bronze award level on this list (U.S. News & World Report, n.d.). Since
only eight Illinois high schools made AYP in 2011 (Malone, 2011) the vast majority of
schools on this elite list are considered failing in the eyes of the Federal government.
For example Adlai Stevenson High School made AYP this year by not having enough low socio-economic students to count as a subgroup. Last year this group did not make AYP and was the lowest performing subgroup of students (http://iirc.niu.edu/). The subgroup proficiency is one of the key accountability pieces of the law and it is also the most challenging.

Besides the public ostracism of not making AYP, there are specific consequences for schools’ failing to make AYP. The consequences escalate for each consecutive year the school does not meet standards. After five years of failing to meet AYP, the school will be required to begin a restructuring process, which could mean the firing or reassigning of the staff and administration (Public Education Network, 2002). In 2011 there were 398 of 3807 Illinois schools in restructuring (ISBE, n.d.). In 2010, Chicago Public Schools closed 14 failing schools that were unable to meet the demands of NCLB (Ahmed, 2010).

Once a school is caught in the increasing difficulty of meeting NCLB benchmarks it is very hard to dig itself out. After being identified as “Not Meeting AYP” for two consecutive years the school must meet AYP for two consecutive years to be exempt from Federal and State NCLB sanctions. This is made more difficult since the annual benchmark target increases. For principals of schools under Federal and State NCLB sanctions or new principals taking on the challenge of these schools, there is a lot of work ahead while the bar continues its climb. However, some schools have been able to meet this challenge. Some schools have taken on these nearly impossible rising standards and
beaten them. What strategies did they use to get out of the sanctions of NCLB while the expectations NCLB increase?

**NCLB and Achievement**

Current evidence suggests the principles of NCLB have made their way into the everyday management of schools. A RAND Corporation report released in 2007 identified four changes to the education system as a result of NCLB (Hamilton, 2007). While the study looks at the long-term impact of NCLB on three states, California, Georgia and Pennsylvania, the researchers believe the three states offer a good sample of education systems across the US. As a result of NCLB schools have:

- Aligned curriculum and instruction with state standards
- Provided professional development and technical assistance with alignment and data use
- Used student test results for instructional planning, implemented test preparation activities and adopted interim or progress tests to provide frequent assessment information
- To a smaller extent, schools have increased the amount of instructional time in reading and math (Hamilton, 2007)

Overall, states report student achievement is climbing, which includes minority and students living in poverty (Jennings, 2006). The states use their own tests to demonstrate these results. However, there is a national test called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is standardized and thereby allows student performance to be compared across state and school boundaries. The results from
NAEP have only recently verified some growth. Until 2007, NAEP results showed student performance had remained unchanged (Hoff, 2007). However, in NAEP’s 2007 reading assessment and 2009 math report, there have been some gains in 4th and 8th grades (Lee, 2007) (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010).

While gains can be seen in aggregate numbers, the impact at the school level is completely opposite. In 2009 40% of Illinois Schools were not meeting AYP, and in 2010 51% were failing. In 2011, 98.5 percent of Illinois High Schools did not meet AYP and approximately 60 percent of Illinois elementary schools failed to make AYP. The research shows more students meeting standards yet the number of failing schools continues to increase.

I recall my first year teaching and the advice I received from my old salt mentor on a new method of addressing student behavior, “Wait a while and (the principal) will move on to something else.” This is often what happens to different school reforms. Educators can be susceptible to the “wait for it to pass” mentality. Give it some time and it will fade away like the fog in the morning. Many educators believe there will be a reprieve of the 100% AYP target in 2014. They believe politicians will stop the law before nearly all schools are defined as failing and the severest of consequences hit every American school.

This hope for a stay from sanctions is detrimental to education and the growth of students. A recent study of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) exposes how ignoring NCLB harms schools. The study identified a large number of CPS schools that failed to make AYP as not using systemic reform strategies. These schools instead targeted a small
group of nearly proficient students called “bubble students” in an effort to avoid NCLB sanctions. Side-stepping the intent of NCLB and school reform results in poor growth for high and low ability students (Neal, 2007). Information from the RAND Corporation again identifies schools as concentrating too much time on “bubble” students (Hamilton, 2007). This same concept is further echoed in a different study of high performing, low socioeconomic schools (Harris, 2007).

If school leaders continue to try to “game” the law by using short-term structural changes at the expense of long-term cultural reform, we continue to jeopardize the students in the American educational system.

Because schools are sanctioned for short-term poor performance, there is a strong incentive to make changes – in curriculum, instruction and management - that can be implemented quickly and give only the appearance of progress, rather than genuine improvements that have a long-term positive influence. (Harris, 2007)

Principals must address the spirit of NCLB rather than minimize the law or try to “game it” by addressing only bubble students who are near proficiency. School leaders provide a disservice to all students when they hope to ride out the wave of accountability. This attitude creates a band-aid, which will only end in short-term gains at the expense of long-term growth.

Long-Term Growth – Cultural Change

School reform falls into two main categories: structural and cultural reforms. While many schools use structural reforms to improve the performance of their students and alter time for reading and mathematics instruction, these reforms commonly impact bubble students. Structural changes can end up trying to fix students in the short-term, not
trying to improve the education of all students. There is value to structural changes, but there is also a limit.

Cultural reforms take longer to create, but they develop long-term corrections rather than short-term fixes. The Professional Learning Communities (PLC) method has the key elements found in many other broad cultural reforms. PLC’s elements have shared missions, collaborative culture, collective inquiry, are action orientated with commitment to continuous improvement and results focused.

**Past and Present Studies**

There is no dispute that there are countless educational reform theories and volumes of research on school reform methods. Major educational researchers have conducted this research and studied individual successful and failing schools to developed systems for improving student learning. Each of their independent findings adds to the tools principals and school leaders can use to improve their schools.

The general value of these research findings is solid. However, under NCLB each state is unique. Each state develops its own assessment tools with varying complexity. The assessment company, Northwest Educational Association, has developed several correlation studies linking their own assessment to the NCLB tools used in nearly every state. From their data one can conclude some states require much higher student proficiency levels than other states. Some states require the equivalent of students being at or above the 70th percentile nationally. Other states require students to be above the 7th percentile nationally to be labeled proficient.
Illinois has developed the Illini Equal Steps Plan for determining the percentage of students that need to be proficient each year to meet AYP (Appendix A). Illinois also has its own test, the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). The ISAT test was constructed to measure only the Illinois Learning Standards, which is the curriculum unique to Illinois. The result is a curriculum and an assessment which no other state parallels.

There is limited research that examines the success of PLC elements in successful or restructuring Illinois elementary schools. Current research is limited to implementation and case studies. This study is unique in that it is analyzing the value different types of Illinois elementary school principals place on PLC elements.

This survey study examined the value leaders of successful schools place on Professional Learning Community reform elements and structural reforms compared to the value leaders of unsuccessful schools place on PLCs and structural reforms. A means test analysis was conducted using the statistical software program SPSS to determine any significance of results.

This study electronically surveyed leaders of Illinois elementary schools who have failed to make AYP for two or more years but then improved by being able to meet AYP for two consecutive years. Schools that improved would have needed to meet a higher standard than when they failed as the benchmarks for proficiency rise over time. The survey asked which elements have been used to transform the school, and the value the school leaders have placed on these reforms. Focus was on PLCs and structural elements common in reform.
The answer to this research question could provide specific guidance to nearly every Illinois elementary school principal as they continue or perhaps initiate school reform. New principals, principals new to a school, and even principals currently dealing with failing schools could benefit from this research. The results of the research could also serve as a guide for educational leadership programs in graduate schools helping to develop new leaders.

As with all studies, there are limitations to the findings. Regardless of outcome, the results cannot demonstrate causation and as such, should not be interpreted such that initiating and successfully implementing PLC elements will automatically move failing schools to successfully meeting AYP criteria. As explained the bar for AYP continues to rise. The end target is 100% proficiency. There is no guarantee that any school using PLCs or any other systems reform will reach that target.
Educational reform literature is plentiful. There are numerous researchers, critics and philosophers with ideas and theories that purport to benefit students in schools. The chapter will detail the federal policy impacting school reform, structural reform methods, and cultural reform systems for elementary schools. The chapter will also examine reform research specific to Illinois elementary schools. Based upon these findings a case will be made for the value of combining these elements into a single study.

**Elementary and Secondary Act and No Child Left Behind**

**How Federal Policy Drives School Reform**

In 1965, under the leadership of President Lyndon Johnson, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was established. The ESEA grew from President Johnson’s desire for further social reform. The ESEA built on the establishment of desegregation, which the Supreme Court ruled necessary the year before in the groundbreaking *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*. A key element of the law targeted students in poverty by providing billions of dollars in aid and detailed rules on how the money should be spent. This key aspect of the law is commonly referred to as Title I. Title I is still a major source of additional dollars for low-income students in American schools. It is the financial carrot of ESEA’s Title I by which many Federal policies are enacted.
While there have been minor changes to the ESEA in the years since 1965, the first major reauthorization came in 2001 under President George Bush. This reauthorization has been commonly referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This 2001 reauthorization is comprised of four main principles. The first principle is stronger accountability for results in elementary and high schools (Hunter, 2003). In order for schools to demonstrate they are providing quality instruction for students, a target percentage of students must meet minimal grade level proficiencies in reading and math. Each state has developed a proficiency test in 3rd grade through 8th grade and then again in 11th grade. The percentage of students that meet proficiency levels are then annually publicized. Ultimately, to avoid sanctions, the law requires every student must be grade level proficient by 2014.

NCLB further requires that not only the total percentage of students in a school meet benchmark percentages, but the same percentage of students in each of nine different subgroups must also be proficient. The first six subgroups of students are defined as: Asian/Pacific Islander, White Non-Hispanic, Hispanic, Black Non-Hispanic, Native American, and Multiracial/Ethnic. The first six categories are races and ethnicities, so every student will be identified in one category. The final three categories: Economically Disadvantaged, Limited English Proficient, and Students with Disabilities are descriptive. A student may be reported in any combination of these three categories plus the student’s race or ethnicity.

If a school meets the yearly proficiency targets it is said to have met adequate yearly progress (AYP). If the school or school district fails to meet the AYP benchmark
percentages there are consequences. The consequences escalate for each consecutive year
the school or district fails to make AYP. After five years the school or district will be
required to begin a restructuring process. This could mean the firing or reassigning of
teaching staff and/or administrators (Public Education Network, 2002). In 2011, 398
Illinois schools were in restructuring (ISBE, 2010). Nationally, in 2010 37% of US
schools are failing. In 2011 that number is predicted by the US Department of Education
to climb to 82% (Armanio, 2011).

These Federal sanctions only apply to schools and districts that qualify and take
Title I dollars. To be eligible for Title I funds the district must have a sufficient number
of low-income families living within the school district boundaries. While nearly every
district in Illinois will qualify for Title I funds, not every school will accept Title I
dollars. Those schools and districts that qualify for and accept Title I dollars are subject
to Federal sanctions. To address schools that do not take Title I funds Illinois has
developed its own sanctioning sequence, which is in effect for every public or charter
school in Illinois. This was a requirement under NCLB. Many schools will need to follow
both Illinois and Federal sanctions should they fail to meet AYP. Restructuring is part of
both State and Federal sanctions.

The second principle of NCLB is flexibility for states and communities (Hunter,
2003). The assessment each state uses, the cut-off scores for determining proficiency, and
the yearly AYP targets are all within the authority of the State, with Federal approval.
This flexibility has created AYP targets, which are specific to each state. States have
taken different paths to reach the 2014, 100 percent proficient target. Some have
established equal interval steps toward the 2014 target. Illinois started with proficiency targets below 50% and then yearly increased that target by 7.5%. Other states stay somewhat low and then leap up to 100 percent in the final year(s). Ledyard King in a USA Today article said, “…many states have taken the safe route, keeping standards low and fooling parents into believing their kids are prepared for college and work.” (King, 2007) He continues with the example that in Mississippi 89% of 4th grade students passed the state reading test, however, only 18% were determined to be proficient on a nationally standardized reading test called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The NAEP tests are randomly administered in every state. NAEP tests students in 4th, 8th and 12th grade reading and math. Since NAEP is a common test administered to random students from randomly selected schools in every state, and is independently monitored and graded by the NAEP scorers, it has become commonly quoted as an independent measure of student proficiency in the United States. NAEP data has allowed researchers and educators to see how states have utilized their flexibility under NCLB.

Many states have reported increases in overall student proficiency. In 37 of 41 states with three years of data there was a 1% increase in the number of students reaching proficiency targets (Hoff, 2007). In contrast NAEP has shown no significant increase in student performance (Hoff, 2007) (NAEP, 2011). While lower benchmarks in many states have given rise to higher proficiency levels actual student growth has been minimal.
The third principle of NCLB is concentrating resources on rigorously scientifically proven educational methods (Hunter, 2003). One example of this is the Reading First program, which emphasizes grade level reading proficiency by 3rd grade. This program utilizes federal funds to support different reading initiatives that have been proven successful. While the success of this specific program has been inconsistent, the concept of requiring research driven strategies has driven reforms. To assist educators in the identification of the effective programs, the Department of Education supported the creation of the What Works Clearinghouse. This website reports on the effectiveness of reading and math programs and strategies. The website is free to everyone and is easy to navigate.

