DISTRICT SUPPORT: STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING CAPACITY IN ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS IN A RAPID GROWTH DISTRICT

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The purpose of this descriptive case study was to examine the role of the central office staff and the strategies used to support capacity building in elementary principals in a rapid growth district. By synthesizing research and models from education reform scholars, the conceptual framework of professional capital, intrinsic motivation, the educational change process, and professional learning communities was generated to advance the understanding of utilizing PLCs as a foundation for central office to initiate and sustain continuous improvement in a rapid growth district. The Professional Learning Community Assessment - District Support developed by Olivier, Huffman, and Cowan was administered to 126 participants within the curriculum and instruction department and three elementary schools to collect data to analyze the five dimensions of PLCs within the school district. Eleven interviews were conducted with members of the curriculum and instruction department and elementary principals. According to the eleven interviewees, and PLCA-DS, six themes emerged to support the role of capacity building in elementary principals using the PLC model as a framework. The PLC infrastructure, supportive central office, collaborative culture, continuous improvement, differentiated opportunities to learn, and data use were the six themes generated by the participants to support continuous improvement in elementary principals. Each of the five PLC dimensions were visible throughout the themes as the findings illustrated six key practices currently in motion within the rapid growth school district used to build capacity in elementary principals.
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .............................................................................................................. iii
LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................................ ix
LIST OF FIGURES ..................................................................................................................... x

Chapters

1. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................... 1
   Background ...................................................................................................................... 4
   Statement of the Problem .............................................................................................. 5
   Conceptual Framework ................................................................................................. 6
   Purpose of the Study ..................................................................................................... 12
   Research Questions ..................................................................................................... 12
   Significance of the Study .............................................................................................. 12
   Delimitations ............................................................................................................... 13
   Definition of Terms ..................................................................................................... 13
   Organization of Study ................................................................................................. 14

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ............................................................................................. 16
   Building Capacity ......................................................................................................... 17
      Professional Capital ................................................................................................. 18
      Intrinsic Motivation ................................................................................................. 22
   Distributive Leadership ............................................................................................. 24
   Change Process ............................................................................................................ 29
   Phases of Change ........................................................................................................ 31
   Dimensions of PLC .................................................................................................... 34
Shared and Supportive Leadership .........................................................35
Shared Vision and Values ........................................................................36
Collective Learning and Application .......................................................37
Shared Personal Practice ........................................................................39
Supportive Conditions ............................................................................41
Central Office Support ............................................................................44
Systemness ............................................................................................44
District and Campus Support .................................................................46
Lateral Capacity ......................................................................................48
District Leaders as Principal Supervisors ..............................................48
District Support in Practice ....................................................................50
Summary ..................................................................................................53

3. METHODOLOGY ..................................................................................55
Research Design .....................................................................................55
Document Analysis ................................................................................57
Professional Learning Community Assessment – District Support (PLCA-DS) ........................................................................59
Interviews ..............................................................................................59
Population and Setting ...........................................................................61
Data Collection .......................................................................................63
Data Analysis ........................................................................................65
Validity in Research ...............................................................................70
Limitations ..............................................................................................71
Ethical Considerations ................................................................................................................72

Summary ......................................................................................................................................72

4. DATA FINDINGS ....................................................................................................................73

Professional Learning Community Assessment – District Support .........................74

Document Analysis ....................................................................................................................81

Interviews ....................................................................................................................................82

Theme 1: PLC Infrastructure ..................................................................................................83

  PLC Journey .............................................................................................................................83

  Structures and Systems ..........................................................................................................84

  PLC Process .............................................................................................................................87

  Connection to the Conceptual Framework ...........................................................................93

Theme 2: Supportive Central Office .......................................................................................94

  Roles ........................................................................................................................................94

  Coaching as Support ...............................................................................................................96

  Elementary Principal Perception of Support from Central Office ..................................98

  Support Rapid Growth ..........................................................................................................99

  Connection to the Conceptual Framework .........................................................................101

Theme 3: Collaborative Culture ...............................................................................................103

  Principal Relationships .........................................................................................................103

  Culture of Trust and Vulnerability .......................................................................................105

  Connection to the Conceptual Framework .........................................................................107

Theme 4: Building Capacity .....................................................................................................108

  Continuous Learning .............................................................................................................108
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Comparison between Distributive Leadership and Shared and Supportive Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Change Process Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Comparison of District Leadership Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A-Priori Protocol Codes and Assigned Numbers for Annotating Data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Initial Coding Process with Categories and Subcategories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Subcategories Used to Generate Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Documents and Materials Collected During Data Collection Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Connections with Themes and PLC Dimensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Capacity building components</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Abby ISD interview organization chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Abby ISD shared and supportive leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Abby ISD shared values and vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Abby ISD collective learning application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Abby ISD shared personal practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Abby ISD shared and supportive structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Abby ISD suggested sampling PLC dimensions from PLCA-DS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Themes and subcategories for capacity building and PLC support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Findings for building capacity and PLC support in Abby ISD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>PLC infrastructure as a theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Supportive central office as a theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Collaborative culture as a theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Building capacity as a theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Differentiated opportunities to learn as a theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Data use as a theme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

By 2030, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that student enrollment in public schools will be 60 million. The National Center for Education Statistics states the number of schools is decreasing, while student population is increasing (Gilberg, Peters, & Weihs, 2004). Are there specific structures and leadership styles that promote continuous professional growth for teachers and administrators to attain consistency in teacher actions and student performance? Building the capacity of the stakeholders through professional learning communities (PLCs) creates conditions for cohesive cultures within the education system. PLCs allow for systemic structures and systems to cultivate consistent and ongoing professional learning (Dufour & Fullan, 2013). Systems and structures within school districts must be restructured and realigned focusing on systemic capacity building for all stakeholders in order for student success to permeate. Blankstein, Houston, and Cole (2008) explain that the United States must change the way students are educated. In the past schools were built for the Industrial Age which was acceptable since the United States led the world in education. Blankstein et al. (2008) acknowledged:

The trend line has changed dramatically, however, and the United States is no longer at the top on many international comparisons. Given current trends, unless dramatic changes are made, the United States runs the risk of falling further behind and risking an uncertain economic and political future. (p. 145)

In order to meet this current need in education, teachers are expected, more than ever, to be expert practitioners in their field. In order to foster successful growth, the central office must cultivate a culture of systemness and provide supportive conditions. Dufour and Fullan (2013) express that systemness is “the degree to which people identify and are committed to an entity larger than themselves” (p. 18). Psencik, Brown, Cain, Coleman, and Cummings (2014) explain
the central office must create a shared language around continuous professional learning. In a successful district wide initiative in Fort Wayne Community Schools, a systemic theory of change was initiated and implemented. Psencik et al. (2014) state:

District leadership team members systematically work with school principals and school leadership teams to ensure that site-based staff internalize the work. They observe school leadership team meetings, conduct walk-throughs in buildings, and observe one another facilitating professional learning for principals. (p. 16)

Extensive research has been conducted on the impact of systemic procedures impacting district wide reform. The impact these systemic structures have on a school district’s initiating system reform is crucial to its success.

- Fullan (2005) explains that “systemness is to constantly seek and refine better ideas and practices (the knowledge dimension) and to foster greater cohesion and shared commitment toward a higher purpose (the moral imperative)” (p. 222).
- We must view the “whole system and work together to achieve the vision. When like-minded people are passionate and committed to student learning, they exhibit a strong sense of collective efficacy” (Pankake, Abrego, & Moller, 2010, p. 130).
- Dufour and Fullan (2013) report that “systemness is about everyone doing their part in two aspects: being as good as one can be during individual and collaborative work, and being aware that everyone needs to make a contribution to improving the larger system” (p. 18).

This research on systemness illustrates the importance of collectively structuring systems from the district office to support capacity in leaders, which in turn transfers to teacher support, which ultimately impacts all students.

Having an organized system with shared meaning and understanding in place is crucial for consistency to permeate throughout a district. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010)
express the need for common language at the central office. Kegan and Lahey (2001) suggest, “Changing the way people talk in an organization can change the way they work but only if there is a common language and clear understanding of the specific implications for action regarding key terms” (p. 213). Central office must also be cognizant of being tight and loose on the right things in order for the culture to have a positive impact on student and adult learning (DuFour et al., 2010).

DuFour and Fullan (2013) have three key principles that are the guiding foundation for central office initiating a system-wide professional learning community culture. They maintain that all innovations have three principles as the primary focus while using the four critical questions as the main guide through decisions. Dufour and Fullan, (2013) explain “The three key principles are a focus on learning, staff working collaboratively and collectively to support student and adult learning, and using results to improve both student learning and instructional practice” (pp. 14-15).

The central office has the responsibility to ensure that there is a shared understanding regarding how they respond to questions from teachers and principals. Dumas and Kautz (2014) purport that the central office’s responsibility to “build the capacity of the people in the district to make change happen” (p.30). The central office must monitor implementation of all initiatives consistently throughout the district.

Collectively, central office staff, campus principals, and teachers must also be responsible for owning their learning. This allows leaders to build capacity in others when a sense of ownership is taken for professional learning. James, Derksen, and Alcorn (2014) maintain that it is the central office’s responsibility to “co-own professional learning, rather than to direct or control processes and outcomes centrally. Schools’ and central office leaders must become
partners in professional learning improvement” (p. 38). Professional learning must be creatively developed for the ever-changing initiatives that challenge changing and growing districts.

Background

Abby ISD (AISD) is at the top of the fastest-growing school districts in the state and nation growing by 7-30% annually since the early 1990s. The district continues to add 2,500-3,500 students each year, and in 2014-2015 enrollment will exceed 49,000 students. With this growth comes the responsibility to manage the growth and intentionally build capacity in stakeholders for the future. In 1998, AISD had seven schools. Since that time, AISD has added 49 new schools, opening or modifying/expanding two-to-six campuses annually. No district in the state or nation has grown faster on a percentage basis in the past 20 years. Only 23 districts in the nation and three in the state have added more students in that same time period. Only 105 school districts in the state have an enrollment higher than 10,000 students, and AISD will be among the top 20 largest districts in the state this year. It is the 135th largest district in the nation based on 2011-12 data. In 2015, AISD will have 38 K-5 elementary schools, 15 middle schools, and eight high schools.