The final principle is more choice for parents (Hunter, 2003). This option called School Choice, allows students to transfer from failing to non-failing schools if their school did not make AYP for two consecutive years. The money necessary to educate the student would transfer from the failing school to the new school. Since this is solely a Federal provision, it does not apply to schools not receiving Title I funds.

**Future Reauthorization**

This year the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) is once again being considered for reauthorization in Congress. NCLB, once the cornerstone of President Bush’s educational policy, now is coming under scrutiny. Many lawmakers are expressing a need for a change. The range of reauthorization opinions span from “scrapping it” (Richardson, 2007) to making minor modifications (Butzin, 2007) (Klein,
2007). A blend of these two diverse views is more mainstream and consistent with the Obama administration’s actions regarding the law (Glod, 2009).

During the summer of 2011 Secretary of Education Duncan spoke in support of allowing states the opportunity to waive some elements of No Child Left Behind. The Department of Education describes this waiver in this way:

This voluntary opportunity will provide educators and State and local leaders with flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction. (ESEA Flexibility Request Document)

While there has been little detail to date, Illinois has started the process of determining which aspects of NCLB they want to waive. The ISBE has been collecting survey data from educators around the state. The US Department of Education has received an intent by Illinois to waive some aspects of the law. As of October 2012, Illinois has not received approval of its waiver. A total of 38 states have been granted the waiver request.

Simultaneously there has been new legislation introduced in the US Senate in October 2011 called the Harkin and Enzi Reauthorization Bill of the Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965. One of the current aspects of this proposed bill would be the elimination of AYP. As of November 2011, debate had just begun on this authorization.

Overall public opinion about the elements of NCLB is split. When parents are informed of the requirements of NCLB they are in favor of the accountability elements (Hart, 2007). Administrators also have a generally favorable view of NCLB (Hart, 2007)
(Hamilton, 2007). However, the use of continual high-stakes testing has caused concerns for many teachers and parents (Hart, 2007). President Obama has also expressed this concern saying on March 28, 2011 students should take fewer tests, and “Too often what we have been doing is using these tests to punish students or to, in some cases, punish schools.” (Associated Press, 2011)

NCLB may be reformed and that might reduce the number of failing schools, but this does not address the true issue: too many students are not at grade level. The 2009 results from NAEP specified that in reading only 35% of students were proficient in 8th grade and 41% were proficient in 4th grade (NAEP, 2011). In math, the percentage of proficient students was as low as 42% in 8th grade and 45% in 4th grade (NAEP, 2011). Politicians may change the rules but that will not change the number of students who are at grade level on this objective measure.

The prelude to any new ESEA reauthorization is the competitive grant called Race to the Top (RTTT). States apply to the US Department of Education for RTTT money and are evaluated with 19 different criteria. The carrot to make these changes is large. Dr. Larry K. Shumway, Utah State Superintendent of Public Instruction, summarized the motivation to apply for RTTT at the Council of Chief State School Officers national conference on June 21, 2010 by saying, “We have five billion reasons to apply,” referring to the five billion dollars dangling in front of the winning states. RTTT criteria involve changes to core issues such as teacher evaluation and tenure. Additionally, to apply for RTTT a state must adopt the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS have fewer standards than currently operating in Illinois.
Many are taught at different grades levels than previously, and the standards are more rigorous. Forty-six of fifty states have applied for Race to the Top.

RTTT also includes funding for the development of new assessment systems to evaluate students on the new CCSS. The US Department of Education approved the development of two assessment consortiums. Illinois and 26 other states are part of the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers consortium (PARCC). PARCC’s new assessment system is projected to begin implementation in 2014. Information from PARCC is slowly emerging but it appears students will be assessed with up to nine tests given at up to five times during the school year. The second consortium is the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium and is composed of 30 states. Some states are currently participating in both consortia.

NCLB accountability is based upon the percentage of students able to reach grade level proficiency. A proficiency accountability system has limitations. A lead researcher for a Rand corporation report has called the current proficiency goal “almost meaningless.” (Hoff, 2007) A recent Chicago Public Schools study showed the emphasis on proficiency is detrimental to many students who are already proficient at the start of the year. (Neal, 2007) “Schools face weak incentives to devote extra attention to students who are already proficient or who have little chance of becoming proficient.” (Neal, 2007) High ability students enter a school year already proficient. One change that many educators and states have been advocating for is the ability to use a growth model rather than a proficiency model. Arne Duncan in presenting the grant award to PARCC and SMARTER said:
For the first time, teachers will consistently have timely, high-quality formative assessments that are instructionally useful and document student growth—rather than just relying on after-the-fact, year-end tests used for accountability purposes. (www.ed.gov)

The Chicago study also provides major support for the growth model. With the focus on proficiency levels, students on the tails of the normal curve have resources diverted and show only minimal growth (Neal, 2007). The implementation of a growth model would allow for all students to have an equal chance of showing what was learned. Using sports as an analogy “contests must be handicapped so that every contestant faces the same probability of winning given a particular choice of effort.” (Neal, 2007)

Under the current proficiency system, students near the proficiency mark end up receiving the majority of the school’s focus. There is less true effort given to students at the tail ends of the normal curve. Student just below proficiency are the students that with some additional effort should be able to move to the proficient mark. These students are commonly called “bubble students.” The result of this emphasis on bubble students is that resources and attention are taken away from other students. This could be an explanation for the increase in the number of proficient students reported by the state data and yet the NAEP data shows that there is limited growth by all students.

By moving to a growth model, the emphasis of NCLB would shift to looking at individual student growth from the start of the school year to the end of the school year. This means students with very low achievement could still have a fair chance of being successful though it may take a few years for them to be proficient (Hoff, 2007). However, the now often ignored high ability students would also have their abilities monitored yearly as well. This is different than a proficiency system where high ability
students are typically proficient for that grade level test before the school year begins.
The growth assessment model would be a system in which all students would have an
opportunity to show what they have learned.

What is Helping Students?

The impact of No Child Left Behind on increased community expectations is a
clear reality. School leaders are the ones responsible for finding a path to help staff and
students. The paths are plentiful. There are just as many leadership solutions to improve
student performance as there are diet plans. And like diets, leadership solutions have a
range of outcomes: some will be effective but even more will not be. How do school
leaders select from the many paths out there? How do school leaders steer away from the
paths which will not work? How do school principals select the strategies and methods
which will target the needs of students?

Federal policies such as a future ESEA reauthorization will have limitations. Arne
Duncan, the Secretary of Education, said it best when discussing RTTT, “One-sized-fits-
all remedies from the federal government don’t work. In fact, one-sized-fits-all remedies
tend to stifle creativity at the local level.” (Conor, 2010) That is why school leadership
must take the lead. In the end principals must use their own knowledge, skills, intellect
and research within the policy framework to help improve instruction. Individual schools
and community needs are unique. The socio-economic, motivational, racial distribution,
community expectations and background knowledge of students vary greatly throughout
the state and even within each school. The skill level, available resources, and even
motivation of the educational staff in Illinois schools also run the gambit. The
instructional leader, the principal of each school, is the one responsible for using policy as a base to find the winning combination of strategies for each student and staff member to ensure a complete and effective education.

The literature points to two different methods of improving the performance of students in schools. The first method of reform is structural changes. Structural changes are programs, allocations of teachers and support staff, schedules and the fiscal resources. These reforms can be easier and cleaner to implement, though they are potentially costly. They are sometimes viewed as a “cure in a box.” These are often the first to be implemented, but are they effective?

The second strategy is cultural reforms in schools. Many schools have developed healthy cultures, which accentuate academic improvements with students. Other schools have developed stalling and sabotaging environments to block improvement in student learning. The culture of open discussion and continuous improvement is the hallmark of Professional Learning Communities.

**Structural Reforms in Schools**

Structural reforms are programs that are purchased or adjustments to staffing or time. One example is increasing the number of staff that assists students. Schools may use technology and volunteers. They may add instructional time or lengthen the school year. A school may purchase a program from a vendor or publisher. Structural changes are often visible. It is easy to identify for the public and easy to show the parents or the community what the school is doing to help students. The staff and community can easily see the added time in a schedule or the new reading program that was started.
These changes can often be easy and quick. Structural changes might begin as conversations or thoughts by a team or the principal. They might be something a staff member saw at a conference or a salesperson demonstrated to the principal. Commonly, many structural changes require additional funds. Money is needed for more reading or math teachers or new software. Money is also necessary for salaries for summer school staff or after school programs.

Since they are so easy to see and discuss but require money, common political reform suggestions focus on more revenue for failing schools. Frequently state and local educational leaders include allocating more money for schools in restructuring (Hoff, 2007). The Council of Chief State and School Officials had proposed adding $375 million to the federal budget to help schools in restructuring. Currently, states may only withhold 4% of the total federal Title I money for helping schools in restructuring. This proposal would expand that to 20% (Hoff, 2007). In 2009, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act added $94.7 billion into school districts around the US through Title I and IDEA grants. The impact of this huge influx of Federal dollars has not slowed the rate of failing schools in the US.

**Extended School Year and School Day**

The new Race to the Top objectives include more instructional time. Arne Duncan stated the policy goal in the summer of 2010, “I think schools should be open 12, 13, 14 hours a day, seven days a week, 11-12 months of the year.” (Conor, 2010) The research shows there is considerable value in adding additional instruction time to the school year, especially in communities with high poverty and low educational levels.
Cech goes on to say, “(At home summer) learning among students in relatively well-educated, economically secure homes had effectively added 47 points to their test scores (over 5 years)... Students in relatively low-income, poor educated families had been reduced to 2 points over (summers until 5th grade).” This is an important point because socioeconomically disadvantaged students keep pace with non-disadvantaged classmates during the school year (Cech, 2007). Non-disadvantaged students at home during the summer have numerous complex linguistic and environmental experiences, which give them a head start on next year.

American schools have a shorter year and school day when compared to many international schools. The typical school year in Europe is 190 to 210 days; in Japan it is 240 days. But here in the United States it is 180 days. In three years, a Japanese student would attend school a year longer than an American student.

These issues have not gone unnoticed. There are numerous urban school districts that are trying to increase their school year especially in high poverty areas: (Silva, 2007)

- Minnesota’s school superintendent proposed increasing the school year to 200 days.
- Delaware businessmen tried to increase the school year in Delaware by 140 hours a year, 21 days.
- Philadelphia School Superintendent wanted to expand the school year by 1 month
- The Mayor in Chicago called for year-round schools throughout his tenure
- New Mexico proposed a longer day for low-performing schools
• Washington DC has proposed a longer day for low-performing schools
• Massachusetts has proposed expanding the learning time by 30% for 10 schools with a high percentage of low-income students
• Fairfax County Schools added 2 hours of instruction a week to low-performing schools

Some schools in high poverty low performing schools have begun to expand their school day to address the needs of their students. The models in DC, which expand time for African-American students, have reportedly shown good gains. (Mathews, 2007) There is a large difference between the 12-hour day that these students receive and the six hours of instruction recorded at most schools in Chicago (Neal, 2007). The new Mayor of Chicago, Rahm Emanuel, continues to push for a longer school day for Chicago Public School kids. “We have the shortest school day of any major city in the country,” he said (www.cbslocal.com, 2011). Emanuel is advocating for an 8:30 to 4:00 school day. This proposal would increase the school day in Chicago from 5.75 hours a day to 7.5 hours.

However, the benefits of an extended school day or year only come from an extension of academic time (Silva, 2007). This is the time in classrooms, when students are learning new information. Only focused academic time is helpful (Silva, 2007). So the message to principals is the same old rule, instructional time is golden. If the extra time is filled with announcements, procedures or non-academic activities, do not expect academic gains.

While parents in the past have not been interested in expanding the school year, sentiment is changing. 48% of parents in a Massachusetts 2002 opinion poll are open to
expanding the school year, up from 32%. 67% of the same parents are in favor of expanding the school day by one hour (Silva, 2007).

This extension of the school year is not limited to students. The Superintendent of Fairfax County Schools had proposed expanding many teacher positions to 11 months, to address the data and student needs under NCLB (Dale, 2004). Superintendent Dale recommends the creation/expansion of these teacher leader positions:

- School Improvement Leader
- Feeder/Cluster Improvement Teacher Leader – collaborating and connecting schools to ease district progression
- New Teacher Trainer/Mentor
- Extended Students Learning Teacher – tutoring and nurturing students below grade level
- Students Transition Leaders – to facilitate supplemental services for students

He asserts these positions will directly enhance student learning thereby reducing the risks of NCLB. He recognizes that these positions require money and a commitment.

There are also concerns that NCLB is narrowing the curriculum to the two content areas, reading and math (Houston, 2006). With such high risks with reading instruction, some schools have chosen to cut back on other subject areas to ensure success in reading and math. By extending the school day and year for schools in status, they will be able to protect the other equally important needs of the community, such as the arts.
If principals are given autonomy over their schools and their budgets, extension of the school day and year are areas they need to investigate. In many other communities the money to fund these additional hours comes from grants and fund raising. This concept calls on the creativity and dedication of the school educators, administrators and union officials to find a creative solution.

**Intervention Programs**

There are so many different intervention programs. Some programs focus on just content areas. There are interventions that work with motivational aspects of the students. There are interventions that target cultural or family structures of specific subgroups. Some are in the form of computer software and some are just a workbook. The options are truly endless. The difficulty for any educator is to find a way to weed through the multitude of options and focus on those options, which work.

Nearly every intervention program will be able to provide research on the effectiveness of the program. Frequently, this research will be paid for by publishers, is done internally, or is actions research and may not be compliant with established research protocols. School leaders must go to objective sources for their intervention information.

The US Department of Education Institute of Educational Sciences has developed a searchable website commonly called the What Works Clearinghouse, ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/. The Institute has developed criteria and utilizes its researchers and existing research to establish the effectiveness of an extensive variety of intervention programs in reading math and other areas. The Institute’s ratings are broken into two categories, effectiveness and improvement index. Broken down simply they can be
summarized as “will the intervention work” and “how much will a student improve.” The improvement index is intended to correspond to effect size.

From all of the hundreds of interventions reviewed by the institute only two had effect sizes above 0.3. The intervention program Reading Recovery had an improvement index of 0.32 in reading achievement and SRA, a math intervention program, had an improvement index of 0.36 in mathematics achievement. With both of these interventions being the most effective and yet only have effect sizes of small to medium, what real impact will they have? Reading Recovery is a 1st grade only program and the SRA reviewed program is for prekindergarten students. This leaves the question what will truly help all students?

A second resource for objective reading intervention reviews is the Florida Center of Reading Research (FCRR). It is supported by Florida State University. Similar to the What Works Clearinghouse this site provides detailed information about the hundreds of interventions available. The FCRR provides specific details on the effectiveness of the program within multi-page summaries.

The FCRR findings show greater effectiveness of intervention programs. The effect sizes of many interventions were reported in the high range, above .8. Effect sizes of these heights are only possible if the staff is properly trained and capable of fulfilling the needs of the intervention. Additionally, the interventions must be administered with integrity, the specified length of time and specified days, and detailed in the intervention implementation guidelines.
Quality Staff to Implement

The more effective intervention programs reviewed require quality teachers with experience and continual training. However, for schools in status, finding, hiring and maintaining quality teachers is becoming difficult. Finding quality staff in high poverty areas for schools under sanctioning is very difficult. A recent study of Chicago Public Schools, CPS, commented: “While NCLB puts pressure on principals to hire and retain the best teachers, it creates working conditions in disadvantaged schools that should make it harder to recruit and retain good teachers.” (Neal, 2007) A study on high performing high poverty schools agreed: “Teachers have been more likely to leave schools where it is most difficult to meet the objectives, that is they go to schools that need them less.” (Harris, 2007) And even more research emphasizes the negative impact of sanctioning on low performing schools, the ones that especially need high quality staff (Echevarria, 2006).

Colleges and universities continue to produce quality teachers who work on critical thinking and problem solving (Echevarria, 2006). However, the number of quality candidates willing to go to areas of need remains insufficient. “It is clear that teacher development efforts have not been adequate to meet the ever-raising needs of all the children in the country, particularly those in greatest need.” (Anonymous, 2004)

President Bush tried to override collective bargaining agreements to allow school administrators to forcibly transfer experienced and shortage-area teachers to low performing schools (Honawar, 2007). Many experienced teachers are afforded a greater opportunity to select where they teach. Invariable they leave low-performing challenging
schools. That proposed policy had come under attack by unions which strenuously objected to such actions especially in the light of NCLB sanctions, “teachers cannot be forced to stay in the schools that are targeted for change and when the sanctions are severe.” (Sunderman, 2006)

With less experienced or newer staff, principals and school leaders have turned to explicit or directed instruction programs in an attempt to insure that instruction and programs are effective. Two programs reviewed in a 2004 reading study examined the impact of Direct Instruction and explicit teaching skills such as Open Court. They then compared these two directive methods with the teacher driven Guided Reading programs. The gains the students had in the skills necessary to read were lost in the transition to reading. The authors concluded, “The ability to deeply comprehend literature beyond the literal level was less developed in the Open Court and Direct Instruction students as compared to the Guided Reading students.” (Altwerger, 2004) A study of direct instruction with special education students also saw no gains after 12 weeks when compared to common methods (Shippen, 2006). The quick fixes of direct instruction will not help students in the long-term and will require additional time to overcome. Time is a luxury that few schools and even fewer struggling schools have to waste.

There is some quality in structural reforms if the staff is of high quality. But many more questions remain with structural reforms. How do school leaders know what is working? How do school leaders know that they are doing the right thing? How do principals know that reforms are targeting the needs of the school? What if the staff is not committed to reform? What if they will not implement the structural reforms with fidelity
because they have their own system that might or might not work. A more robust system of reform is needed.

**Cultural Reform**

A school’s culture can be as easily defined as “the way we do things around here” (Deal and Kennedy, 1984). Every school has one. Every school has a method of dealing with problems, a way of celebrating successes, a way of integrating new staff, a way of collaborating, a way of communicating with parents and a way of addressing needs. This is a school’s culture. This is canvas for the way all daily or hourly decisions are made.

There is clear power in effective cultures. Roland Barth wrote in *Learning by Heart* “the schools culture dictates, in no uncertain terms, the way we do things around here. Ultimately, a school’s culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board or even the principal can ever have.” (Barth, 2001)

Dr. Robert Marzano is a renowned researcher and author of the “What Works” in education series. In his book *School Leadership that Works*, he objectifies the value and necessity of effective culture for reform. Marzano explains culture is implicit or explicit in virtually every theory and in the principles espoused by every theorist discussed in his research (Marzano, 2005).

Michael Fullan has written many books on change and educational leadership. He clarifies a key premise of this paper. From his 2007 book *The New Meaning of Educational Change* he states, “Most strategies for reform focus on structures, formal requirements and events-based activities….they do not struggle directly with existing
cultures… restructuring occurs time and time again whereas reculturing (how teachers come to question and change beliefs and habits) is what is needed.” (Fullan, 2007)

Effective cultures that support student growth have unwavering belief in the ability of all students to achieve success (Peterson, 2002). But what is also clear is that culture is created and supported by the school leader. Harvard Educational Leadership Professor Richard Elmore “(cultures) change by the specific displacement of existing norms, structures and processes by others; the process of cultural change depends fundamentally on modeling the new values and behaviors that you expect to displace the existing ones.” (Elmore, 2004)

Cultural changes unlike structural ones, are not as easy as flipping a switch or delivered in a box. They require the leader to share responsibility, change his or her behavior and to continually re-examine what is done, not just what is said. To maximize the positive effects of culture on student performance, a culture must be open to continuous improvement, staff must be collectively focused on student achievement and leadership is distributed. A system that supports this effective culture is Professional Learning Communities.

Professional Learning Communities

Rick DuFour is the educator most recognized with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Dr. Dufour is the former Superintendent of Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois. This school was the first public high school in Illinois to receive four Blue Ribbon Awards for Excellence in Education from the U.S. Department of Education. Stevenson was awarded Blue Ribbon Awards in 1987, 1991, 1998, and
2002. *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report* have consistently identified Stevenson in their lists of America’s best public high schools. *Newsweek* has included SHS seven times in the past 11 years, including the last three (www.d125.org, 2010). Dr. Dufour grew the characteristics of Professional Learning Communities model from his work with staff at Stevenson High School.

Like other cultural changes a PLC is not a single strategy that can be checked off at a faculty meeting. It is a continuous system that uses data to change the processes and symbols of a school for the betterment of the students. Dr. Dufour describes a PLC as:

Educators committed to working collectively in ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job embedded, learning for educators (Dufour, 2009)

The support for the value of PLCs and its elements is pervasive:

School systems around the world that move from great to excellent facilitate school-based learning communities to create peer-led support and accountability. (Mourshed, 2010)

High-quality professional development in the context of a supportive professional community and where teachers are orientated toward improvement appears powerfully related to gains in academic productivity. (Bryk, 2010)

Findings from many studies suggest that participation in a professional community with one’s colleagues is an integral part of professional learning that impacts positively on students…if teachers are to change, they need to participate in a professional learning community that is focused on becoming responsive to students. (Timperley, 2008)

The collective results of these eleven studies suggest that well-developed PLCs have a positive impact on both teaching practice and student achievement. A collaborative focus on student learning is the key to increased achievement. (Vescio, 2008)
Time and again we see the power of collective capacity. When the group is mobilized with focus and specificity, it can accomplish amazing results...The collaborative, sometimes known as professional learning communities, gets these results because not only are leaders being influential, but peers are supporting and pressuring each other to do better. (Fullen, 2011)

PLCs are the guide to help cultures change from unhealthy to healthy, and thus from non-beneficial to beneficial student achievement cultures. PLCs are the glue for hourly decisions. PLCs are what make other structural interventions effective by monitoring progress and getting staff to the quality necessary to enhance their effectiveness.

**Common Direction.** Schools with Professional Learning Communities have numerous elements which reflect their commitment for continuous review. The initial element of a PLC is common direction. PLC schools break this common direction into (Dufour, 2009):

- shared mission (purpose)
- vision (clear direction)
- values (collective commitments)
- goals (indicators, timelines, targets)

It would be difficult to find a school which does not list learning as part of their goal, but what distinguishes the PLC model is the shared and collective contribution to student learning goals. In a PLC environment a school must work with its staff, leadership and community to develop these goals.

Other researchers support the importance of collective goal setting for student learning. Mike Schmocker declares that abundant research and school evidence suggest
that setting such goals may be the most significant act in the entire school improvement process, greatly increasing the odds of success (Schmoker, 1999). Richard Elmore supports this process, “cultures do not change by mandate.” (Elmore, 2004) A single strong leader cannot make or sustain the change alone. Power to make decisions will need to be shared. This often means disagreement and sticky conversations. These difficult conversations are part of weeding out the less important goals and honing the essential ones. If as part of this process there is not investment by the staff or parents, the goals and visions will be left behind. They will fail to enhance student achievement.

Dr. Douglas Reeves, Harvard Educational Leadership Professor and researcher has studied a unique set of schools. In his instrumental book, *Accountability in Action*, Dr. Reeves examined schools, which met these three characteristics: (Reeves, 2005)

- More than 90 percent of the students are eligible for free and reduced lunch, a commonly used surrogate for low-income families.
- More than 90 percent of the students are from ethnic minorities.
- More than 90 percent of the students met or achieved high academic standards, according to independently conducted tests of academic achievement.

These schools are commonly referred to as 90/90/90 schools. The common assumption is low-income minority students are very difficult to help succeed. Yet, these schools are succeeding. Dr. Reeves looked at the common characteristics of these schools and determined distributive leadership was necessary and helped set a common
direction (Reeves, 2005). 90/90/90 schools do not rely on a single magnanimous leader. The drive and direction of the school is collective.

One way to formulate common direction is through SMART goal setting. The use of SMART goals is also an effective tool for collective goal setting for desirable school cultures. SMART goals are: Strategic and Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Orientated and Timebound (Conzemius, 2005). SMART goals should be regularly evaluated and adjusted to ensure continuous improvement is taking place.

**Collaborative Culture.** The second element of PLCs is the establishment of a collaborative culture focused on student learning (Dufour, 2009). Educators balance two competing needs. The first is the need for teachers to be professionals. Staff are trained, highly trained in many cases, and have the skills to identify the needs of students and then create solutions to address those needs. Some teachers, however, have moved into an isolationism methodology. They do not want outside interference. They prefer to close their classroom door and teach what they feel they need to teach. The days for isolation in teaching have ended and are the equivalent of educational malpractice (Dufour, 2009).

On the other end of the spectrum is commonality. The need to have content learned by students similar in all grade level classrooms. For the data to be properly analyzed they must have common timelines for content, common assessment dates and common benchmark scores to identify the three elements Dr. Dufour says are necessary for common formative assessments (Dufour, 2009). The conflict that arises is the desire to allow professional to make decisions and not become automatons.
The term “collective autonomy” by Zmuda, Kuklis and Kline’s book *Transforming Schools, Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement* describes this conflict (Zmuda, 2004). The ideal culture is one where the entire staff is moving in the same direction. Each teacher is teaching the same content which the students are learning, assessments are given to the students in the same time frame, but teachers are given the professional flexibility to determine how best to deliver that content and how best to reach the students in their classrooms. Schools with a collaborative culture with collective autonomy for teachers are like cruise ships with the passengers representing classrooms in a school. All the passengers will arrive at the same destination, but what they do on the ship along the way is up to them.