With this rapid and extensive growth, the crucial factor of building capacity within the district to prepare leaders to assume administrative roles in a timely manner is a key role for district leaders. Also, building lateral capacity, and supporting collaboration among the numerous campuses is also a major goal. In 2014, 12 new elementary principals, 12 new assistant principals, and 12 new instructional coaches were added to the elementary roster. This increase shows the need to develop leadership capacity to share information and to embed strong communication structures within the culture of AISD.
Fullan (2013) describes the epitome of large school districts when he refers to Sanger Unified School District in Los Angeles, California. Fullan explains in order to cultivate a positive culture for increased individual and collective capacity to be entrenched throughout the district administrators:

Foster collaboration up, down, and across the system as a vehicle for continuous learning and shared accountability. Create intersecting learning communities so that everyone has ongoing access to professional support and learning. Ensure that purposes are clear and supports are in place. (p. 93)

This resonates profoundly as AISD is in need of aligning practices in order to develop leaders within to prepare for the continuous growth of the district. Fullan (2013) emphasizes that aligning practices is key, but in order for structures and systems to be successful, a healthy, learning culture is prioritized above all else.

Statement of the Problem

There is little research conducted related to how to use the professional learning community process as a framework to build capacity in elementary principals within rapid-growing districts. Although, professional learning communities provide systems and structures to be initiated, implemented, and sustained, it is the central office that institutionalizes and guides how the process is administered. Often, campuses have been left on their own to build capacity with teachers, however, with a district growing rapidly, systems and structures have to be implemented and sustained in order for capacity to collectively be built across the district.

Additionally, there is little research on the central office staff’s responsibility and role in implementing and aligning systems and structures in order for consistent and intentional leadership structures in professional learning to occur with beginning, middle of career, and seasoned elementary principals. An in-depth study and knowledge of central office’s role, and
how professional learning community components are aligned within a rapid-growing district, could greatly assist central office staff and districts that experience rapid growth.

Conceptual Framework

In the current study, the conceptual framework is centered around capacity building and the components that must be in place to cultivate and support building capacity. Fullan (2013) espouses of all the educational strategies in place, the greatest power is “developing new capacities in individuals and groups” (p. 74). Fullan (2005) defined capacity building as “developing the collective ability – dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation, and resources – to bring about positive change” (p. 4). This conceptual framework centers around building capacity while focusing on the components that must be in place for capacity building to be developed. Fullan (2005) further explained capacity building: “capacity to motivate and create powerful collaboration” and “capacity for instruction or pedagogy – learning for all students” (p. 74). Figure 1 demonstrates the interactive process of professional capital, intrinsic motivation, educational change process, and professional learning communities interdependently working together in order to build capacity.

This framework begins with professional capital, which focuses specifically on social and human capital. The second component is intrinsic motivation and leads into the third component, the change process. The fourth component of the conceptual framework is implementing and sustaining professional learning communities. The four components interact and support capacity building in a school. In the literature review, information will be presented describing feedback and follow through as natural processes that occur within components such as professional capital, the change process, and professional learning communities. Existing structures within central office, as well as distributive leadership are also discussed in the
literature review. Distributive leadership is the leadership style that supports capacity building by strategically developing “the interaction of leaders, teachers, and the situation as they influence instructional practice” (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004, p. 4).

Figure 1. Capacity building components.

In Fullan’s (2011a) book, *Change Leader: Learning to Do What Matters Most*, he examines the characteristics of a healthy culture related to the attributes of leaders. Through a distributive leadership style, leaders share learning experiences in order to cultivate a peer-led culture. Fullan explains that ongoing learning must be intentional and deliberate for leaders and staff to continue growing. He purports building capacity must be developed in a non-judgmental manner to foster collaboration in leaders and produce the desired change within a culture in order for successful leadership to be apparent (Fullan, 2011a).
The first component that frames the study is what Fullan (2011a) espouses as professional capital. The balance of social and human capital is professional capital, which is essential to continuous capacity for all stakeholders. Fullan (2011a) refers to a study of social and human capital. He explains individual rewards and incentives do not motivate the masses. This illustrates the importance of social capital, which is the interaction and conversations with peers that center on the common goal and is based on feelings of trust and relationships within the organization. Social capital is the foundation for any success within an organization, and human capital, the qualifications and experience of the leaders in an organization, grows from strong social capital. This happens because all internal factors that cultivate a healthy culture such as trust, ownership, and vulnerability are transparent and collective capacity is shared. In order to reach the goal faster, investments in capacity building and using the group to lead are the accelerators. Collaborative cultures are necessary to increase social capital while authentic, clear, and timely feedback strengthens professional capital.

According to Fullan (2014), feedback and follow through emerge from how strong or weak social capacity is within a campus or district culture. When Fullan (2014) was asked a question he stated, “If I’m in a bad relationship, I’d rather be alone.” He continued to say that it is imperative to have and to maintain an attitude of non-judge mentalism, which increases transparency. He also expressed that by providing a system of following through on initiatives with authentic feedback, it maximizes internal accountability. He asked the question, “How will you know if you are making progress?” This clearly explains the administrator’s role of authentic feedback. Fullan maintained that feedback is the introduction into capacity building. He stated it increases candor by allowing people the right to accept or reject the feedback. He
mentioned that we need feedback, but at times we do not want it (Fullan, 2014). Fullan, Bertani, and Quinn (2004) explain:

Effective districts do not just get the strategy right to begin with; they continually refine it using systematically collected information. Districts maintain close contact with problems, promote and invite regular feedback, and engage in problem-solving actions. This disciplined inquiry fuels deeper and more-sustainable improvement. (p. 45)

The effectiveness of feedback and follow through heavily rely on the level of professional capital within the school system. The strength of social capital is the foundation for how strong feedback and follow through will be within a system.

The second component is intrinsic motivation; it is imperative for individuals to seek ongoing professional, intellectual growth to cultivate a learning community where ongoing intrinsic capacity ebb and flows within the culture. Fullan (2011a) explains that intrinsic motivation is the most valuable motivator within a person, and for leaders, reaching to the intrinsic motivation within a person is the critical factor to developing capacity. Fullan (2011b) suggests leaders must allow people to engage in initiatives and experiences. By challenging others with inquisitive questioning that allows for insight and personal perspective to surface, capacity is naturally built with individuals.

Fullan (2011a) expresses that in order for intrinsic motivation to flourish; new experiences must be available for people. Distributive leadership allows intrinsic motivation to formulate as it essentially integrates new learning experiences in order to build capacity. Harris (2008) suggests distributive leadership strengthens intrinsic motivation by using “lateral leadership where the practice of leadership is intentionally shared amongst members within an organization” (p. 174).

Behaviors must be changed in a nonjudgmental and empathic way in order for positive feelings and emotions to attach to the intrinsic experience. The exposure to new skills and
experiences lends itself to naturally reinforcing positive motivation for the new experience to become a natural behavior. “The most meaningful experiences exhibit changes in behaviors that given time and feedback will lead to change within the peer culture” (Fullan, 2011a, p. 83). Fullan continues to explain that the most powerful culture is one driven successfully by peers. He explains that when a strong peer culture is at the forefront, usually a healthy collaborative culture exists. Fullan (2011a) states, “Whole system success requires the commitment that comes from intrinsic motivation and improved technical competencies of groups of educators working together purposefully and relentlessly” (p. 8).

Change theory is the third component related to building capacity. Dufour et al. (2010) explains change is a shift that can be confusing, challenging, and emotional for some. They stress the importance for change to be effective, “Demand, both pressure and support, and leaders at both the district and building level must be willing to kick-start the improvement process and exert top-down pressure when needed” (p. 252). Districts must successfully equip campus principals with learning experiences for them to lead their campus successfully through the initiating, implementation, and sustaining stages of the change process.

The three phases of Fullan’s (2007) change theory will be the measuring system used in the current study. Hipp and Huffman (2010) describe the three phases of change as initiation, implementation, and institutionalization (sustaining). Within a large school district change is occurring daily. A number of elementary, middle, and high schools are at various stages when it comes to change. Some schools are at the beginning stages of Fullan’s educational change theory, which is the initiating stage. Other schools are in the action stage of change and are implementing the initiatives set before them. Some campuses sustain what they initiate and implement by making small tweaks in the cyclical sustaining process as needed. In order for
initiatives to move through the phases of change and capacity building to occur, feedback and follow through must be present.

The fourth component, professional learning communities is the overarching framework for building capacity. Professional capital, intrinsic motivation, and the change process must authentically exist within the structures of a professional learning community to build capacity. The professional learning communities evolve from a culture where five dimensions interdependently exist to foster an environment of continuous learning for all. The five dimensions are (a) shared and supportive leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). These dimensions must be in a cohesive, constant motion throughout an organization in order for a PLC culture to flourish. Hipp and Huffman (2010) suggest professional learning communities exist to create structures that “build individual, interpersonal, and organizational capacity” (p. 4). Dufour (2015) agrees the PLC process is about changing the way people think within the organization in order to build collective capacity. He states: “The assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and commitments of people in any organization shape the culture within” (Dufour, 2015, p. 100). Professional learning communities exist to combine the five dimensions naturally within the culture of an organization. In this study, the five dimensions within professional learning communities organically evolve from the cultivation of professional capital, intrinsic motivation, and the change process in order to demonstrate capacity building explicitly.

These four components, working together, create a culture that supports collaboration, instructional learning, and builds capacity for all. These strategies must be utilized within a district to align structures that ensure continuous growth. Intentionally coordinated and
implemented strategies and structures can guide the daily practice for central office staff, principals, instructional coaches, and teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how central administration builds capacity and supports elementary principals within the professional learning community framework in a rapidly growing district. In this study, the researcher examined the four concepts described within the conceptual framework – professional capital, intrinsic motivation, educational change process, and professional learning communities – and demonstrated their relationship to building capacity in elementary principals.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study are:

1. What is the central office staff’s role in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapidly growing district?

2. How does central office staff use the PLC process as the main driver in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapidly growing district?

3. How are the five PLC dimensions used to support capacity building in elementary principals?

Significance of Study

This study contributes to the role of central office staff and the importance of building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growing district in Texas. This study allows the rapid growing district to be analyzed and reviewed in connection with how systems and structures are aligned districtwide in order to accommodate on-going growth. With this study, the researcher will add to the body of research by examining professional learning communities
as a framework for central office change initiatives. PLCs are mentioned throughout research, however PLCs as a framework mentioned in relation to rapid growing districts is found in very few studies. By taking into account the perspectives of central office staff and elementary principals, this information adds to the relevance of district actions in elementary school improvement. For practitioners in the field, the study results specifically provide an in depth analysis of the aligned central office practices that build capacity with elementary principals in a rapidly growing district. The study results also allow practitioners to identify how the professional learning community dimensions can guide change in a rapidly growing district.