In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins classifies this same phenomenon as “loose and tight”. He defines loose and tight as, “a culture built around the idea of freedom and responsibility within the framework of a highly developed system.” (Collins, 2001) A balance of honoring individual professional abilities, yet everyone being committed to the common direction.

Jim Collins emphasizes the second part of this element: the mutual accountability for student learning. Dr. Reeves refers to the “laser-like focus” of his 90/90/90 schools (Reeves, 2005). The symbols in the schools, the awards in the trophy cases, all show the commitment to achievement. If the goals of a school are not academic then don’t anticipate high academic performance. Dufour explains that common goals are only effective if they relate to student growth. When the team does not fulfill those goals the team is part of the reason for the poor result.
Collective Inquiry to Best Practice. Educators should engage in collective inquiry, about their profession. Dufour states educators in PLC schools engage in collective inquiry into: (Dufour, 2009)

- best practice in teaching and learning
- a candid clarification of their current practice
- an honest assessment of their students’ current levels of learning

Important to the element is the willingness to improve what is not working. Jim Collins’ Good to Great discusses the importance of confronting the “brutal facts” (Collins, 2001). The “brutal facts” rise to the top when there is an “honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of your situation.” (Collins, 2001) At the data team level this means reviewing not only what students are doing, but what each educator is doing to promote student growth, or preventing students from being their best.

Collins suggests how leaders can promote an environment that confronts the brutal facts. The leader, principal or administrator, should follow these four practices (Collins, 2001):

- Lead with questions, not answers.
- Engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion.
- Conduct autopsies, without blame
- Build red flag mechanisms which the school is unable to ignore

Action Orientation. “They avoid the paralysis of analysis and overcome inertia with action” is how Dufour describes the focus on action by effective schools (Dufour, 2009). Ineffective cultures have staff who believe change cannot occur or action will still
not produce results. Learning by doing is more effective than learning by reading, listening, planning or thinking (Pieffer, 2000).

**Commitment to Continuous Improvement.** Another essential element of Professional Learning Communities is the need for regular feedback on student knowledge and then using that data to improve instruction and interventions (Dufour, 2009). Researchers also point to enhancing the current culture of a school by obtaining regular student data. Whether it is assessment data for Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS) or data teams for Response to Intervention (RtI), research points to common formative assessments (Reeves, 2005) (Dufour, 2009) (Stiggins, 2004). Common assessments are assessments that all students in a grade level take at the same time. The formative element defines how the data is used. Formative assessments are used to reteach and improve upcoming instruction.

Once again the researchers and practitioners agree. Marzano states, “Formative assessments are one of the most powerful weapons in a teacher’s arsenal. An effective standards-based, formative assessment program can help to dramatically enhance student achievement throughout the K-12 system.” (Marzano, 2006) Fullan also states that formative assessments are one of the most powerful strategies for improving student learning (Fullan, 2005). Stiggins adds by saying assessments rival one-on-one tutoring for effectiveness (Stiggins, 2004).

Dr. Reeves has coined an analogy that resonates with many educators, formative is to summative assessment as a physical exam is to an autopsy (Reeves, 2005). Even now most exams are summative in nature. They are used to report the end result of a unit
or content. There is often no change in instruction as a result of the assessment. Most assessments take the form of state exams, NCLB assessments, report card grades and college entrance exams. These “high stakes” exams do have a role but not as instructional tools. They describe what happened and are not used to correct the student’s knowledge. The transition to formative assessments and utilizing that data for immediate instruction is what is needed and what PLCs do.

Dr. Dufour also sees large value in formative assessments given regularly. He points to some very essential components of assessments to develop the effective frequent common assessment effective school leaders should seek. For an assessment to be formative it must: (Dufour, 2009)

- Identify students who are struggling
- A system intervention must be in place to ensure low students obtain additional time and support for their need
- Another opportunity must be provided and they must not be penalized for previous difficulty

As Dufour and Reeves describe, once assessments have been established and data has begun to be collected, it is time to use that data for formative reasons not just descriptive. Schools without cultures that include data team analysis will simply collect data which will then perish like rotting fruit. The function of a data team is to shift the emphasis of teachers from teaching to learning (Dufour, 2009). It is not important what a teacher has taught, it is important what the students learned. That is the emphasis of a data team.
The support for data teams is equally expansive. From Mike Schmoker, “Evidence from numerous schools as well as broad concurrence in the research community point to proven structures and practices that make an immediate difference in achievement. They begin when a group of teachers meets regularly as a team to identify formative assessments, analyze current levels of achievement, set achievement goals, and then share and create lessons and strategies to improve upon those results.” (Schmoker, 2004)

Another educational assessment expert, Richard Stiggins, also supports data teams, “To the extent that teachers work together in teams to 1) analyze understand and deconstruct standards, 2) transform standards into high quality classrooms assessments, 3) share and interpret the results together, they benefit from the union of their wisdom about how to help students continue to grow as learners.”

As identified in the RAND report, staff development and technical training of staff in the use of data is very important (Hamilton, 2007) (Murnane, 2005). Data teams need to be trained on how to read the data, problem solve the data without judgment, and then facilitate conversations on how to respond based upon the results (Murnane, 2005). The research conducted by a Harvard Education Team inadvertently discovered that principals that made “explicit link between data analysis and instruction” had a good correlation between test performance and student grade point averages (Murnane, 2005).

The discussion of individual students by the professionals of the school begins the process of raising student performance. Data teams need formative assessments as a base for their professional discussions. They use the data that is fresh to enlighten their
decisions. As learned from Dufour’s formative systems the data team must identify those students struggling. They then determine an immediate intervention and track the progress of that student during the intervention. The process then ends with the student taking another formative assessment to review progress.

**Results Orientation.** The final element of PLCs is the focus on high student achievement (Dufour, 2009). Student learning and the end result of higher performance on summative assessments is the end goal. Reeves’s 90/90/90 schools also discovered a focus on high academic achievement. Once again a “laser-like” focus on achievement was a common factor of these successful schools (Reeves, 2005). Reeves found huge differences between these schools and low-achieving schools (Reeves, 2005). He details, “In additional, we saw school trophy cases full of exemplary academic work…90/90/90 schools made it clear to the most casual observer that academic performance was highly prized.” (Reeves, 2005)

**Illinois Professional Learning Communities Research**

The research for PLCs in Illinois is limited and mostly descriptive. One Illinois school district Kildeer-Countryside in Buffalo Grove, Illinois, was identified in the article “Districts Speak with One Voice.” The article was published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Staff Development. The article focuses on the implementation of PLCs. There is evidence that in this district the overall number of students that take the Illinois Standards Achievement Test did improve from 75% - 80% of student meeting standards, to 90% meeting standards over a six-year period (Many, 2008). This is further evidence of the value of PLCs.
The book *Professional Learning Communities* by Patrick Baccellieri examines the South Loop Elementary School. It was defined as a sinking ship that through PLCs has reformed. When reviewing the data of this school in the Illinois Interactive Report Card this school has undergone large improvements. What was at one time only 34% of students meeting expectations on ISAT in 2002 has grown to 91% meeting standards in 2010 (http://iirc.niu.edu).

A dissertation by John Stewart Tignor investigated Spotlight Schools in Illinois. Spotlight Schools are schools with high poverty and high performance. This study has elements common to this proposed study, though this is a small segment of Illinois schools.

**The Research Void**

Regardless of what happens with the reauthorization of the ESEA or waiver options, accountability and expectations for student performance will remain. The new assessments being developed will focus on growth of all students. However, these policy changes will not effectively make changes down to the school level. The Secretary of Education agrees, when he communicated school change capacity is necessary. Principals and other school leaders will need to lead that change.

The research points toward the high value of cultural change. The professional learning communities’ elements detailed in this chapter have extensive support by practitioners as well as researchers. While structural initiatives can have benefits their impact is limited. Cultural reform in the form of PLC elements can maximize the benefits of structural changes by maximizing the abilities of the staff and focusing their
efforts on consistent data driven student achievement. What have the students learned is far more important than what they were taught.

The research shows PLCs have one of the best benefits to student achievement. Yet there is limited Illinois research on PLCs influence on a standardized measure such as the ISAT. And there is no evidence on the value school leaders of successful schools place on the elements of PLCs.

What is missing in the research is a specific study of schools that have failed to make AYP for all reasons but have found a way to succeed. Based upon the research, the responses from effective schools may or may not have many elements of PLCs. The study could determine the school leadership’s rated value of PLCs elements on student learning.

The Research Questions

Research Question 1. Do successful Illinois elementary schools leaders value elements of Professional Learning Communities differently than structural reforms in reading and structural reforms in mathematics?

Research Question 2. Do restructuring Illinois elementary school leaders value elements of Professional Learning Communities differently than structural reforms in reading and structural reforms in mathematics?

Research Question 3. Do successful Illinois elementary schools leaders value Professional Learning Communities elements differently than restructuring school leaders?
**Research Question 4.** Do successful Illinois elementary school leaders value structural reforms in reading and structural reforms in mathematics differently than restructuring school leaders?
CHAPTER THREE
THE RESEARCH

Participants

There were three different types of participants for this study. The first group of participants were the leaders of successful Illinois elementary schools. These leaders were from schools that at one time had failed to meet the expectations for AYP for two consecutive years, but through some process, the students in these schools subsequently were able to meet the higher benchmark performance for two consecutive years needed to make AYP. There are 164 schools that meet these criteria. The Illinois State Board of Education yearly disseminates the list of schools that were able to go off AYP status. Since the list of schools for a single year would not yield a sufficient number for a robust survey analysis, multiple years were necessary. Administrators from successful elementary schools from 2007 - 2011 were surveyed.

The second group of participants were an equal number of schools engaged in restructuring. Restructuring is initiated after five consecutive years of a school not making AYP. The 164 successful schools were broken into two categories, Chicago suburban and non-suburban schools. Schools in the following eight counties were defined as Chicago suburban schools: McHenry, Lake, Kane, Dupage, Cook, Kendall, Will and Grundy. Any school outside of these counties were non-suburban. The schools of the Chicago Public School system were not included.
The final group, Illinois spotlight schools, are identified by the Illinois State Board of Education. The ISBE defines these schools as: “(Illinois Spotlight Schools are) high poverty, high performing schools where at least 50% of students are classified as low-income and at least 85% passed (met or exceeded standards on) the state reading and mathematics tests. All Spotlight Schools made Adequate Yearly Progress and sustained their performance over the past three years.” (IIRC, 2012) Leaders of 2011 Illinois Spotlight School were asked to participate in the survey for comparison purposes though their responses were not part of the formal research questions.

Every elementary school in restructuring in Illinois was sorted into the suburban or non-suburban category. The schools in each category were numbered and then a random number generator was used to select the necessary number of schools in each category. Based upon the number of successful suburban and non-suburban elementary schools, a matching number of suburban schools and non-suburban schools in restructuring was determined.

The final successful school list did not contain schools in the Chicago Public Schools. All Chicago Public Schools research must be approved through an internal review process. It is a violation of CPS policy to contact school leaders directly for research purposes. As a result, this survey did not include schools in Chicago.

Survey Tool

Surveymonkey.com was the vehicle for this survey, with email as the communication method. Surveymonkey.com allows for tracking of responses without
specific identification of the respondents. This method and suppression of IP addresses were used to insure respondent confidentiality.

Answers were kept confidential and at no point will an individual response be made available. Throughout the survey, surveymonkey.com maintained a secure encrypted connection. Surveymonkey.com also maintains several levels of electronic and physical security for its servers maintained in the United States.

All participants were asked to provide their consent by selecting the NEXT button on the survey page. If a respondent no longer wished to continue the survey, he or she was able to exit the survey at any time by selecting the “Exit this Survey” button on the top right corner of each webpage.

There were no foreseen risks to the respondents. The respondents could stop the survey and leave at any point should they choose. Only professional questions were asked and no personally identifying information was collected.

Emails were obtained from public sources. Most schools have their principals’ email available online. However, there were some schools where a specific email was not accessible to external individuals. In these cases there was often an electronic communication portal within the webpage that could be used to contact the school leader. That portal was used to send the link to the survey along with a brief description of the survey.

The survey was available for two weeks. There were reminders sent to the potential participants during the time the survey was available to remind and encourage potential participants to complete the survey.
Constructs

The survey contained three sections: structural reform questions, professional learning community element questions, and then general demographic questions. The structural reform questions reflect the types of structural interventions found in the literature and used by schools. These include adding or reassigning staff, adding instructional time to the school day or year, curricular modifications and enhancements and added revenue. Separate structural questions were asked for both reading and mathematics interventions.

The six elements of professional Learning Communities were part of the survey. These six elements are identified as the key PLC elements identified in PLC sources.

The survey asked which elements were or are being used within the school and the value the school leaders placed on these reforms through a variety of multiple-choice questions. The demographic questions include school description, location and performance history. There were two open-ended questions to gather additional information. All questions were developed by the author of this manuscript. The specific questions used in this survey can be found in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

The results of this survey were analyzed based upon the four research questions. Responses were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software. Pearson Chi-Square tests, independent and dependent t-tests, ANOVA and MANOVA tests were used to determine statistical significance of the data.
CHAPTER FOUR

DATA FROM ILLINOIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEADERS

Respondents

During January and February of 2012, the electronic survey instrument approved by the Loyola University of Chicago Institutional Review Board was implemented. The survey is available in Appendix B. Digital survey links were sent via email to the school leaders of successful Illinois elementary schools (successful) and leaders of Illinois elementary schools in restructuring (restructuring). A total of 149 surveys were sent to leaders of successful schools, resulting in 24 responses. In all 160 surveys were sent to the leaders of restructuring schools with a return of 25 responses. The corresponding response rates are: successful schools 16.1% and restructuring schools 15.6%.

The locations for the responding schools are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents Location Counts and Expected Counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorize your school's location</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful Count</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure Count</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Utilizing a Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis there is a significant difference in the locations of the schools, \( x^2 = 9.53, df = 2, p = 0.009 \). The number of urban schools and
the number of rural schools both had actual counts significantly different from expected values.

The enrollments of the schools in each research group differed though these differences were not significant utilizing a Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis. Upon visual inspection successful school respondents had the smallest range of school sizes (+/- 3). Table 2 details the enrollment sizes from the respondents to the survey.

Table 2. Respondents Enrollment Counts and Expected Counts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is your school's enrollment?</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 300 students</td>
<td>301 to 500 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful Count</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure Count</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total Count | 6 | 7 | 17 | 13 | 43 |
| Expected Count | 6.0 | 7.0 | 17.0 | 13.0 | 43.0 |

While there are more large successful schools, over 500 students, than small successful schools, less than or equal to 500 students, the school sizes are comparable. This contrasts with restructuring schools, which had 81% of the respondents came from schools with enrollments over 500 students. A Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was also conducted on the condensed enrollments of less than or equal to 500 students and more than 500 students. The results were not found to be significant.

To summarize, successful school responses represent all enrollment sizes but are primarily in the suburbs. Restructuring schools are primarily in the suburbs and city environments and are larger in size. The survey did not include any schools in the
Chicago Public School system due to the restrictions on survey participation by Chicago Public School personnel.

The final piece of demographic information collected was the grade levels housed in each school. Table 3 details those grade levels. Overall, both school groups covered an even spread of grade levels with a range of +/- 4.

Table 3. Responding Schools Self-Reported Grades Served

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
<th>7th</th>
<th>8th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Successful</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restructure</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Descriptive Statistics

The survey obtained quantitative information on the perceived value of reforms utilized by the two school types. These responses can be broken down into two types: how valuable are structural reforms in reading and math and how valuable are Professional Learning Communities, and its elements. The specific structural reforms for reading and math and PLC elements are detailed in Table 4.
Table 4. Structural Reforms for Reading and Math Performance and Professional Learning Communities Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Reforms for Reading</th>
<th>Structural Reforms for Mathematics</th>
<th>PLC Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Added Staff for Reading</td>
<td>Added Staff for Math</td>
<td>Common School Direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Changes in Reading</td>
<td>Curricular Changes in Math</td>
<td>Collaborative School Culture With a Focus on Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Instructional Time in Reading</td>
<td>Additional Instructional Time in Math</td>
<td>Collective Inquiry for Best Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Intervention Programs in Reading</td>
<td>New Intervention Programs in Math</td>
<td>Action Orientated: Learning by Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer School Options in Reading</td>
<td>Summer School Options in Math</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Revenue for Reading</td>
<td>More Revenue for Math</td>
<td>Results Orientated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Structural Reforms for Reading Performance**

The value of structural reforms used to improve reading performance was derived from the six areas identified in Table 4. Respondents were asked to rate the value of the different structural reforms on a 7-point scale, with 7 being the highest value of a reform, and 1 being no value. The values of the structural reforms for reading performance are detailed in Table 5.
Upon inspection of the means there is a consistent pattern of the successful schools valuing all structural reforms more than the restructuring schools. The responses, excluding one case, show successful school leaders rated the value of the reading reforms higher than the restructuring school leaders. Despite this visual trend, the differences are not statistically significant utilizing an independent t-test analysis. The value of interventions in reading approached significance \( t(38) = 1.367, p = 0.057 \). The remaining reforms were not found to be significant.

### Structural Reforms for Mathematics Performance

The structural reforms used to improve mathematics performance were derived from the six areas identified in Table 4. Respondents were asked to rate the value of the different structural reforms on a 7-point scale, with 7 being the highest value of a reform, and 1 being no value. The results for the structural reforms for mathematics performance are detailed in Table 6.
Table 6. Structural Reforms for Mathematics Performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value of Staff Added in Math</th>
<th>Value of Curric in Math</th>
<th>Value of Added time in Math</th>
<th>Value of Interventions in Math</th>
<th>Value of Summer Math Program</th>
<th>Value of Revenue for Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon inspection of the means there is a consistent pattern of the successful schools valuing all structural reforms more than the restructuring schools, excluding the tie of summer math programs. The differences seen were not statistically significant utilizing an independent t-test analysis.

Professional Learning Communities Elements

PLCs are composed of six different elements. These elements are identified in Table 4. Respondents were asked to rate the value of the six different elements on a 7-point scale, with 7 being providing the highest value, and 1 providing no value. Table 7 defines the number of schools trained in Professional Learning Communities and the number of schools implementing PLCs. Table 7 also specifies the mean value school leaders gave to the impact of PLCs on reading and mathematics performance.

Table 7. Professional Learning Communities Knowledge, Implementation and Value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trained in PLCs</th>
<th>Implement PLCs</th>
<th>Value of PLCs in Reading</th>
<th>Value of PLCs in Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes Count</td>
<td>No Count</td>
<td>Yes Count</td>
<td>No Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Upon inspection of the means there is a consistent pattern of the successful schools valuing PLCs for reading reforms and valuing PLCs for mathematics reforms more than the restructuring schools. These differences were not statistically significant utilizing an independent t-test analysis.

When comparing the two groups, a higher percentage of schools in restructuring have been trained in PLCs. Furthermore a higher percentage of restructuring schools report they were implementing PLCs. Percentage breakdowns are: 50.0% of successful schools are implementing PLCs and 59.1% of restructuring schools were implementing PLCs.

While a higher percentage of schools in restructuring have been trained in PLCs and have implemented PLCs, the value these school leaders placed on PLCs was lower than the successful schools though this difference was not found to be significant. The value restructuring school leaders placed upon PLCs was on average 0.9 points lower on the 7-point scale than the value successful school leaders place on PLCs.

**Value of Professional Learning Communities Elements**

The Professional Learning Community elements were derived from the six areas identified in Table 4. Respondents were asked to rate the value of the different PLC elements on a 7-point scale, with 7 being the highest value of a reform, and 1 being no value. The results for value of PLC elements are detailed in Table 8.
Table 8. The Value of Professional Learning Communities Elements by School Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Valuing Common School Direction</th>
<th>Valuing Collaborative School Culture with a Focus on Learning</th>
<th>Valuing Collective Inquiry for Best Practice</th>
<th>Valuing Action Orientated Learning</th>
<th>Valuing Continuous Improvement</th>
<th>Valuing Results Orientated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>2.04</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon inspection of the means there is consistent pattern of the successful schools valuing all PLC elements more than the restructuring schools. These differences were not statistically significant utilizing an independent t-tests analysis.

*Index Development*

The survey contained 18 value questions focused on structural reforms in reading and mathematics and PLC elements. These 18 questions can be categorized into three different indices. The first index contains responses to the value of structural reforms on reading performance. The second index describes the value of structural reforms on mathematics performance. The final index summarizes the value of PLC elements on performance. The questions utilized to develop these indices are detailed in Table 9.
Table 9. Components of the Three Value Indices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of Structural Methods On Reading Performance Index</th>
<th>Value of Structural Methods On Mathematics Performance Index</th>
<th>Value of PLC Elements On Performance Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were additional reading staff in improving student performance?</td>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were additional mathematics staff in improving student performance?</td>
<td>Please select the value to you of having a Common School Direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were the curricular changes in reading?</td>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were the curricular changes in mathematics?</td>
<td>Please select the value to you of having a Collaborative School Culture With a Focus on Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were the additional instructional time changes in reading?</td>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were the additional instructional time changes in mathematics?</td>
<td>Please select the value to you of having a Collective Inquiry for Best Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were intervention programs in reading?</td>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were intervention programs in mathematics?</td>
<td>Please select the value to you of being Action Orientated: Learning by Doing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were summer school programs in reading?</td>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable were summer school programs in mathematics?</td>
<td>Please select the value to you of Continuous Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable was additional revenue for reading?</td>
<td>In your opinion, how valuable was additional revenue for mathematics?</td>
<td>Please select the value to you of having a Results Orientation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine the reliability of these indices, a Cronbach Alpha statistical test was performed on each index. The results of the Cronbach Alpha analysis are contained in Table 10.
Table 10. Cronbach Alpha Tests on Structural Reforms and PLC Element Indices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value of Structural Methods On Reading Performance Index</th>
<th>Value of Structural Methods On Mathematics Performance Index</th>
<th>Value of PLC Elements On Performance Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach Alpha Value</td>
<td>0.899</td>
<td>0.725</td>
<td>.942</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Cronbach Alpha is a conservative estimate of internal consistency of an index measured using a mean of item-to-total correlations. If a Cronbach Alpha exceeds 0.7, then items may be combined to form an index that is considered sufficiently reliable for further analyses. Each one of the three indices surpassed the minimum 0.7 Cronbach value to be considered reliable. The value of structural reforms for reading and the value of PLC elements both surpassed the more stringent 0.8 Cronbach value indicating strong reliability. Since all three indices are reliable, hypothesis testing and analysis were conducted using these three indices.

Comparison of Means for Structural Reforms in Reading, Mathematics and Elements of Professional Learning Communities

The previous sections analyzed the individual elements of structural reforms in reading, mathematics and the elements of PLCs. The Cronbach tests determined indices could be constructed for each of these three areas. The indices then were analyzed to address the research questions of this study. The mean index values of the structural reforms in reading, mathematics and elements of PLCs can be found in Table 11.
Table 11. Values for PLC Elements and Structural Reforms in Reading and Math by School Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value of PLC Elements</th>
<th>Value of Structural Elements in Reading</th>
<th>Value of Structural Elements in Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Mean 6.0</td>
<td>Standard Deviation .90</td>
<td>Value 4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>Mean 5.4</td>
<td>Standard Deviation 1.72</td>
<td>Value 4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon inspection of the means there is a consistent pattern of the successful schools valuing all elements more than the restructuring schools. These differences were not statistically significant utilizing an independent t-test analysis. The standard deviation of PLC elements by restructuring schools is nearly double the standard deviation of the successful schools. Not surprisingly, the Levene’s test of Homogeneity did produce a significant finding. The Levene’s test for PLC elements was a $p = 0.007$ and there is no significant difference. This is perhaps due to the large variance between school groups.

**Research Question 1 Do successful Illinois elementary schools leaders value elements of Professional Learning Communities differently than structural reforms in reading and structural reforms in mathematics?**

The mean results of the successful school leaders in Table 11 show the mean difference between structural reforms for reading and mathematics and PLC elements when measured on a 7-point scale. The successful school leader means of the six PLC elements is higher than the means for structural reforms in reading and mathematics. To determine if this difference is significant a paired samples t-test of statistical significance was conducted. The null hypothesis for this test was that successful school leaders value elements of PLC equally to structural reforms.
$H_0$: Value of PLC elements $=\ Value$ of structural reforms

$H_a$: Value of PLC elements $\neq$ Value of structural reforms

The mean for the value of PLCs and structural reforms in reading is notably different on a 7-point scale. The mean for the value for PLC elements was 6.0 (SD = 0.90) and the mean value for structural reforms in reading was 4.8 (SD = 1.89). The visual difference in means suggests a difference between the value of PLC elements and structural reforms in reading for successful school leaders.

The results from the paired samples t-test were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of PLC Elements - Value of Structural Elements in Reading</th>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Dev.</td>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of PLC Elements - Value of Structural Elements in Reading</td>
<td>1.1803</td>
<td>2.1018</td>
<td>.4481</td>
<td>.2483</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from the t-test confirm the visual findings. The t-test resulted in a $p$ value of 0.016. Because this $p$ value is below 0.05 we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. There is a significant difference between the values that successful school leaders place on PLC elements compared to the value they place on structural reforms. Successful school leaders valued PLC elements significantly more than structural reforms in reading [$t(21) = 2.634, p = 0.016$].

The mean for the value of PLCs and structural reforms in mathematics is also visually different on a 7-point scale. The mean for the value for PLC elements was 6.0
(SD = 0.90) and the mean value for structural reforms in mathematics was 4.5 (SD = 1.81). The difference in means between the value of PLC elements and structural reforms in mathematics for successful school leaders was tested using a dependent $t$-test.