Delimitations

This was a qualitative study based on a single descriptive case study. The study occurred in one school district in Texas allowing for the information gathered to be specific to the school district within the study. However, since the study was conducted within one school district, this allowed for an information rich analysis to occur. By focusing in depth on specific roles, practices, and structures within the district an explicit understanding of the school district occurred (Patton, 1990). The researcher chose three elementary campuses based on similar demographics and principal experience. Therefore, the sample is limited to the principals and staff members of three elementary campuses within the school district as well as the central office staff within the curriculum and instruction department.

Definition of Terms

Building capacity – “Developing the collective ability – dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation, and resources – act together to bring about positive change” (Fullan, 2005, p. 4).

Central office staff – The central office staff consists of the superintendent, deputy superintendent, assistant superintendent, director of professional learning, curriculum and
instruction directors, and curriculum coordinators. The central office staff provides support and partners with individual elementary campuses.

_Intrinsic motivation_ – For this study, intrinsic motivation is the driver that motivates teachers from within to want to initiate and sustain successful initiatives in order to build capacity.

_Professional learning community framework_ - “Professional educators working collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults” (Hipp & Huffman 2010, p. 12).

_Professional capital_ – In this study, professional capital is the combination of both social and human capital.

_Structures_ – Plans put in place in order to move initiatives forward at the campus and district level. The structures must align and be parallel with the overall shared mission of the district. Examples are collaborative planning, backwards planning, built-in time within the schedule, etc.

_Systems_ – In this study, systems include strategic steps that are in place for the district and elementary campuses to have similar practices and understanding in order to have systematic processes with shared meaning.

Organization of Study

In Chapter 1, the researcher presented the introduction, background information, statement of the problem, conceptual framework, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of study, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 includes the literature review related to building capacity with elementary principals in a rapidly growing school district. In Chapter 2, the researcher summarizes literature on professional capital with an emphasis on social and
human capital. Capacity building, specifically focusing on distributive leadership coupled with intrinsic motivation will be explained in the literature review. The third area of literature that will be reviewed is the educational change process. The initiation, implementation, and sustaining components of the change process will be clearly defined. The five dimensions of PLCs – (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions - will be discussed. The role of central office staff in cultivating and sustaining a PLC culture will be reviewed as well. Chapter 3 includes the methodology and procedures used to gather and analyze data. The results and findings of the study will be within Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will contain a discussion, summary, and analysis between the literature review and the findings, along with recommendations for further study.
As districts increase in student population, establishing and sustaining systems and structures that allow for consistent and systemic alignment of mindsets, priorities, and practices is crucial. Defining and knowing where a district is within the initiating, implementing, and sustaining phase of change process is imperative for meaningful progress to occur. From the district level, the understanding that effective initiatives must be limited, consistent, and strategic in order to transition into a professional learning community culture is essential (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

In order for systemic alignment to prevail in a fast growing district where new campuses are opened annually and enrollment continually increases, central office must actively support and intentionally build capacity in campus principals. It is also important for a consistent shared set of values and leadership principles to exist at the central office level in order for professional learning communities to develop vertically throughout the K-12 district. Hipp and Huffman (2010) maintain individual campuses require different levels of central office support based on the phase of change that exists on their campus.

In large fast growth districts, elementary principals are hired every year to lead campuses. Elementary principals are charged with complex expectations, and supports should be in place from the central office to provide assistance needed by the elementary principals. The central office must meet the expectations while giving principals autonomy based on their leadership capacity. Some elementary principals may need more focused support (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Fullan (2005) stated capacity building encompasses “new skills and dispositions, enhanced and focused resources, and new and focused motivation and commitment” (p. 4).
aligning clear consistent practices with a shared understanding and meaning within the central office, consistent structures are modeled and distributed to elementary principals to build their individual professional capacity. This effort is not limited to campus leaders. Fullan et al. (2004) explains capacity building is necessary for a senior executive as well as to the brand new entry employee.

The literature review begins with an overview of building capacity. The researcher will then examine the four components within the conceptual framework: professional capital, intrinsic motivation, educational change process, and the five dimensions of professional learning communities. In addition, the researcher will examine in more detail distributive leadership as a foundational piece within the building capacity section. The literature review concludes with central office staff’s role in cultivating and sustaining a PLC culture, and in building capacity in a rapidly growing district.

Building Capacity

Fullan (2005) defines building capacity as “actions that lead to an increase in the collective power of a group to improve student achievement” (p. 4). Fullan (2013) explains that the most important responsibility within any organization should be capacity building. In the article, “New Lessons for Districtwide Reform,” Fullan et al. (2004) explained the ultimate determination of successful capacity development is the number of good leaders that transfer from the campuses to become leaders within the district. These actions signal the importance for the culture within to embrace ongoing learning and development of individual leaders.

Fullan (2011a) believes talent is not something people are born with; however, it must be developed from experiences. Fullan posits deliberate practice is repeated and reflective. Deliberate practice allows knowledge to be deepened and developed and building capacity
within allows this to be accomplished. Growing the capacity of others by investing and performing hands-on work with them creates shared ownership. The key to successful sustained change is the deliberate practice of behaviors that lead to the desired change needed within a nonjudgmental atmosphere.

Fullan (2011a) and Harris (2008) agree that new personal experiences allow positive motivation to build individual capacity by changing behaviors within a culture. While Fullan (2011) focuses on personal experiences and Harris (2008) targets distributive leadership, they agree it is not only the personal experience that increases capacity, but the personal feelings and feedback one associates with the experience that leads to individual progress. Fullan (2011a) explains behaviors must be changed in a nonjudgmental and empathetic way in order for the positive feelings and emotions to attach to the intrinsic experience. The exposure to new skills and experiences lends itself to reinforcing positive motivation for the new experience to become a natural personal behavior. Fullan (2013) states leaders must, “Focus the new work on a small number of ambitious goals and create opportunities to make the capacities essential for accomplishing them through new learning while increasing skills, clarity, and ownership” (p. 74). Harris (2008) purports distributive leadership is the way power is relinquished and reinforced, coupled with the emotional piece of individuals feeling safety and trust. In order for deliberate experiences to be created and shared within an organization, distributive leadership must be the leadership style that leads the organization in order for capacity to be built.

Professional Capital

Social and human capital are crucial concepts in building capacity as they set the foundational tone for individuals to collaboratively guide, share, and lead. According to A. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), the combination of social and human capital is professional
capital. Fullan (2011a) explains that in order to build capacity, social capital and human capital must be entrenched within the culture. Fullan (2011a) states social capital and human capital focus on relationships and collaborative interactions through specific practices, which allow teachers to be exposed to other teachers’ knowledge and perspectives and share in learning experiences. This purposeful collaboration serves as the most effective form of capacity building. Fullan (2011a) also expresses the transparency of high social capital fosters collective ownership of educational practices, and capacity building then naturally filters through the educational system.

Social capital centers around trust, dense social networks, and the value these networks have in terms of producing positive outcomes (Taliaferro & Seigler, 2012). Taliaferro and Seigler explain that social capital is “the interrelationship between internal and external assets that a person either possesses directly, inherently, or potentially (p. 411).” Assets include relationships where all parties have a like interest and similar personal characteristics. These similar internal or external characteristics account for a connectedness that builds trust acting as the catalyst for shared social capital (Taliaferro & Seigler, 2012).

Odden (2011) explains human capital is about recruiting teachers with specific credentials and qualifications as well as certain experiences. The two key factors in human capital is finding the talented people needed and strategically managing that talent within human capital. Acquiring, strategically placing, and equitably distributing individual talent is the goal for human capital. The district’s vision is the pinnacle for aligning instructional practices and behaviors to increase and sustain human capital over time (Odden, 2011).

According to A. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), in order to build a positive successful culture, social capital must encapsulate human capital. A. Hargreaves and Fullan state
professional capital is “about what you know and can do individually, with whom you know it and do it collectively, and how long you have known it and done it and deliberately gotten better at doing it over time” (p. 102).

Bonding and bridging are ways to explain social capital. Bonding social capital is the natural relationship one has with a relative and family member (Taliaferro & Flood, 2014). Taliaferro and Flood describe bridging social capital as capital that is informal, however professionals must have this social capital to advance in their career. Bridging social capital is the most difficult social capital to attain, because it lacks the natural connectedness that bonding capital exemplifies. Therefore, in bridging social capital, one must exert more into bridging relationships and making up for connections that are organically transferred from bonding social capital (Taliaferro & Flood, 2014).

In order to build social capital, principals must build interpersonal relationships. The key for principals is to keep the mindset of, “what can you do for other people instead of what other people can do for you” (Bolton, 2011, p. 4). Principals can also strengthen social capital by joining a connected network group. Taliaferro and Flood (2014) agree with Bolton’s (2011) servant leadership focus by mentioning that by immersing oneself into a connected network group, relationships hinge on a similar interests and experience, which in turn filters to a deeper relationship which increases the capacity of the group. Principals must also develop mentor relationships in order to increase social capital. By having professional mentors in fields other than education these mentors provide perspectives and increase one’s social capacity by offering a diverse background and insight that builds professional capacity (Taliaferro & Flood, 2014).

Nappi (2014) explains that distributive leadership strengthens social capital by allowing teacher leaders to experience situations and experiences that principals navigate on a daily basis.
Social capital increases as distributive leadership experiences allow teachers to utilize others’ personal experiences and perspectives within their individual context. By relying on one’s specific professional strength, Nappi (2014) explains that professional communities thrive and demonstrate best instructional practice by the social capital continuously built from the practice of distributive leadership.

A study conducted by Leana (2011) of 1000 fourth and fifth grade teachers in 130 New York elementary schools focused on the relationship between social and human capital by studying math achievement over one year. Leana explains that social capital is the “relationship among teachers and between teachers and administrators while human capital is referred to as teacher’s cumulative abilities, knowledge, and skills developed through formal education and job experience” (p. 33). Leana’s findings in the study were that teachers with high social capital and high human capital had a 5.7% increase in math scores. Leana mentioned that participants with a lower human capital and high social capital scored average in her study. This shows the importance of high social capital and high human capital in the workplace. Leana (2011) found social and human capital must be combined for success to transpire. Fullan (2011a) and Leana (2011) both conclude social capital gives leverage to human capital.

Fullan (2011a) posits that focusing on the current human capital at hand and then adding social capital strategies such as purposeful collaboration, learning experiences from teacher to teacher, and transparent data disaggregation leads to successful systems that transform schools. When leadership is distributed and experiences are shared through an entire system, capacity is built and a common culture is established within and among schools. By strategically managing and increasing human capital through professional learning experiences and encouraging social capital to create a positive, trusting culture, building capacity will be embedded throughout the
district and campus culture. A. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) emphasize professional capital is essential in all educational circumstances.

For individuals to become intrinsically motivated, they must feel valued and share in experiences that will build their individual capacity. By sharing in these experiences and receiving feedback from the experiences, individuals become motivated. The next section in the literature review encompasses the second component of the conceptual framework, intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic Motivation

Deci and Ryan (1980), Larson and Rusk (2011), and Fullan (2011a) confirm that intrinsic motivation supports capacity building by creating positive experiences while providing feedback throughout the experience in order to elicit ownership, skills, and clarity. Deci (1975) describes intrinsic motivation as behavior that “seeks stimulation and challenges and conquers challenges while resolving incongruity” (p. 61). Deci also explains that it is important for people to feel competent and self-determined while suggesting that the internal motivation is also dependent on the external factors that surround the person. Intrinsic motivation is described by Deci and Ryan (1980) as a human’s desire to be self-determining and competent. Intrinsic motivation is enhanced by feedback with a specific focus on self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Fullan (2011a) explains intrinsic motivation supports capacity building by motivating people through learning experiences where emotional meaning and value develop through the experience.

Larson and Rusk (2011) also explain intrinsic motivation increases performance improvement and the learning that occurs within a motivating experience. They delineate intrinsic motivation positively affects processes within the mind as individuals are focused on the specific task by staying devoted and engaged in order to understand and comprehend. Reiss
(2012) agrees with the original research by stating intrinsic motivation supports capacity building by experiencing a process for one’s personal desire to increase one’s individual ability.

A study by Koestner, Zuckerman, and Koestner (1987) coincides with Fullan’s (2011a) research that feedback enhances intrinsic motivation. Koestner et al (1987) found that participants in their study who completed a specific task and received immediate feedback based on the participant’s specific ability to complete the task, excelled and were excited and engaged to accomplish the next task. Koestner et al. also explain that intrinsic motivation is focused on the increased motivation in one’s ability to accomplish a specific task rather than the effort exuded for the specific task.

Panagiotakopoulos (2014) conducted a study of intrinsic motivation for 30 large Greek organizations and received 143 responses. The study concluded the external factors that correlate with the employee motivation were the positive relationships, increased trust within the organization, and high rates of communication between the employees and their leadership team. These components are the intricate factors that create the high morale, which increases motivation. Conchie’s (2013) research supports Panagiotakopoulous (2014) study of increased employee motivation with the prediction of a relationship between leadership behaviors and intrinsic motivation. Conchie (2013) found self-efficacy and motivation are intricate contributors to having a shared vision. Intrinsic motivation was found to increase satisfaction with an activity that was challenging and interesting (Conchie, 2013). The leadership behaviors of increased autonomy for participants and supportive climate attribute to increased intrinsic motivation (Conchie, 2013).

Larson and Rusk (2011) express that intrinsically motivated individuals must be challenged, have a sense of control over a task, be deeply attentive to a task, and be highly
motivated to accomplish a task. These factors reduce self-consciousness and increase the feeling of being individually energized (Larson & Rusk, 2011). These accomplishments develop from receiving immediate, clear, specific feedback on specific actions. Research continues to iterate that challenging rigorous tasks cultivate high intrinsic motivation when coupled with clear and concise feedback.

Pink (2011) supports Fullan’s (2011a) research of correlating intrinsic motivation to building capacity by describing four essential ingredients for building capacity with intrinsic motivation. The first ingredient is individuals must partake in work that has a strong meaningful purpose. The second ingredient is increased capacity. When individuals increase their capacity, they are getting better at the particular task, which is intrinsically satisfying. The third ingredient is there should be a degree of autonomy, which allows individuals to make decisions and judgments. The fourth ingredient is developing collective capacity within the organization (Pink, 2011).

Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership focuses on building capacity within communities of leaders and decision makers. Values, beliefs, and focal points for the common good are also shared in distributive leadership. Fusarelli, Kowalski, and Petersen (2011) agree with Spillane and Diamond (2007); distributive leadership is the integration of leader’s behavior coupled with the experience of collaboration that builds individual capacity as well as improves school performance. Spillane and Diamond (2007) espouse distributive leadership is a powerful way to understand leadership activity in schools in more complex and interconnected ways. The relationship between motivation and relationships improve leadership practices and overall school performance. Zepke’s (2007) research corresponds by explaining that people work
together through “engagement, working together, imagination, creating an identity, alignment, connecting through coordinating actions, thoughts, and practice” (p. 304). By incorporating these practices of valuing people and their knowledge, trust and ownership are taken in the organization. Distributive leadership values people’s thinking and relationships established within the organization. Zepke (2007) explains that in distributive leadership:

People must matter; personal relationships must at least counterbalance procedures and position in a hierarchy on questions of accountability. Power must cycle through these relationships rather than pooling in certain positions. It is the flow of power that builds mutual trust and enables management to do its job, while also empowering the community to pursue its goals. (p. 312)

Distributive leadership seeks to diffuse leadership in an organization, making the organization less dependent on an individual leader. This allows for stability within the organization. This allows for the less impact when a leader leaves the organization. The leadership does not go with the leader that is leaving. It remains embedded within the organization (Fusarelli et al., 2011).

According to Fusarelli et al. (2011), professional learning communities thrived under distributive leadership. This allows administrators to get a closer look at grade level or subject collaboration. In Fusarelli et al.’s example, PLCs are made up of professionals with a common specialty or background. They meet together as a team to collaborate about a given situation bringing their specialties together in order to achieve the common goal of the particular topic.

Distributive leadership differs slightly from shared and supportive leadership, one of the five dimensions within a professional learning community. According to Harris (2008) distributive leadership is “the practice of leadership experiences shared with individuals or extended groupings within an organization” (p. 175). This approach is often used in corporate settings as a top-down approach when the leader relinquishes leadership responsibilities within
the organization. Shared and supportive leadership is a “nurturing leadership” approach that shares the leadership responsibility while scaffolding support and decision making throughout the shared leadership experience (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 24). Table 1 is a comparison of the differences between distributive leadership and shared and supportive leadership. The table shows the relinquishing of power and expansion of leadership within distributed leadership compared to the cultural transformation within the powerful partnerships among administrators and teachers within shared and supportive leadership.

Table 1

**Comparison between Distributive Leadership and Shared and Supportive Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distributive Leadership</th>
<th>Shared and Supportive Leadership</th>
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<tr>
<td>Distributive leadership allows “influence to shift as different individuals emerge to be influential” (Harris, 2008, p. 174).</td>
<td>Shared and supportive leadership is when, “school administrators share power, authority, and decision making, while promoting and nurturing leadership” (Hipp &amp; Huffman, 2010, p. 13).</td>
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<td>“Distributive leadership creates democratic learning communities where power is shared and there’s a mutual belief that everyone works together for ‘good’” (Fusarelli et al., 2011, p. 47).</td>
<td>“Administrators as well as teachers must be learners, who together are openly discussing instructional problems and exploring solutions to the problems” (Hord &amp; Sommers, 2008, p. 11).</td>
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<td>Distributive leadership is constituted through the interaction of leaders, teachers, and the situation as they influence instructional practice (Spillane &amp; Diamond, 2007).</td>
<td>Administrators model the collaborative processes that cultivate shared and supportive leadership (Hord &amp; Sommers, 2008).</td>
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<td>Effectiveness of distributive leadership depends on the organizations culture, growth, and readiness to change (Harris, 2008).</td>
<td>A dynamic, interactive influence process where team members lead from within the organization constantly supporting each other towards a common goal. (Muethel &amp; Hoegl, 2013)</td>
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In his book, *Motion Leadership in Action: More Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy*, Fullan (2013) gives examples of various systems and structures in six schools around the world that have successful examples of distributive leadership in place. These schools utilize Fullan’s push, pull, and nudge components when implementing systems and structures. In Hackney, England, Fullan explains Okoruwa uses distributive leadership to transform the school district from a district in which parents were pulling their children out of school in 2002 to one in which the school is currently equal to the national average of student achievement. By using the *push* strategy, clear, high expectations were set for student achievement. The current leaders began building and utilizing leaders within the district while at times outside leaders were utilized. This demonstrates the *push and pull* system. The *pull* strategy was illustrated by ensuring every educator received the best possible support.

Within the Hackney district Fullan (2013) notes, “If you want to change something deeply and in reasonably short time frames, you need to use the group to change the group” (p. 18). This allows collective capacity to be built within campuses, and is most effective when replicated at the district level. In the Hackney example, the district formed clusters of schools allowing systemness to be visible and actionable throughout the district. The headmaster explained by pulling in people within the system who were intrinsically motivated and committed, collective capacity began to spread throughout the entire district (Fullan, 2013). Fullan maintains that the next steps for Hackney includes working on and sustaining the system as a whole by guiding each school through school improvement steps.

In Sanger Unified school district in California, Superintendent Marc Johnson expressed that being classified in the Program Improvement Designation was a wake-up call (Fullan, 2013). Using a successful distributive leadership system, Sanger Unified doubled its
achievement scores from the 2003-2004 school year. Johnson comments, “If you have an expectation of anyone in the organization, then as a leader I also have the obligation to build the capacity in that individual to meet that expectation” (Fullan, 2013, p. 23). The catalyst to ongoing successful distributive leadership is the constant capacity building of leaders at all levels. Mr. Johnson created learning communities in which everyone received ongoing support and access to learning (Fullan, 2013). The clustering of three to four schools with a focused learning priority has assisted Sanger Unified’s success. The schools monitor data and seek new information from within their district and outside their district (Fullan 2013). This example of distributing learning and building capacity within mirror’s the importance and success of distributive leadership behaviors. In order to sustain the ongoing success, Mr. Johnson has expressed that distributive leadership extends within and across schools, and with other outside districts (Fullan, 2013). Districts must learn from other districts in order to keep improving. By learning from other districts, Sanger Unified has established a shared culture of commitment and capacity, which the expectation is to contribute to and learn from other schools and systems (Fullan, 2013).

In the Australian Capital Territory, Jim Watterson initiated and implemented whole system reform by modeling distributive leadership behaviors (Fullan, 2013). The key behavior used was capacity building within leaders with a focus on instruction. In 2008 enrollment was dropping and areas of low academic performance were a concern. By 2011, enrollment was on the rise, and achievement scores indicated instruction had improved. Campus leadership teams became more aware of quality feedback and quality teaching. By using the push-pull system, teachers were being coached by instructional coaches, which is voluntary (push). This allowed
for the push system to function effectively as fellow teachers felt a healthy pressure to be coached also (Fullan, 2013).