Table 13. Research Question 1 - Paired Samples Test Successful School Leaders Value of PLC Elements and Value of Structural Reforms in Mathematics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Dev.</td>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of PLC Elements - Value of Structural Elements in Math</td>
<td>1.5189</td>
<td>2.2590</td>
<td>0.4816</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The $t$-test resulted in a $p$ value of 0.005. Because this significance value is below 0.05 we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. There is a significant difference between the value successful school leaders placed on PLC elements compared to the value they placed on structural reforms in mathematics. Successful school leaders valued PLC elements significantly more than structural reforms in mathematics [$t(21) = 3.154, p = 0.005$].

Research Question 2 Do restructuring Illinois elementary school leaders value elements of Professional Learning Communities differently than structural reforms in reading and structural reforms in mathematics?

The mean results of the successful school leaders in Table 11 show a mean difference between PLC elements and structural methods for reading and mathematics when measured on a 7-point scale. Restructuring school leaders valued the six PLC
elements more than structural reforms for reading and mathematics. The mean for the value for PLC elements was 5.4 (SD = 1.72) and the mean value for structural reforms in reading was 4.7 (SD = 1.64). The mean value for structural reforms in mathematics was 4.1 (SD = 1.64).

To determine if this difference is significant, a paired samples t-test of statistical significance was conducted for PLC elements and structural reforms in reading. A second paired t-test was performed PLC elements and structural reforms in mathematics. The null hypothesis for this test was restructuring school leaders value structural reforms and elements of PLCs equally.

\[ H_0: \text{Value of structural methods} = \text{Value of PLC elements} \]

\[ H_a: \text{Value of structural methods} \neq \text{Value of PLC elements} \]

The results from the paired samples t-test for PLC elements and structural reforms in reading are found in Table 14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Std. Error Mean</td>
<td>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of PLC Elements - Value of Structural Elements in Reading</td>
<td>.7750</td>
<td>2.6499</td>
<td>.5649</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The t-test resulted in a \( p \) value of 0.185. Because this significance value is not below 0.05 we must accept the null hypothesis. There is no significant difference
between the values that restructuring school leaders placed on structural reforms in reading compared to the value they placed on PLC elements \( t(21) = 1.372, p = 0.185 \).

The paired samples t-test for PLC elements and structural reforms in mathematics are in Table 15.

Table 15. Research Question 2 - Paired Samples Test Restructuring School Leaders Value of PLC Elements and Value of Structural Reforms in Mathematics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of PLC Elements - Value of Structural Elements in Math</td>
<td>1.3765</td>
<td>2.8487</td>
<td>.6073</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The t-test resulted in a p value of 0.034. Because this significance value was below 0.05 we must reject the null hypothesis. There is a significant difference between the values that restructuring school leaders placed on structural reforms in math compared to the value they placed on PLC elements. Restructuring school leaders valued PLC elements significantly more than structural reforms in mathematics \( t(21) = 2.266, p = 0.034 \).

Research Question 3 Do successful Illinois elementary schools leaders value Professional Learning Communities elements differently than restructuring school leaders?

The mean results of the successful school leaders and restructuring leaders can be found in Table 11. The results showed a difference in means between the value successful school leaders placed on PLC elements and the value restructuring school
leaders placed on PLC elements on a 7-point scale with 7 being the highest value of a reform, and 1 being no value. Successful school leaders valued PLC elements with a mean of 6.0 (SD = 0.90). Restructuring school leaders valued PLC elements with a mean of 5.4 (SD = 1.72). Upon visual inspection successful school leaders valued PLC elements more than restructuring school leaders but these differences were not statistically significant.

The responses contained in Table 11 were mathematically rescaled into three categories: Low Value, Some Value and High Value. The new scale was coded 1 through 3. This was done to address the skewed nature of the responses. An independent t-test of statistical significance was then conducted. This was the appropriate test for this research question because there are only two nominal groups: successful school leaders and restructuring school leaders and the two groups are independent.

The null hypothesis for this test was successful school leaders and restructuring school leaders value PLC elements equally.

\[ H_0: \text{successful schools value PLC elements} = \text{restructuring schools value PLC elements} \]

\[ H_a: \text{successful schools value PLC elements} \neq \text{restructuring schools value PLC elements} \]

The results from the independent t-test in SPSS are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of PLC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.909</td>
<td>.2942</td>
<td>.0627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.590</td>
<td>.6661</td>
<td>.1420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Successful school leaders have a higher value for PLC elements. After recoding the response to a 3-point scale there is a significant difference between school groups. Table 17 displays the results of a t-test on these responses.

Table 17. Research Question 3 - Independent Samples Test Successful School Leaders and Restructuring School Leaders Value of PLC Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value of PLC Elements</th>
<th>Equal variances not assumed</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.049</td>
<td>28.895</td>
<td>.0496</td>
<td>.3181</td>
<td>.1552</td>
<td>.0006, .6357</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite rescaling, the Levene Test for Equality of Variances was not met since the value was significant \((F = 19.3, p = 0.001)\). As a result equal variances cannot be assumed. The results from the t-test then provided a 0.0496 significance level with equal variances not assumed. Because this significance value was below 0.05 we can reject the null hypothesis. There is a significant difference between the value that successful school leaders placed on PLC elements compared to the value restructuring school leaders placed on PLC elements. Successful school leaders valued PLC elements significantly more than restructuring school leaders \([t(28.895) = 2.049, p = 0.0496]\).
Research Question 4 Do successful Illinois elementary school leaders value structural reforms in reading and structural reforms in mathematics differently than restructuring school leaders?

The mean results of the successful school leaders and restructuring leaders can be found in Table 11. The results show a difference in means between successful school leaders rating of PLC elements and restructuring school leaders on a 7-point scale with 7 being the highest value of a reform, and 1 being no value. Successful school leaders valued structural reform in reading with a mean of 4.8 (SD = 1.98). Restructuring school leaders valued structural reform in reading with a mean of 4.7 (SD = 1.64). Successful school leaders valued structural reform in mathematics with a mean of 4.5 (SD = 1.81). Restructuring school leaders valued structural reform in reading with a mean of 4.1 (SD = 1.87). None of these differences was statistically significant.

The responses contained in Table 11 were mathematically rescaled into three categories: Low Value, Some Value and High Value. The new scale was coded 1 through 3. This was done to address the skewed nature of the responses. An independent t-test of statistical significance was then conducted. This was the appropriate test for this research question because there are only two nominal groups: successful school leaders and restructuring school leaders and the two groups are independent. Because there are two independent indices, one for reading and one for mathematics, the t-test will have two measures.

The null hypothesis for this test was that restructuring school leaders and successful school leaders value structural reforms equally.
$H_0$: Value of structural reforms in reading (or mathematics) for restructuring leaders $=$ Value of structural reforms in reading (or mathematics) for successful leaders

$H_a$: Value of structural reforms in reading (or mathematics) for restructuring leaders $\neq$ Value of structural reforms in reading (or mathematics) for successful leaders

The results from the independent t-test are:

Table 18. Research Question 4 - Successful School Leaders and Restructuring School Leaders and Value of Structural Reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of Structural Reforms Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.636</td>
<td>.4923</td>
<td>.1049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2.500</td>
<td>.6593</td>
<td>.1346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Structural Reforms in Math</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.428</td>
<td>.6761</td>
<td>.1475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.285</td>
<td>.7837</td>
<td>.1710</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean values are very similar between the two groups. The resulting t-test is:

Table 19. Research Question 4 - Independent Samples Test Successful School Leaders and Restructuring School Leaders Value of Structural Reforms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
<th>Mean Difference</th>
<th>Std. Error Difference</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of Structural Reforms Reading</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>.1363</td>
<td>.1728</td>
<td>-.2120 to .4847</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Structural Reforms in Math</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>.531</td>
<td>.1428</td>
<td>.2258</td>
<td>-.3136 to .5993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For structural reforms in reading, the Levene Test for Equality of Variances was met since the value is not significant for the reading values \((F = 3.317, p = 0.075)\). As a result equal variances can be assumed. The results from the t-test then provided a 0.434 significance level with equal variances assumed. Because this significance value is not below 0.05 we must accept the null hypothesis. There is no significant difference between the value that restructuring school leaders placed on structural reforms in reading compared to the value successful school leaders placed on structural reforms in reading \([t(44) = 0.789, p = 0.434]\).

The results for math reach a similar conclusion. The Levene Test for Equality of Variances was met since the value is not significant for the reading values \((F = 0.669, p = 0.418)\). As a result equal variances can be assumed. The results from the t-test then provided a 0.531 significance level with equal variances. Because this significance value is not below 0.05 we must accept the null hypothesis. There was no significant difference between the value that restructuring school leaders placed on structural reforms in math compared to the value successful school leaders placed on structural reforms in math \([t(39.158) = 0.632, p = 0.531]\).

**Ex-Post Facto Results**

The focus of the survey was the value successful and restructuring school leaders ascribed to a variety of reform strategies. As described in Chapter 3 a third group was surveyed, spotlight school leaders. Results from key questions and other significant findings have been included in these ex-post facto results.
There were 149 surveys sent to leaders of successful schools, resulting in 24 responses. There were 160 surveys sent to the leaders of restructuring schools with a return of 25 responses. There were 159 surveys sent to leaders of spotlight schools, which produced 29 responses. The corresponding response rates were: successful schools 16.1%, restructuring schools 15.6%, and spotlight schools 18.2%. Percentages of the total completed responses utilized for analysis were: successful 30.8%, restructuring 32.1%, spotlight 37.2%.

The locations and enrollments for the responding schools are broken down in Table 20.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Group</th>
<th>Successful</th>
<th>Restructure</th>
<th>Spotlight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Categorize the school's location</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the school's enrollment?</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 300 students</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301 to 500 students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>501 to 700 students</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 701 students</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were a variety of different locations and school sizes in the responses. Overall, 60% of all responses were from leaders in suburban communities. Suburban schools ranged from 43% for spotlight schools to 71% for successful schools. Most spotlight school responses came from leaders in rural schools with a close second in suburban environments. Restructuring schools had the strongest proportion of urban environments, equaling 33% of those responses. The result of this location analysis was found to be statistically significant utilizing a Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis, \( x^2(4, N = 65) = 21.66, p = 0.001 \).
The enrollments of the schools in each research group also differed. Successful school responses represent the most equal spread of school sizes. While there are more large successful schools than small successful schools, the range is small. This contrasts with restructuring and spotlight schools, which are both skewed. Restructuring school responses came more often from larger school leaders. 81% of the responding restructuring schools had enrollments over 500 students. On the other end of the spectrum, all spotlight schools had enrollments equal to or less than 500 students. Table 21 details this data. The result of a Pearson’s Chi-Square analysis was found to be statistically significant, \( x^2(2, N = 66) = 31.49, p = 0.001 \).

Table 21. Enrollments Condensed to School Sizes up to 500 Students and More Than 500 Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Enrollments Condensed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>500 Students or Less</td>
<td>More than 500 Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spotlight</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expected Count</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To summarize, the results from the locations and enrollments are both statistically significant. Successful school responses represent all enrollment sizes but are primarily in the suburbs. Restructuring schools are primarily in the suburbs and city environments and have larger enrollments. Spotlight schools are smaller and are often in rural environments. The survey did not include any schools in the Chicago Public School system due to the restrictions on survey participation by Chicago Public School leaders.
The final piece of demographic information collected was the grade levels each school group services. Table 22 details those grade levels. Overall, restructuring schools cover an even spread of grade levels. Spotlight schools are skewed to the lower grades and successful schools are skewed to high elementary grades. Responses were within predicted ranges and hence were not found to be significant.

Table 22. Responding Schools Self-Reported Grades Served

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which grades does the school serve?</th>
<th>3rd Grade</th>
<th>4th Grade</th>
<th>5th Grade</th>
<th>6th Grade</th>
<th>7th Grade</th>
<th>8th Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spotlight</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Structural Reforms for Reading Performance**

The value of structural reforms used to improve reading performance was derived from the six areas identified in Table 4. Respondents were asked to rate the value of the different structural reforms on a 7-point scale, with 7 being the highest value of a reform, and 1 being no value. The results from the structural reforms for reading performance responses are detailed in Table 23.
Upon visual inspection of the means there is a consistent pattern of the spotlight schools valuing all structural reforms more than the restructuring schools. However, only one reform was found to be statistically significant utilizing an ANOVA analysis. The value of interventions in reading was found to be significant between successful, spotlight and restructuring school leaders $F(2, 62) = 5.403, p = 0.007$.

### Structural Reforms for Mathematics Performance

The structural reforms used to improve mathematics performance were derived from the six areas identified in Table 4. Respondents were asked to rate the value of the different structural reforms on a 7-point scale, with 7 being the highest value of a reform, and 1 being no value. The results from the structural reforms for mathematics performance responses are detailed in Table 24.
Upon inspection of the means there is consistent pattern of the spotlight schools valuing all structural reforms more than the restructuring schools. However, no reforms were found to be statistically significant utilizing an ANOVA analysis.