In order to sustain this reform, Watterson noted the focus of the leadership team shifted to one of serving schools rather than using only a top-down approach (Fullan, 2013). In order for any plan to be successful, the center of the district must involve all stakeholders. Collaborative autonomy was a structure put in place that embraced learning from stakeholders within the schools. However, it also encompassed learning from other schools within the Australian Capital Territory. Mr. Watterson posits that for whole system reform to be successful, the cultural direction of the district must shift. Then the structural direction can be shifted. The whole reform system included structuring the system of 20 schools into four clusters with a new school leader from central office. This clearly displays the action of distributive leadership and the importance of having tight structures in place for systems to be successful (Fullan 2013).

The change process encompasses building capacity by implementing the three phases of change for elementary principals to understand and assess the progress of specific initiatives. The next section within the literature review supports the third conceptual framework component, change process.

Change Process

Examining the educational change process has been the focus of researchers throughout many educational research studies. Within an educational system, the change process is a complex, strategic initiative that includes cyclical phases of growth over several years. Barth et al. (2005) explain, “System change changes individuals more often than individuals change the system” (p. 218). Table 2 provides quotes on research related to the importance of the educational change process.
Table 2

*Change Process Literature*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Process</th>
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<td>“The emphasis on capacity building at the early stages of the change process is consistent with our knowledge about how people change. To secure new beliefs and higher expectations – critical to improvement – people first need new experiences that lead them to different beliefs.”</td>
<td>Fullan, 2007, p. 58</td>
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<td>“... The change process is the importance of keeping communication channels open because ‘communication pathways are the veins and arteries of new ideas.”</td>
<td>Kouzes &amp; Posner, 1987, p. 30</td>
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<td>“…Change sticks only when it becomes ‘the way we do things around here’ when it seeps into the very bloodstream of the work unit. Until new behaviors are rooted in social norms and shared values, they are always subject to degradation as soon as the pressures associated with a change effort are removed.”</td>
<td>Kotter, 1996, p. 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Change is a process not an event.”</td>
<td>Fullan, 2007, p. 68</td>
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In a study by A. Hargreaves (2004) of 50 teachers in 15 Canadian elementary and secondary schools, change is defined as moving from the current state to another state and the emotion that occurs in between. Various results illustrated the comprehensive meaning of the perception of change. A. Hargreaves indicated mandated change without reason causes emotional stress, resistance, insecurity, and anxiety among teachers. When change is mandated strictly by the government or administrator, teachers spend energy questioning the change and lack the understanding of change to implement change initiatives successfully. A. Hargreaves goes on to explain that change must be a systemic process embraced by stakeholders involved within the process. When change is cultivated within the system by teachers that are responsible...
for the implementation of the change process, change is less likely to bring about negative emotions (A. Hargreaves, 2004).

In order for change to penetrate within a system, moral purpose must be at the forefront of the change process. Fullan (2001) contends that moral purpose is the catalyst to sustain any successful change initiative. Moral purpose is having the positive intent to make a difference in society (Fullan, 2001). “Leaders who combine a commitment to moral purpose with a healthy respect for the complexities of the change process will be more successful and unearth deeper moral purpose” (Fullan, 2001, p. 5). Fullan suggests that with any change moral purpose is a natural instinct that leaders must possess to lead through the change process. Moral purpose is knowing the end outcome. Fullan gives an example of the government initiating a positive education initiative: all students will read on grade level and pass state mandated tests. The moral purpose is all students will have received the quality education needed in order to learn to read for these initiatives to be met.

Leaders must engage in a cyclical process of “moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, coherence making, and knowledge creation and sharing” (Fullan, 2001, p. 4). However, moral purpose remains a natural part of all components along with relationships being the most important factor with any change. These two entities must be heavily cultivated throughout the change process (Fullan, 2001).

Phases of Change

Three phases of change used to classify the measurement system in the current study are the initiating, implementing, and sustaining phases of change. The initiating stage of change is the first phase of the change process and most often involves a new initiative. During this phase, research from Fullan (2007) and Hipp and Huffman (2010) consistently state that clarity must be
at the forefront of the initiation stage. Hipp and Huffman (2010) explain that the leader will share the vision, and staff will collaborate by sharing information and knowledge in order to achieve common goals. Fullan (2007) states the initiation stage of change is the initial decision that leads up to moving forward with making change. Fullan espouses educators often begin initiatives but at times do not have the capacity to utilize the ever-evolving stages of change. Without this capacity, the process of initiation brings about uncertainty, confusion, and lack of commitment due to the lack of clarity. It is important during this phase to be specific and clarify all stages of the change process.

With change, too many initiatives can be in place. Reeves (2010) describes initiative fatigue as, “the number of initiatives increasing while time, resources, and emotional energy are constant” (p. 27). According to Reeves, this means that no matter how well the new initiative is received or how positive the intentions behind the initiative, due to the lack of prioritization from the centralized source of the initiative, the initiative will receive less emotional energy, hours, and commitment.

In the implementing phase of change, leaders will urge staff to set clear expectations in order to meet their shared goal by collectively sharing responsibility and receiving feedback to make needed adjustments and improvements (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Fullan (2007) implies this phase of the change process takes two to three years as the initiative will be put into action for the first time. During this phase, a clear change in practice will be apparent. Fullan (2007) describes three phases of the implementation stage of educational change as, “(1) the possible use of new or revised materials; (2) the possible use of new teaching strategies; (3) the possible alteration of beliefs” (p. 30). With these phases of the implementation stage, one stage is dependent on the other. The ultimate goal in the implementation stage is for Stage 1 and 2 to
transpire in order for the beliefs and new practices to be cemented as new behaviors of the change process.

During the implementing phase of change, Fullan (2001) describes a term known as the implementation dip. This term refers to a “dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings” (Fullan, 2001, p. 40). The implementation dip involves feelings of anxiety, questioning, and lack of confidence for those making changes. Fullan maintains that it is important for leaders to become partners and coaches during this time. All parties involved in the implementation dip evolve stronger and have greater depth of knowledge having experienced the uneasiness that exudes from the implementation dip.

The last phase of the change process is the sustaining phase of change. During this stage, Hipp and Huffman (2010) explain that the change initiative is fluid throughout the culture of the school. While schools institutionalize PLCs, the school’s vision is clear by sharing accountability and being committed to student learning by all stakeholders.

Fullan (2006a) maintains that there are eight elements to sustainability. Fullan’s eight elements of sustainability are (1) public service with a moral purpose, (2) commitment to changing context at all levels, (3) lateral capacity building, (4) intelligent accountability and vertical relationships, (5) deep learning, (6) dual commitment to short-term and long-term results, (7) cyclical energizing, and (8) the long lever of leadership. Sustainability according to Fullan (2006a) is a cyclical process supported by two reasons. The first reason is energy increases and decreases while sustaining initiatives. The second reason is within sustaining, plateaus arise that allow the opportunity to improve and set a new standard to increase the rigor of sustainability. The eight elements of sustainability must be in constant motion. This allows sustainability to penetrate through the entire system.
In a dissertation framed and structured around Fullan’s eight elements of sustainability in Mississippi public schools, schools found they were able to sustain initiatives by sustaining cyclical energy. According to Wentland (2010), the study results showed superior performing schools scored at a Level 5 by the Mississippi Department of Education, and exemplary performing schools scored at a Level 4. Both levels were able to sustain new practices because of the cyclical energy. Wentland (2010) explains cyclical energy as the fine tuning that must occur in order to sustain an initiative. This process is often complex for individuals sustaining educational reforms because it is not a linear process. During the sustaining process, Wentland (2010) states, “Leaders need to seek and harness four sources of energy – the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual, but instead of continually trying to maximize energy, cycles of high performance followed by recovery are required” (p. 78). The study results define and support the importance of sustaining within the change process.

The next section of the literature review examines the fourth conceptual framework component, the five dimensions within a professional learning community. Hord (1997) defines a professional learning community as “administrators and teachers actively seeking to learn and sharing their learning experiences to improve student learning” (p. 10). Hord (1997) explains there are five attributes or dimensions specific to professional learning communities, and all five dimensions must be present within a successful professional learning community culture.

Dimensions of PLC

Within a professional learning community (PLC) culture, five dimensions exist that support the creation and sustainability of PLCs. According to Hipp and Huffman (2010), the five dimensions are shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective
learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions. The first dimension is shared and supportive leadership.

Shared and Supportive Leadership

Hord (1997) explains that shared and supportive leadership is “collegial and facilitative participation of shared power and authority through inviting staff input in decision making” (p. 24). While Hipp and Huffman (2010) explain the first dimension, shared and supportive leadership, is, “School administrators sharing power, authority, and decision making, while promoting and nurturing leadership” (p. 13). The consistent terms of shared power and decision making by the researchers demonstrate that shared and supportive leadership are always supported and reinforced by a partnership between the leader and individual sharing in the leadership experience.

With shared and supportive leadership, research consistently states that it is a process of filtering, sharing, and facilitating leadership experiences, with the opposite individual accepting and owning the shared experience. Fullan (2006b) asserts lateral capacity leadership is shared by creating and distributing opportunities when ownership and commitment are entrenched within the culture. This allows purposeful collaboration to transpire amongst colleagues with various experiences and knowledge to share and learn from within the organization. Pearce, Wassenaar, and Manz (2014) continue to explain the notion that leadership must become more of a social process rather than hierarchical role. Muethel and Hoegl (2013) exert that within a team of participants, shared leadership refers also to the influence of one team member’s authority being an influential factor and accepted by the targeted team member.

Hord (2008) states with shared and supportive leadership; power, authority, and decision-making is shared. The principal is the key element in assuring implementation of this process.
The principal must cultivate the mindset of a facilitator. With shared and supportive leadership 
Hord (2008) explains, “Teachers broaden their perspectives, develop a higher level of 
professionalism, and deepen their effectiveness” (p. 12).

Shared Vision and Values

framework for clear strategies: It defines a strategic direction and presents a conceptual map of 
how to move from current reality to a desired future state” (p. 317). Hord (1997) describes 
shared values and vision as the current image of what is individually valued to the individual and 
the organization while aligning decisions to the collectively created vision. Hipp and Huffman 
(2010) define shared values and vision as the “present, credible yet realistic picture of the 
organization that inspires the participants to work toward a future goal” (p. 16). Dufour et al. 
(2010) also explain that the vision provides a sense of direction for the current beliefs and status 
of the school. Action steps and the ongoing evaluation of the beliefs and current status allow for 
continuous improvement.