**Professional Learning Communities Elements**

PLCs are composed of six different elements. These elements are identified in Table 4. Respondents were asked to rate the value of the six different elements on a 7-point scale, with 7 being providing the highest value, and 1 providing no value. Table 25 defines the number of schools trained in Professional Learning Communities and the number of schools implementing PLCs. Table 25 also specifies the mean value school leaders gave to the impact of PLCs on reading and mathematics performance.
Upon inspection of the means there is separation of the value spotlight schools and successful schools assigned to the value of PLCs in reading when compared to restructuring schools. This inspection, however, was not statistically significant utilizing an ANOVA analysis.

Upon inspection of the means there is separation of the value spotlight schools and successful schools assigned to the value of PLCs in mathematics when compared to restructuring schools. This inspection however was not statistically significant utilizing an ANOVA analysis.

The Professional Learning Community elements correspond to the six areas identified in Table 4. Respondents were asked to rate the value of the different PLC elements on a 7-point scale, with 7 being the highest value of a reform, and 1 being no value. The results for the PLC elements are detailed in Table 26.

| Table 26. The Value of Professional Learning Communities Elements by School Group |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                                 | Valuing Common School Direction | Valuing Collaborative School Culture with a Focus on Learning | Valuing Collective Inquiry for Best Practice | Valuing Action Orientated Learning | Valuing Continuous Improvement | Valuing Results Orientated |
| Successful                      | Mean Standard Deviation        | 6.1                           | 6.1                           | 5.9                            | 5.8                            | 6.1                            | 5.9                            |
|                                 |                                | 1.11                          | 1.06                          | 1.17                          | 1.02                          | 1.15                          | .92                            |
| Restructure                    | Mean Standard Deviation        | 5.3                           | 5.4                           | 5.5                            | 5.3                            | 5.8                            | 5.6                            |
|                                 |                                | 1.81                          | 2.04                          | 1.79                          | 1.68                          | 1.58                          | 1.71                            |
| Spotlight                      | Mean Standard Deviation        | 6.6                           | 6.4                           | 6.3                            | 6.3                            | 6.5                            | 6.6                            |
|                                 |                                | .98                           | 1.07                          | .95                            | .98                            | 1.00                          | .77                            |
Upon inspection of the means there is consistent pattern of the spotlight schools having the highest value for PLC elements followed by successful schools and consistently lower are the restructuring schools. The results from an ANOVA analysis showed statistical significance in three of the six elements. Table 27 details the elements that were determined to be significant through the ANOVA analysis.

Table 27. ANOVA Analysis of Significant PLC Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLC Element</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Common School Direction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>17.251</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.625</td>
<td>4.702</td>
<td>.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>113.734</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1.834</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130.985</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Action Orientated Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>10.540</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.270</td>
<td>3.282</td>
<td>.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>96.349</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.606</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>106.889</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Results Orientated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>10.232</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.116</td>
<td>3.420</td>
<td>.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>89.768</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.496</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.000</td>
<td>62</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ANOVA results identified three PLC elements as statistically significant. The values of common school direction, action orientated learning, and results orientation were significant when measured across school types.

The previous tests analyzed the individual elements of structural reforms in reading, mathematics and the elements of PLCs. The Cronbach tests determined indices could be constructed for each of these three areas. The indices can then be analyzed to address the research questions of this study. The average values of the structural reforms in reading, mathematics and elements of PLCs can be found in Table 28.
Table 28. Mean Values for Structural Reforms and PLC Elements by School Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Group</th>
<th>Value of Structural Elements in Reading Index</th>
<th>Value of Structural Elements in Math Index</th>
<th>Value of PLC Elements Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Mean 4.8</td>
<td>Mean 4.5</td>
<td>Mean 6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Deviation 1.89</td>
<td>Standard Deviation 1.81</td>
<td>Standard Deviation .90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructure</td>
<td>Mean 4.7</td>
<td>Mean 4.1</td>
<td>Mean 5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Deviation 1.64</td>
<td>Standard Deviation 1.87</td>
<td>Standard Deviation 1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spotlight</td>
<td>Mean 5.6</td>
<td>Mean 4.7</td>
<td>Mean 6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standard Deviation 1.45</td>
<td>Standard Deviation 1.99</td>
<td>Standard Deviation .71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the three indices the range was the highest for PLC element. Spotlight schools rated PLC elements the highest followed by successful schools. The relatively lower ratings of the restructuring schools made for large discrepancies between the two effective schools and the restructuring schools.

Successful schools leaders rate the value of PLC elements 1.2 to 1.5 points higher than structural reforms in reading and mathematics on a 7-point scale. Spotlight leaders rate the value of PLC elements 0.9 and 1.8 points higher than structural reforms in reading and mathematics, respectively.

**Three Indices and Three Schools Significance Testing**

A final set of statistical analyses was run on the three indices and the three school groups. A MANOVA analysis was conducted in SPSS to determine the significance of the three groups and the three indices. Using the Wilk’s Lambda MANOVA calculation the results were not significant. F(6, 66) = 1.809, \( p = 0.108 \).

A follow-up ANOVA analysis was run on PLC elements. This was the only index, which produced a significant result in the Post Hoc tests of the MANOVA. The results of the ANOVA did confirm significant differences for PLC elements F(2, 66) =
4.053, \( p = 0.022 \). This verifies spotlight school leaders valued PLC elements significantly more than restructuring school leaders.
Analysis of the research questions and the ex post facto testing confirmed the significant value of PLC elements. Professional Learning Community elements were found to be significantly more valuable for the higher performing, successful and spotlight, Illinois elementary school leaders than restructuring reforms in reading or mathematics. Research question 1 and the ex post facto testing confirmed these significant results.

It was also found that the two higher performing Illinois school leaders, successful and spotlight, valued elements of PLC significantly more than leaders of restructuring Illinois schools. Confirmation comes from the significant findings of research question 3. Significant results contributing to this conclusion were also found in the ANOVA from the ex post facto testing.

These valued PLC elements form a cultural of continuous improvement and reform for a school. Hence, for successful Illinois elementary schools the way a school operates was rated as more valuable to school leaders than the programs implemented, staffing added or additional funds. These survey results confirmed that even without formal PLC training, the implementation of PLC elements was more valuable than other reforms.

These results are consistent with the research by Dr. Marzano on effective school culture (Marzano, 2005). Michael Fullen’s conclusions from 2011, “Time and again we
see the power of collective capacity. Professional learning communities, get these results...” (Fullen, 2011) Other researchers findings were also confirmed for elementary schools, “…well developed PLCs have a positive impact on both teaching practice and student achievement.” (Vescio, 2008). Ultimately, Dr. Dufour’s resources on Professional Learning Communities and the impact upon schools are confirmed in Illinois elementary schools under NCLB.

The research on PLC elements themselves, detailed in the second chapter, are clearly supported by these findings. Mike Schmocker’s strong support for setting goals, similar to DuFour’s common direction, is supported by this Illinois specific research. Dr. Reeves defined values from 90/90/90 schools and the value of distributive leadership equating to common school direction and collaborative culture are seen in the survey results (Reeves, 2005). Jim Collin’s requirement to “confront the brutal facts” (Collins, 2001) can be found in the PLC elements index of this research. Action orientation and commitment to continuous improvement echoed by Reeves (Reeves, 2005), Dufour (DuFour, 2009) and Stiggins (Stiggins, 2004) are supported by this research.

One surprising finding in the survey results was the percentage of restructuring schools that have been trained in PLCs, and their elements. A total of 45% of restructuring schools were trained in PLCs, which is higher than the percentages of successful schools or spotlight schools, 32% and 22% respectively. One explanation is restructuring school leaders often identified the Rising Star School Improvement system as a beneficial element of school success. The Rising Star School Improvement system is a required school improvement tool for Illinois schools in restructuring. Many of the 104 indicators of effective practice in the Rising Star School Improvement system relate to
PLC elements. The ISBE should be credited for utilizing this tool to expose, train and require implementation of PLC elements for restructuring schools. This system may also be the reason, contrary to the literature, that Illinois elementary restructuring schools responding found greater value in PLC elements than structural elements.

The US Department of Education’s Race To The Top grant has provided $4.35 billion dollars to states that have complied with a variety of requirements. While the money is desired by all states, additional revenue was not found to be valuable by participants. Additional revenue for reading improvements was rated ninth out of the twelve structural reforms and PLC elements. Additional revenue for mathematics improvements was also rated ninth out of the twelve structural mathematics reforms and PLC elements.

The Silva study determined the impact of additional time through summer school and beyond the school day was highly effective with minority groups and students living in poverty (Silva, 2007). This contrasts with the findings of this survey. Summer school programs in math and reading were both rated the least valuable of the six types of structural reforms and six PLC elements. Next to last was additional time within or beyond the school day. These directly conflict with the value Silva found in additional instructional time. Silva used data from a Duke researcher H. Cooper that examined 39 studies on summer programs. Cooper’s results were focused on summer loss and the resulting benefits of year round schools (Cooper, 1996). The quality of summer programming implemented and year-round schools may play a large part in the reduction of summer loss but that was beyond the scope of this survey.
Limitations of the Study

This study like any other strives to be comprehensive and reliable. One limitation to this survey was the absence of responses by Chicago Public School System (CPS) due to CPS Board of Education policy; therefore, this study did not include CPS responses. All three groups of schools, successful, restructuring and spotlight, are found in CPS. CPS has over 100 schools in restructuring. Responses by this pool of leaders could have added beneficial insight into the value of cultural and structural reforms. Because Illinois performance is so dominated by CPS, the lack of these data is a limitation. However, responses from the other two Illinois urban schools systems, Rockford and Waukegan, contributed responses as urban schools.

This study was focused on Illinois elementary schools and the uniqueness of these schools under NCLB. As such Illinois high schools and schools outside of Illinois were not surveyed in this study. Private schools and parochial schools were not included in this survey as well. This author hopes that this research could be added to the research collective on effective cultural reforms and found to generalize beyond Illinois elementary schools.

The level of implementation and vigor of the use of the six PLC elements could not be determined by this survey instrument. Some schools may have extensive use of PLC elements as part of their culture but other schools may only minimally implement the elements. The level of integration into the school’s culture could bolster or inhibit the value of PLC elements or any intervention strategy. Some leaders may have attended conferences and read the literature on cultural reforms and thus may have responded with
what they know should occur in the school, however, this idealized vision might not be what is occurring. Determining the level of integration of PLC elements into the culture of the school could shed light onto different values assigned and corresponding school performance. This will have to be left for follow-up researchers.

Some leaders may have personal biases for or against PLC elements for a variety of reasons, which could have affected their responses. While this is difficult to measure, it would be helpful to determine. Any negative personal bias by any leaders was hopefully equalized by positive personal bias described above by other leaders. The true impact is unknown. One way to address this possible perspective bias would be a more detailed follow-up study on site or with multiple respondents from each school.

There were sufficient response rates to run a statistical analysis, but a more robust response rate would have been desired. Response rates were between 16 and 19 percent. This resulted in samples between 24 and 29. The desirability of higher response would help generalize the results and perhaps lead to more significant findings.

It should be noted that while a correlation exists, this is not causation. It cannot be stated that a school that increases their value for PLC elements will always see higher student performance. The converse to this also cannot be verified with this research: high student performance will not necessarily result in a higher rated value for PLC elements among administrators. Further studies could be developed to show evidence of the validity of the correlation.
Recommendations for Future Research

The possibility of surveying successful elementary school leaders in Illinois is coming to an end. The number of possible candidates continues to decline each year. In 2008 there were 184 total schools in Illinois that had improved for two years after failing to meet AYP for two years. In 2011, the number was 8. The leaders that began PLC reforms in past years often have retired or moved on. A common reason some leaders did not respond was that reforms took place under a previous leader, hence the current leader did not feel knowledgeable enough to complete the survey. This will be even more the case as time moves on from the 2008 AYP results. With an ever decreasing group of successful leaders as defined in this survey, any future research should identify a new definition of a successful school.

The goal of this research was to provide information on how to help schools and ultimately students have high quality educations. Moving forward, the emphasis should be on restructuring schools. Within the category of restructuring schools, there were a variety of values. The variance for the value questions was the highest in restructuring schools. A focused study on the value of PLC elements in restructuring schools that analyzes improving performance on a ratio scale level rather than the benchmark proficiency level of this study would be valuable. All current reporting is done with proficiency benchmarks. This is the Illinois accountability tool. Since AYP uses benchmark scores, schools such as those in restructuring are often well below the benchmark score and hence improvements are not dramatic enough to be detected. A
study that looked at trends of mean scale scores on the accountability tool, by grade, in restructuring schools could detect improvements when schools implement PLC elements.

Conducting in-depth interviews of school staff could pinpoint what is perceived versus what is occurring. Surveying and interviewing the staff of improving restructuring schools and then comparing that data to staff interviews of not improving restructuring schools would bring a more rounded view of the value of PLC elements. Additionally, researchers looking at ratio scale scores from ISAT or other standardized assessments such as Northwest Evaluation Association’s MAP test would allow for greater variation in the success level of these restructuring schools.