Huffman and Hipp (2003) maintain shared values should precede the shared vision. 
Dufour et al. (2010) states the vision is the action behind accomplishing the school’s purpose and 
values and how the vision will be carried out. Collective commitments are created when 
defining values. Kanold (2011) agrees that values are the commitments to a specific action to 
accomplish the vision. Actions and the evidence that adult behaviors and commitments will lead 
to improved student learning are critical in order for the values to elicit the shared vision 
(Kanold, 2011). These commitments are collectively created among teams in order to fulfill the 
shared vision.
Covey (1995) explained creating a shared vision is a cyclical process. The shared vision should be a continuous reflection of the different experiences and perspectives of individual visions where similar abilities and desires are brought together to achieve one shared mission. Senge (2008) agrees shared visions are individual visions cultivated daily within a culture. Huffman (2003) adds to the research by stating, “The task of the leader is to share and combine the personal visions of faculty members into a collective vision molded and embraced by all” (p. 22). When shared values and visions are the pinnacle of the structures within an organization, stakeholders more easily collaborate and communicate more constructively (Huffman, 2003).

When individuals have been heard and leaders have listened, a shared vision will value all perspectives and produce a clear united picture for a shared vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). The research results indicates shared visions will be held tighter since the stakeholders involved have been intrinsically motivated by being valued and having been an integral part of creating the vision (Wilder, 2013).

Collective Learning and Application

Hipp and Huffman (2010) state the dimension of collective learning and application involves “the staff sharing information and work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning opportunities” (p. 13). Hord (2008) contends this dimension guides the PLC members to determine their specific learning based on the breakdown of student data. This data drives the next step for learning within the professional learning community. The learning experience is often continuous and embedded within the current work. The new learning is applied, and the continuous process will begin again based on the new student data. According to Hipp and Huffman (2010), this shared learning also guides targeted professional learning.
based on student data. The professional learning experiences are often embedded learning experiences that are an imperative dimension for continuous personal growth and improvement.

Learning environments created for teachers should be constructed with a shared understanding of all members of the learning community (Chan & Fai Pang, 2006). Senge (1991) explains teams are the intricate element within a learning organization. Hord (1997) asserts team members who dialogue about student data will learn new strategies to apply for improved teaching and student learning. Within this collaborative time, teachers develop new strategies and learning from shared experiences to build the collective capacity of the team (Hord & Sommers, 2008). In a study of five urban districts in Boston, shared responsibility of students emerged as a guiding factor that improved the culture. Collaboration was seen as “the way we work” (Poulos, Culbertson, Piazza, & D’Entremont, 2014, p. 30).

At the central office level in Abby ISD (AISD), collective application is evident within all departments within central office, however for the current study, the focus of collective application will include the curriculum and instruction department and the human resources department. For example, an intra district approach between the departments within central office offers a shared responsibility for continuous improvement of all employees within AISD. For this study, a focus on the relationship between the Area Director of Curriculum and Instruction and the Elementary Director of Personnel build capacity of elementary principals through a collaborative approach by looking at characteristics and skills of principals. The Elementary Personnel Director joins the Area Directors of Curriculum and Instruction to develop soft leadership skills of a principal such as communication and collaboration rather than specific instructional skills. Principals must have a balance of personal leadership skills as well as instructional skills in order to continue the cycle of capacity building with teachers.
The Elementary Director of Personnel and Area Director of Elementary Instruction jointly recruit and interview principal candidates. Together they focus on principal development such as monthly professional learning for new principals that focuses on a balance of instruction and human resources. The Elementary Director of Personnel directly works with elementary principals for personnel needs while sharing those needs with each principal’s immediate supervisor, the Area Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction to support the principal. Even though the Elementary Director of Personnel is not a member of the curriculum and instruction department, the interconnectedness of responsibilities of the principal relies on a shared responsibility and revolving communication between the curriculum and instruction department and the human resources department.

Shared Personal Practice

Researchers contend that shared personal practice is continuing to create opportunities for sharing experiences and practices in order to increase individual and collective knowledge and capacity. Shared personal practice is noticing and sharing specific practices while providing feedback within all settings (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Hord (1997) explains shared personal practice is the “team’s desire for individual and community improvement and is enabled by the mutual respect and trustworthiness of staff members” (p. 17). Hipp and Huffman (2010) state that teachers need opportunities to learn from each other in a trusting environment that allows individual and team capacity to expand. To add to this foundation, Roseler and Dentzau (2013) express that novice and experienced teachers learning together within the group should be a reciprocal process that develops through participating in shared knowledge and learning experiences.
Hord (2008) contends that within the dimension of shared personal practice, teachers become partners with peers as they open their classrooms to peers as a learning environment. Partner teachers observe specific teaching behaviors within the classroom to improve personal practice. This process is complex and involves transparency and specific protocols set in place. Learning walks are a practice that promotes the shared personal practice within a learning community. Steiny (2009) expresses that within learning walks, specific questions must proceed the learning walk in order to establish a shared purpose and knowledge of desired outcomes. Once questions have been established, a specific protocol is chosen for teachers to follow as they visit classrooms. Within the learning walk, the debriefing time is the most powerful component. This allows teachers to analyze specific behaviors and trends observed during the visit. Authentic professional development occurs during this process. Teachers are able to see specific practices and develop their own practice based on specific teacher observations.

Another example to support shared personal practice is the use of Dufour and Fullan’s (2013) four critical questions developed to ensure all students are learning.

1. What is it we want our students to learn?
2. How will we know if each student is learning?
3. How will we respond if some students don’t learn?
4. How will we respond if students are already proficient? (p. 15)

Teachers have used these guiding questions to also guide specific practices to guarantee learning together is occurring within the learning community.

Rosa (2008) explains the result of creating a learning community is a shared interest in honoring individual expertise. Improving individual instructional craft happens while sharing practices, experiences, and strategies that focus on an intentional shared purpose surrounding student results. Brown (2014) agrees collaboration must be embedded within the culture of the campus in order to have a lasting effect for students.
Supportive Conditions

The fifth dimension, Hord (1997) labels as a critical component of PLCs, is supportive conditions. These logistics determine how frequently staff members meet to problem solve, make decisions, and collaborate about specific components within the professional learning community. According to Hipp and Huffman (2010), the structures within the supportive conditions “include systems and resources that enable staff to meet and examine practices and student outcomes” (p. 13). This dimension also encompasses the supportive condition of relationships. This cultural dimension is comprised of “teacher attitudes that are consistently positive; norms that support ongoing learning and improvement; teachers who share and learn with each other; and a sense of responsibility for student learning and success” (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, p. 20).

The structure of ensuring that a common collaborative planning time exists along with the needed technology, adequate space, and resources are necessary supports. Having the structure of a common planning time is when members from the same grade level team meet to collaborate about student and teacher behaviors, logistics, and discuss student data. Hord and Sommers (2008) explain that being creative with scheduling allows for extra built in time during the instructional day that is within the common planning period. This time out of the instructional day, according to Mertens, Flowers, Anfara, and Caskey (2010), improves student and teacher learning. Research conducted by Dever and Lash (2013) also states that common planning times allow for sacred time for teachers to have conversations about specific student needs. They also delineated that it was crucial to include the structure of a common planning time as an inclusive entity of the professional learning community culture rather than it being compartmentalized (Dever & Lash, 2013).
By analyzing three case studies, several common trends were clear. In a case study conducted in a suburban middle school in Florida, Gill and Hoffman (2009) concluded a shared planning time provided data for why teachers make specific decisions, perspective for teaching methods and pedagogical practices, and it cultivated autonomy for teachers. In another case study of two middle schools in Kentucky, Cook and Faulkner (2010) found the success of having a common planning time depends on the collective commitment of all stakeholders involved to ensure the common planning time is held tight. Campus administrators must support the common planning time and deem it as an essential structure on the campus. Principals must also clearly embed within the school climate the support needed for common planning. This would include accountability for the common planning time such as minutes, agendas, and data derived from the common planning meeting. In the final case study conducted in a Mid-Atlantic middle school, Haverback and Mee (2013) discern the benefits and barriers of common planning time. The most important benefit was the openness of communication with the team leader, cooperation with others, and consistent expectations for student achievement. The major barrier Haverback and Mee (2013) found with a common planning time was the time available to achieve team goals. This natural barrier surfaces when the common planning time is utilized in a successful manner. When common collaborative planning time thrives, members create goals; due to time restraints on the instructional day, time to achieve goals becomes a barrier.

Another supportive structure to ensure is the appropriate physical space to collaborate and conduct common planning. Lippman (2013) provides that spatial design affects collaboration with others. Collaboration must be encouraged no matter the spatial layout. Physical environments, along with technology design, must be planned and utilized to support collaboration (Lippman, 2013).
The second condition with the supportive condition dimension is supportive relationships. Research indicates the single most important key in relationships is trust. Trust evolves over time when participants of a team have had experiences and activities where actions build relationships established around trust (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Green, Etheridge, and Plata (1999) also state that trust is dependent on other factors such as “respect for individual differences, philosophically consistent behavior, group interaction, two-way communication, and agreeing to disagree” (p. 392). These key factors are essential elements within a collaborative team. Reciprocity is another term used by Baker (2003) to describe characteristics of strong professional relationships. He indicated reciprocity exists when as an individual we help others genuinely without expecting a reciprocating favor or behavior in return.

In a national study of 4,500 early childhood students over five years of age, Moller, Mickelson, Stearns, Banerjee, and Bottia (2013) found how teachers collaborate and work with each other impacts elementary students. This study defined a collective pedagogical culture as a strong professional learning community in which the collaboration is the norm among teachers (Moller et al., 2013). Maguire (1994) explained relationships develop when members are clear on the task-at-hand and are driven to accomplish the task collaboratively. In regards to relationships, Maguire (1994) expresses that individuals must be motivated and have a shared respect for one another. Collegial and professional relationships take time, practice, and vulnerability. Research shows that by having respect and actively striving to achieve common goals, relationships strengthen and develop (Maguire, 1994).

Each of the five dimensions are interdependent dimensions that naturally exist alone, yet are most effective when practiced together (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Strong professional learning communities will become grounded when the five dimensions of (a) shared and
supportive leadership, (b) shared vision and values, (c) collective application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) shared and supportive conditions are practiced and sustained. These dimensions are the pinnacles of a strong structured professional learning community culture.

In order to foster a district wide professional learning community, the central office must take the lead. Central offices nationwide have implemented practices and are creating professional learning community cultures in order to provide systemic structures to support campuses. In the next section, the researcher examines the central office’s role in creating structures that support creating a professional learning community on each campus.

Central Office Support

When a school district and all of the schools within the district get in motion to improve student learning and build capacity, a clear cohesive system must be in place to ensure congruent actions from school to school are in place. The central office is the primary support system for establishing and following through with systems and structures to ensure lateral capacity is in place. Schools within a district must collaborate with and challenge each other. However, a clear mission and vision along with a tight system must be in place in districts to warrant fidelity within a system.