An area of potential concern for restructuring schools is reform fatigue. This is a term being used in education circles that describes, constant “fad” like reforms, which may have good value if implemented well but due to poor implementation, or a constant flow of new reforms, fosters cynical educators (Trout, 2012). Restructuring schools reported higher implementation and training levels of PLCs than the other schools yet they rated their value the lowest. Could this be due to the constant poorly implemented reforms being utilized in poor performing schools? Could a general level of frustration with a lack of improvement cause there to be deflated values for all reforms? Within the restructuring group there must be success cases. What causes a restructuring school to begin improving and others to give in to cynicism? Is cynicism and reform fatigue the reason for higher levels of PLC training for restructuring schools and yet significantly lower values assigned to PLC elements?
Implications

My old mentor and the other educators who think they can “wait out” accountability are wrong. Accountability is here to stay. My old mentor and other cynics believe that initiating quick structural reforms is the best path, are shown to be to be wrong. Emphasis on structural reforms harms the quality of the education by diverting school reform energy away from the deeper and more effective cultural reform. The Rand report on CPS schools indicated, there was far too much effort expended on “bubble students” and hence avoiding the long-term true reform of cultural change (Neal, 2007; Harris, 2007). A core goal of No Child Left Behind when it was adopted in 2001 was to identify the discrepancies between the student performance of ethnic and socioeconomic groups. In a campaign speech in 1999 to the Latino Business Association of Texas, then Presidential Candidate George W Bush, initiator of NCLB, stated, “Some say it is unfair to hold disadvantaged children to rigorous standards. I say it is discrimination to require anything less - the soft bigotry of low expectations.” (New York Times, 1999) NCLB has brought that discrepancy to the forefront.

Subgroups and ethnicities are showing some growth. Aggregate numbers across the US as seen in the NAEP data do show improvement (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). However, when using NCLB as the measure, US schools are not improving, they are getting worse. There are many more schools being identified as failing. As Arne Duncan predicted in 2011, 82% of US schools will be labeled failing under NCLB. The actual number in 2012 is currently not known.
The benefits of Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 and the 2001 reauthorization of No Child Left Behind need to be built upon. Just as the ESEA is set to provide for support for at-risk populations by equal school access, NCLB identified the still unequal student performance within these equal access schools. The NCLB system of identification of unequal variance of education within a school has been exposed this last decade. The benchmark proficiency system used under NCLB has reached its limit. Restructuring schools far below the benchmark in Illinois may be giving up hope. Implementation fatigue may be setting in. Why bother truly reforming if there is no hope of reaching a benchmark of 92.5%. Students must demonstrate success when the school is working on improving the number of students to more than 50%.

Now it is time to transition to a new system of identification. It is time to adopt a new accountability system. By changing to a system that measures the growth of all students from a baseline to a target later in the year, every student’s performance would be measured. Every student’s performance would need to be addressed by a school. Any perceived value of structural reforms for the “bubble students” would be gone. This would motivate school leaders to focus on the benefits of PLC elements occurring in their schools. When all students are part of the schools’ success determination, then cultural reform becomes a more necessary tool and must be given more value.

The theory of cultural reform has been supported in Illinois. The hope of this author is that the politics of NCLB reform be put aside so that Washington will not focus on the structural changes, such as more contact time or additional money, but on the cultural change. Any renewal of the Elementary Secondary Education Act will focus on
helping school leaders create a culture of effective results through PLC elements. For
schools in restructuring let this research clear away the distractions of structural reforms
and clarify the benefits of re-culturing the school. Cultural reform is necessary for the
benefit of education in United States, or more importantly, for the benefit of students in
failing schools.
APPENDIX A

ILLINI EQUAL STEPS MODEL
ILLINI EQUAL STEPS MODEL

Equal Steps 7.5% Model

Retrieved from: http://www.isbe.net/ayp/htmls/illini_equal_steps.htm
APPENDIX B

ELECTRONIC SURVEY TOOL
Informed Consent Page

Prior to beginning this survey please read this page carefully. By clicking the NEXT button below you are giving your consent to participate in the survey. If you do not wish to participate in this survey then click on the “Exit This Survey” button in the top right corner of this page.

Project Title: School Reform and Adequate Yearly Progress
Researcher(s): Steven Thomas
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Martha Ellen Wynne, Ph.D.

Introduction:
You are being asked to take part in a research study being conducted by Steven Thomas for a dissertation under the supervision of Dr. Martha Ellen Wynne, Ph.D. from the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago.

You are being asked to participate as a leader of an elementary school in Illinois that is under the requirements of No Child Left Behind and Adequate Yearly Progress.

Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before deciding to participate in the study.

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to examine the variety of strategies used by elementary school leaders and the perceived value of these strategies on student performance.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in the study, then click the NEXT button below. You will be asked to answer a variety of multiple choice questions and two open ended questions on school reform strategies. There are three parts to this survey: structural reforms, cultural reforms, and demographic information. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes of your time.

Risks/Benefits:
There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you from participation, but the information gained will be used to help guide new and current principals and school leadership training programs.

Confidentiality:
Your answers will be confidential to the limits of technology and at no point will an individual response be made available. Throughout this survey your responses will be transmitted via a secure encrypted connection to the survey site. The survey provider maintains several levels of electronic and physical security for its servers maintained in the United States.

The anonymous results of the survey will be maintained at surveymonkey.com until after the survey analysis is complete. A single download of the data will be made for analysis. All access to the surveymonkey.com site and the downloaded copy will be password protected at all times. Only the principal researcher will have direct access to surveymonkey.com. Once all analysis is complete all data will be deleted from the surveymonkey.com server.

Voluntary Participation:
Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do not want to be in this study, you do not have to participate. Even if you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or to withdraw.
from participation at any time, before survey submission, without penalty. However, because the data is anonymous, once submitted the researcher will not be able to exclude or withdraw a participant’s responses.

Research Subject Rights:
For detailed information on your rights as a research subject please contact Dr. Wynne at mwynne@luc.edu or the Office of Research Studies at Loyola University (773) 508-2689 or at irb@luc.edu.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have questions about this research study, please feel free to contact Steven Thomas at thomas_steve@comcast.net or the faculty sponsor Dr. Martha Ellen Wynne, Ph.D. at mwynne@luc.edu.
## Curricular Changes

### Curricular Changes for READING Improvement since 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new curricular program in READING?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new SUPPLEMENTAL curricular program for students not &quot;Meeting&quot; Illinois standards, in READING?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new AT-HOME curricular program in READING?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Curricular Changes for MATHEMATICS Improvement since 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new curricular program in MATHEMATICS?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new SUPPLEMENTAL curricular program for students not &quot;Meeting&quot; Illinois standards, in MATHEMATICS?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new AT-HOME curricular program in MATHEMATICS?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### In your opinion, how valuable were the CURRICULAR CHANGES in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular Changes</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new curricular program in READING?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new SUPPLEMENTAL curricular program for students not “Meeting” Illinois standards in READING?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new AT-HOME curricular program in READING?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular Changes for MATHEMATICS Improvement since 2008.</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new curricular program in MATHEMATICS?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new SUPPLEMENTAL curricular program for students not “Meeting” Illinois standards in MATHEMATICS?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new AT-HOME curricular program in MATHEMATICS?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In your opinion, how valuable were the CURRICULAR CHANGES in:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Additional Instructional Time

**Since 2008 did you extend your school day to increase the amount of instruction in:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How often were students recommended or required to attend reading or mathematics programs beyond their normal school day.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>0 times a week</th>
<th>1 time a week</th>
<th>2 times a week</th>
<th>3 times a week</th>
<th>4 times a week</th>
<th>5 times a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before School</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During Lunch</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After School</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Were students recommended or required to attend reading or mathematics programs on the weekend?**

- Yes
- No

**In your opinion, how valuable were the ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTIONAL TIME changes in:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Interventions

**Intervention Programs for READING Improvement since 2008.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new intervention</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>program for students not “Meeting” Illinois standards, in READING?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new AT-HOME</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intervention program in READING?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intervention Programs for MATHEMATICS Improvement since 2008.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new intervention</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>program for students not “Meeting” Illinois standards, in MATHEMATICS?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you implement a new AT-HOME</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intervention program in MATHEMATICS?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**In your opinion, how valuable were INTERVENTION PROGRAMS in:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Summer School Programs

### Summer School Programs for READING Improvement since 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1 to 2</th>
<th>3 to 4</th>
<th>5 to 6</th>
<th>7 to 8</th>
<th>9 to 10</th>
<th>More than 10 weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many weeks were students not “Meeting” Illinois Learning Standards required or recommended to attend a READING class(es) during the summer?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Summer School Programs for MATHEMATICS Improvement since 2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1 to 2</th>
<th>3 to 4</th>
<th>5 to 6</th>
<th>7 to 8</th>
<th>9 to 10</th>
<th>More than 10 weeks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How many weeks were students not “Meeting” Illinois Learning Standards required or recommended to attend a MATHEMATICS class(es) during the summer?</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### In your opinion, how valuable were SUMMER SCHOOL PROGRAMS in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Revenue

**In your opinion, how valuable was additional REVENUE for:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are educators committed to working collectively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for student is continuous, job embedded, learning for educators. (Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work, Dufour, Dufour, Eaker 2008)

Was your staff trained in the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

Does your school implement Professional Learning Communities?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

In your opinion, how valuable was the implementation of PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES for student learning in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Effective</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Highly Effective</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>READING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATHEMATICS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Professional Learning Communities Elements

Does your staff for each of these reform elements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Not present</th>
<th>Some Educators Implementing</th>
<th>Every School Educator is Fully Implementing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common School Direction - expectation of high performance for all students and specific direction for each educator</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative School Culture With a Focus on Learning - mutual accountability and interdependent collaboration on the right issues behind each classroom door</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Inquiry for Best Practice - best practices of teaching and learning, teachers having candid clarification of current practices and honest assessment of student current levels</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action Oriented: Learning by Doing - educators serve as a catalyst for action, understand unless we do differently we should not anticipate different results</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Improvement - common formative assessments, data teams reviewing student responses to instruction, there should be perpetual teacher</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning and regular innovation and experimentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results Orientated - student results not educator intentions are what matters
### Professional Learning Communities Value

**Please select the VALUE to you of each of these reform elements.**

**If your school is not utilizing any one of these elements then select N/A.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common School Direction - expectation of high performance for all students and specific direction for each educator</th>
<th>No Value</th>
<th>Moderate value</th>
<th>High Value</th>
<th>N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative School Culture With a Focus on Learning - mutual accountability and interdependent collaboration on the right issues behind each classroom door</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Inquiry for Best Practice - best practices of teaching and learning, teachers having candid clarification of current practices and honest assessment of student current levels</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action Orientated: Learning by Doing - educators serve as a catalyst for action, understand unless we do differently we should not anticipate different results</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Improvement - common formative assessments, data teams reviewing student responses to instruction, there</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
should be perpetual
teacher learning and
regular innovation and
experimentation

Results Orientated -
student results not
educator intentions
are what matters
### Additional Strategies

Provide any additional strategies, philosophical changes or data collection changes which you have implemented to address students not "Meeting" standards in reading or mathematics.


Given all of the school improvement strategies available to school leaders, please identify the three most valuable strategies for your school.
Tell us about your school.

### Categorize your school’s location
- [ ] Urban
- [ ] Suburban
- [ ] Rural

### Which grades does your school serve? Mark all that apply.
- [ ] 3
- [ ] 4
- [ ] 5
- [ ] 6
- [ ] 7
- [ ] 8

### What is your school’s enrollment?
- [ ] Less than 300 students
- [ ] 301 to 500 students
- [ ] 501 to 700 students
- [ ] More than 700 students

### Since 2008 did your school fail to make AYP in READING?
- [ ] yes
- [ ] no
- [ ] Other (please specify)

### Since 2008 did your school fail to make AYP in MATHEMATICS?
- [ ] yes
- [ ] no
- [ ] Other (please specify)
Thank You!

Thank you for taking the time to detail your work.
REFERENCE LIST


Many, T., et. al., Districts Speak with One Voice. *Journal of Staff Development*. v. 29 no. 3 (Summer 2008) p. 28-30, 32.


VITA

Steven James Thomas attended Maine West High School in Des Plaines, IL. After graduating in 1987 he attended Iowa State University and National-Louis University. In the spring of 1993 he graduated from National-Louis with a Bachelors of Arts degree in Elementary Education. He began his teaching career in 1993 as a fifth and later a sixth grade teacher at Meridian Middle School in Buffalo Grove, IL. In 1996 he completed his Masters Degree in Administration and Supervision from Loyola University of Chicago. Steve then began working as an administrator at Woodland School District 50. From 1998 through 2012 he has held numerous positions at Woodland including: the Assistant Principal of Woodland Primary East School, the Principal of Woodland Primary School, and the Director of Continuous Improvement and Accountability. He is currently the Director of Teaching and Learning at Woodland. Steve is a Ph.D. Candidate at Loyola University of Chicago in Administration and Supervision.