Systemness

Hargreaves (2007), Fullan (2010), Giles (2006), and O’Day (2004) suggest that systemness is the alignment of structures within a system that target a mission and vision. O’day (2004) refers to a parallel system where all stakeholders are clear regarding the direction and tendencies needed for success. General systemness is a combination of pressure or drive from external sources coupled with a force of motion from internal reformers. Giles (2006) and Hargreaves (2007) contend systems within learning organizations should develop processes and
structures that draw on developing the collective capacity of the group. Systemness allows for members of the organization to see the whole picture of how the practices and behaviors within the school district are interrelated and critical to achieving the shared mission and vision. Fullan (2010) explains school districts with strong systems have all schools in alignment with a common vision to improve student learning. He also states that districts move away from silos and rely on the interdependence of all departments within the districts to form partnerships collectively. These researchers agree systemness requires clear, consistent alignment of practices within organizations where the mission, vision, and goals are shared and owned by all stakeholders (Fullan, 2010; Giles, 2006; Hargreaves, 2007; O’Day, 2004).

More explicitly, Hargreaves (2007) explains successful systemic behaviors within school systems define essentials, possess systematic professional learning, and emphasize collaborative practices among districts, schools, administrators, and teachers. Hargreaves (2011) delineates that systems with these visible components provide direction and motivation to members within an organization to improve performance. Floden, Goertz, and O’Day (1995) purport systems build capacity in leaders by giving opportunities to learn and understand new skills while altering goals and reflecting on their role as a leader. Senge (2000) emphasizes that systems must be reinforced with sustainable leadership. Changes and improvements within systems must sustain overtime. According to Senge (2000), systems must distribute leadership in order for stakeholders to remain systematic in knowing how to problem solve and make decisions in order to build the collective capacity and strengthen the system. Systems must be sustained over time by constant and consistent increase of individual capacity, which in turn increases the school district’s collective capacity.
District and Campus Support

In *Learning By Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*, Dufour, et al. (2010) cite an explicit example of a district office initiating a PLC culture that was not successful. The district office stated specific goals, but the lack of clarity, directives, and communication with principals were hindrances on the success of initiating the PLC culture.

Successful districts cited by Dufour et al. (2010) indicated follow through by the district office is imperative for clear communication to transfer from the district to the principal to the teachers. Principals often receive training off campus; however, when the training is applied to challenges directly linked to the current, practical work, the organizations goals, and tactics for improvement demonstrate ongoing capacity in principals. The implementation of district expectations can best be achieved by having reciprocal accountability where principals are required to do specific work on their campus, and then report the results, feedback, and questions back to their peers at district principal meetings (Dufour et al., 2010).

At the district level, Dufour et al. (2010) discuss the importance of a balance between tight and loose expectations:

Superintendents are tight on what they expect to see in each school at the same time that they are loose in terms of implementation. Each school has a significant degree of autonomy regarding how they would create the conditions, but no school would ignore the stipulation that they would address the district priority. (p. 209)

Marzano and Waters (2009) agree with Dufour et al. (2010) that principals must have defined autonomy in order to successfully create and implement a system of tight and loose goals and expectations. Marzano and Waters (2009) explain that defined autonomy is when the district “expects building principals and all other administrators in the district to lead within the boundaries defined by the district goals” (p. 8). Dufour and Fullan (2013) state the answer to the balance of tight and loose is interdependence.
To achieve the balance of support between the district and campus, Dufour and Fullan (2013) state interdependence demonstrates the “right amount of autonomy and collaboration that results in focus, learning together, and strong internal commitment to group accountability that serves them well in the face of external public accountability” (p. 39). Table 3 shows the comparison between the researchers’ views of district leader responsibility. The table displays the connection between Dufour et al.’s (2010) tight and loose structure and Marzano and Water’s (2009) defined autonomy theory by illustrating the district office must have specific goals, support systems, and clear alignment in place in order for the district’s goals to transfer consistently back to the campus with fidelity.

Table 3

*Comparison of District Leadership Responsibilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers</th>
<th>Dufour et al. (2010, p. 208)</th>
<th>Marzano &amp; Waters (2009, p. 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarify priorities</td>
<td>Ensure collaborative goal setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify the specific conditions that must be created in each school to achieve the priorities</td>
<td>Establish nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build the capacity of people throughout the organization to succeed in what they are being called upon to do</td>
<td>Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish indicators of progress to be monitored carefully</td>
<td>Monitor achievement and instruction goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Align leadership behaviors with articulated purpose and priorities</td>
<td>Create board alignment with and support of district goals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dufour and Marzano (2011) also explain the need for specificity. In their research, they identified the need for superintendents to create a common language and to communicate goals
clearly and strategically. This will create alignment between central office and campuses. They explain by limiting initiatives and focusing on specific goals, clarity and learning for all in a specific area is most likely to occur. This creates a cohesive unit for professional learning communities to develop.

Lateral Capacity

Setting goals from the data collected, allows lateral capacity to develop system wide. Fullan et al. (2004) suggest lateral capacity forms bridges among schools within a district while building the capacity of individuals and the organization by generating authentic ideas, strategies, and individual practices.

Fullan (2006b) also explains that in order to transform schools, schools must learn from each other while districts learn from each other. Fullan (2006a) believes lateral capacity is crucial for system-wide reform:

The route to all schools changing means each school must engage in lateral capacity building. Schools’ interacting with each other is a strategy to promote intra-school collaboration as educators show to others what they are doing and learn from others. Breaking down the walls of schools is a concomitant part of breaking down the walls of the classroom. (p. 14)

Fullan (2006b) also observes that by encompassing two-way collaboration and interaction between campus and district, both levels are influenced. Thus, when the district and campus initiate action and work together within the same process on shared goals, purposeful, systemic change occurs.

District Leaders as Principal Supervisors

In order for central office to be able to support principals fully, a clear and direct understanding of the role of a principal and principal supervisor must be understood. A mutual understanding of the role between both parties must exist. Syed (2014) espouses that a principal
supervisory role is ever changing along with the role of the principal. In the last 10 years, the role of the principal has shifted to center around high quality education whereas the principal supervisor role has made little change. The role of the principal supervisor must be in sync to support the principal. Rather than serving as the role of evaluating principals, a principal supervisor role has shifted to become a centered support for principals.

In order for the principal’s supervisor to become the central support system for the principal, principal supervisors must invest in professional learning where individual growth and support is needed for the principal supervisor (Syed, 2014). In Denver, Colorado, the Relay program is a four-day principal supervisor training program; coaching training is an intricate part of the four-day training. The message given during this training program honors the multiple roles supervisors play and their busy schedules. Often supervisors give principals the answers to questions so the task-at-hand can be completed. Syed mentions that it is during the wait time for a principal that individual processing can happen as well as collaboration with a counter-part where answers are generated. Supervisors from the Relay program share strategies and structures used to build individual capacity that allows them to build capacity of principals. Sitor Narcisse, an associate superintendent in Prince George County, Maryland, explained the district has focused more on equipping the principal to become more of a thought partner and coach rather than an individual that focuses on compliance and regulations (Syed, 2014).

In a dissertation that focused on central office supporting new principals, Woody (2014) indicates central office must purposefully support new principals. Intentional collaboration was deemed a huge impact for new principals according to Woody’s study of 249 school districts in 49 states. Central office leaders must provide guidance on site rather than waiting for principals to seek them out. Woody also noted communication must be strengthened between the principal
and district leader in order for trust to be established. Along the lines of communication, Woody (2014) states, “District leaders should focus on sending a message of ‘here is how I am going to help you,’ instead of ‘call me if you need me’; the more casual phrase” (p. 92). Based on the interviews, trends also spoke to the need for offering intentional professional development for new principals, and then offering time to collaborate in order to devise a plan to initiate the professional learning experience intentionally at their campus (Woody, 2014).

District Support in Practice

Literature shows explicit examples of structures districts have initiated in order to promote leadership at the district level that will cultivate a learning community, which demonstrates the behaviors expected from principals who can then emulate the specific behaviors from district leaders within the learning community. Psenick et al. (2014) conclude:

District leadership team members systematically work with school principals and school leadership teams to ensure that site-based staff internalize the work. They observe school leadership team meetings, conduct walk-throughs in buildings, and observe one another facilitating professional learning for principals. (p.16)

This demonstrates the exact behaviors and shared practices principals exhibit on a daily basis. Professional learning is a structure that supports these practices at the district and campus level. Principals value time to work collaboratively within a principal learning community. The focus is often on the student as the learner; at times, it must shift to the adult learner (Psenick et al., 2014).

In Fort Wayne, Indiana, the school district aligned all structures and systems by defining leadership and professional learning in order to affect principal effectiveness. Upon initiation of this process, the entire administrative staff was part of the process by revising documents, which described the structures and systems based on feedback from shared learning experiences. This allowed all at central office to own the work. The district team applied the learning and
protocols to every department within central office. The finance, school improvement, and leadership team members applied the protocols to all aspects within each department (Psenick et al., 2014).

James et al. (2014) explain central office and district leaders have shifted from a focus specific on management tasks and administrative tasks to an ongoing learning and instructional leadership mindset. In Saskatoon Public schools, the largest district in Canada, professional learning and shared ownership has been the bridge between central office and campus leadership. Saskatoon Public Schools has transitioned three major shifts within the central office. The shared ownership of ongoing professional learning for all members of central office and campuses has created common and shared knowledge for central office staff and principals. Central office and campus leadership worked collaboratively on a framework for the school’s districtwide instructional initiative. The third shift was the continuous collaboration between central office and school leaders as they developed and implemented districtwide initiatives. This allowed campus leaders to take a districtwide initiative and share it with all leaders within the district. The culture also shifted from the collaboration and shared ownership to one of mutual respect between the campus and district (James et al., 2014).

In a case study, Honig (2012) conducted 283 interviews with 162 central office administrators, principals, and representatives from three rapid growing school districts in Atlanta, GA; New York City, NY; and Oakland, CA. The findings were that at the time the study began, instructional leadership directors (ILD) were working with a broad definition of principal leadership. A common understanding of principal leadership was not established, which led to inconsistencies. Within the study, instructional leadership directors demonstrated five practices that strategically supported principals in the advancement of becoming successful
instructional leaders on the campus. The trends show five supports that were consistent between ILD’s and principals. Joint work is a practice that focuses on the relationship between the ILD and the principal. Specifically, this domain found that prioritizing the instructional capacity of the principal was essential, while also focusing on the joint nature of the work between the ILD and principal. Honig (2012) expressed that differentiation of practice between ILD’s was complex depending on the number of principals to supervise and each principal’s understanding of their role as an instructional leader. Various support was needed depending on the principals strengths and weaknesses throughout the year. The study results were that in most cases support for strong principals decreased throughout the year as more time and focus was redirected to principals with less experience.

The third area of support found consistent with Honig’s (2012) study was modeling between the ILD and the principal. ILD’s reported by modeling expected behavior for the principal, it allowed the principal to observe then model the behavior. By modeling expected behaviors, principals were allowed to offer feedback as was the ILD when observing the principal’s behavior. An ILD explained that it was imperative to model and explain the why behind a specific behavior. The behaviors referred to in the study were conversations between principals and teachers and specific rationales for certain situations (Honig, 2012). Consistent support for principals from ILDs also included specific tools for measuring growth in instructional leadership as well as measurement tools for specific areas of instruction. Honig (2012) concluded the study with the least consistency between principals and ILDs as brokering. Brokering is the central office support for the principal other than the ILD. In the districts within this study, another instructional support person was assigned to the principal other than the ILD to increase instructional support and leadership in a specific area. Honig (2012) referred to this
term as “bridging” (p. 755). These noted consistencies and trends throughout Honig’s study offer components of support structures and practices needed to bridge the gap between the central office and campus leadership team.

In a dissertation focused on the perceptions of principals in relation to the influence of central office, Russell (2013) found principals tend to lead and collaborate horizontally. The data from elementary, middle, and high school principals revealed communication among central office and the principal was crucial yet lacked in consistency. Principals in Russell’s study felt that in order to develop capacity, constant communication should occur between the central office and principals. This study showed central offices in the two Pennsylvania districts indicated a separation between the central office and campus leader by stating central office was responsible for fulfilling the district’s vision while principals are responsible for fulfilling their campus’s vision. Because of this separation of focus, campus leaders felt more inclined to rely on each other horizontally while portraying they wanted central office leaders to collaborate on a daily basis (Russell, 2013). Therein lies the issue of aligning district and campus goals in order to sustain a collective vision between the central office and campus leader.

In contrast, Carney (2010) explains it starts with central office to transform the silos of departments and individual concentrations to dissolve and focus intentionally on alignment of goals and purpose for a professional learning community to form within central office. Common goals and forums for central office can transcend to build a culture of collective responsibility for all students within all departments in central office (Carney, 2010).

Summary

This review of literature grounds the conceptual framework that encompasses capacity building. By creating high social capital coupled with the balance of human capital, strong
professional capital flourishes. This leads to cultivating intrinsic motivation, which is at the forefront of shifting one’s thinking, and in turn leads to capacity building. Change begins to happen when mindsets shift and collaboration becomes a norm. This supports a dynamic culture that moves through the initiating, implementing, and sustaining stages of the educational change process. As cultures embark on various stages of the change process, a professional learning community begins to evolve. The five dimensions within a professional learning community must be visible and valued within a culture in order for systemic alignment to sustain within a fast growing district. When district leaders and elementary principals move collectively through the cycle of capacity building, consistent and shared practices will be evident throughout elementary campuses and the central office. By creating these aligned systemic structures, effectiveness of the central office personnel and elementary principals increase, resulting in improved teacher effectiveness and student achievement. Within a rapid growing school district, this process allows capacity building to permeate throughout the culture to exist as the most important professional practice.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In Chapter 3, the researcher explains the research design, which includes the qualitative methodology, sampling, instrumentation, data collection plan, and data analysis. The purpose of this study was to examine central office’s strategies and practices currently in place that build capacity in elementary principals. This chapter also explains the selection of a descriptive case study analysis as the method, as well as the validity and credibility of the study. The study’s focus was central office staff using professional learning communities (PLC’s) as the main driver for building capacity in elementary principals while also studying central office staff’s specific supporting role with building capacity. Abby ISD (AISD) was studied in an effort to provide information related to the research questions:

1. What is the central office staff’s role in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growing district?

2. How does central office staff use the PLC process as the main driver in building capacity in a rapidly growing district?

3. How are the five PLC dimensions used to support capacity building in elementary principals?

Prior to conducting any research, approval was obtained from the UNT Institutional Review Board. The approval is in Appendix A.

Research Design

The research design was constructed to identify how central office builds capacity in elementary principals while using PLC process as the framework. Three methods were used to gather data. First documents created by the curriculum instruction department that support
building capacity within PLC’s were researched and analyzed. Appendixes B and C include examples of the documents. The second method in the research design was the administration of the Professional Learning Community Assessment-District Support (PLCA-DS) survey (Olivier, Huffman, & Cowan, 2015) (see Appendix D for the survey). Utilizing the PLCA-DS, data was gathered to analyze the areas that align to systemic structures supporting the initiation and implementation of the PLC dimensions. The third method in the research design was the open-ended interview question protocol. The questions were asked of central office staff and elementary principals.

The data collection and analysis procedures listed are for the purpose of studying the interactions of the participants, analyzing the interaction at multiple stages of data collection, and generating general themes and interpretations to determine the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2014). The intent of the data collection and analysis procedures was to reveal specific central office actions that build capacity in elementary principals, determine the specific PLC dimensions that clearly evolve within the central office and among elementary campuses, as well as discover how specific practices align for a PLC culture to develop within the district.

A qualitative research approach was utilized to focus on the construction of group interactions and the perspectives of social group in determining meaning behind specific actions (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Hesse-Biber and Leavy contend qualitative research is a grounded approach based on meaning. A holistic approach is involved in qualitative research by utilizing the connections, process, and relationships that emerge based on the themes and trends within the research. To examine perceptions, experiences, and interactions between the central office and elementary principals, the current researcher used a case study design to describe the phenomenon in depth within the real-world setting (Yin, 2014). Case studies present an
extensive description of how and why a social phenomenon is in place. Since this study was a small sample of central office staff within the curriculum and instruction department as well as three elementary campuses, with current practices in place, the phenomenon of how the district supports capacity building in elementary principals by utilizing a PLC process was studied, in the context of the real-world, as a descriptive case study (Yin, 2014).

Case studies rely on collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources. In this study, descriptive case study research encompassed the use of document analysis, administering the PLCA-DS, and conducting interviews as methods to collect data. Using a descriptive case study, the researcher analyzed a current process in place within its natural context. This descriptive case study provided a rigorous and explicit analysis of the current practices in place used to build capacity consistently in elementary principals by utilizing the perspectives within a district. Yin (2014) explains a descriptive case study examines a current process in place. This examination allowed insight and discovery regarding the current procedures and structures within AISD in which capacity building progressed from central office to elementary principals.

Document Analysis

Fullan (2014) believes that within a district it is important for the practitioners to lead the initiative. Building capacity within the district starts with the central office at AISD. In 2014, AISD introduced the initiative to allow for embedded time on Monday afternoon for the curriculum and instruction department to meet vertically and horizontally to collaborate about implementing professional learning community components. By providing this time, the expectation was the collaboration and conversations that emerged within the curriculum and instruction department be shared with, and guide actions of other departments within the central office and also with campuses.
After researching Fullan’s works, it is clear a strong systemic structure and related processes are critical for any successful initiative. In AISD, Monday afternoon was set aside for the curriculum and instruction department to meet, however one aspect that was unclear was the driver and purpose behind the collaboration within the allotted time. To address this concern, the curriculum and instruction department was involved in creating core values. They did this by reviewing collective commitments, core values, and perspectives, and then creating a document entitled Professional Learning Communities Essentials and Common Vocabulary document, as of November 11, 2014 (see Appendixes B and C for the documents).

Within the document, the first priority is building professional capacity. This is followed by providing supportive conditions and structures, and fostering interdependent relationships. Learning is highlighted and within the learning section collective knowledge, developing and implementing common assessments, and utilizing planning for learning are emphasized. The learning component highlights creating and implementing intervention and enrichment instruction. Also included within learning are the four essential PLC questions, which are embedded within every learning component. Collaboration is another section of the document that targets schools having collaborative teams with allotted time to plan, and ensuring instruction is differentiated to meet individual student needs. Results are the last focus of the document, which focuses on campuses analyzing and responding to data. Abby ISD Curriculum and Instruction core values are also listed that state the district’s collective values. The Common Vocabulary Document allows for a districtwide shared meaning and understanding of specific terms used within the district (see Appendix C for the document). The PLC Essentials and Common Vocabulary documents were analyzed as part of the collected data. Documents related to district/campus created PLC initiatives were also analyzed.
Professional Learning Community Assessment – District Support (PLCA-DS)

The Professional Learning Community Assessment-District Support was administered to the curriculum and instruction department and the certified teachers within the three elementary campuses. Appendix E is the electronic notice and consent for the survey. According to Olivier et al. (2015), the PLCA-DS identifies district supports to “develop, support, and sustain a highly effective PLC process at the school and district level” (p. 1). The tool specifically evaluates actions district leaders should take to support the schools implementation of the PLC process. The PLCA-DS allows participants to rank AISD’s current status of perceptions of central office support for development and implementation of PLCs in schools by having participants answer 67 questions scored on a Likert scale of 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*. The questions reflect the level of agreement with the participant on the support of central office with campuses during the PLC process. The questions also elicit data to determine what supportive structures are in place to provide district support to the campus principal while implementing the PLC process. The comments at the end of each section allowed for participants to seek clarification, expand on a specific question of interest from the survey or provide more information specific to the PLCA-DS (Olivier et al., 2015).

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the central office staff and three elementary principals. Notice and consent was obtained before the interviews were conducted (see Appendixes E and F for the consent forms). Open ended questions along with probing questions were asked in order for interviewees to articulate their experience, and insight, and also to gain their perspective on the support central office provided for building capacity in elementary principals. The interviews were audio recorded by the researcher and transcribed by a third party.
In order to maintain validity, the researcher used professional judgment on when to deviate from the questions. The interview questions supported the research questions; the questions were specifically directed to the role of central office building capacity in elementary principals, the current systems central office has in place for supporting elementary principals, and how results of the PLCA-DS were used to support PLCs as the framework for building capacity. The interview questions correlated to the specific terms used in the research questions. District and school leader protocols were similar in content and varied slightly due to the roles within the district (see Appendixes G and H for the protocols). Interview questions:

1. Describe your role in this district? (background)

2. Please describe the central office’s role in continuous improvement with elementary principals? (Research Question 1 and indirectly 2 and 3)

3. What professional learning opportunities are provided for elementary principals? (Research Questions 1, 2 and indirectly 3)

4. How has the central office managed rapid growth and continuous improvement of elementary principals? (Research Question 2, 3 and indirectly 1)
   Probe: How do these practices connect to continuous improvement of elementary principals?

5. What specific systems has central office implemented to support continuous improvement in elementary principals? (Research Questions 1, 2, and 3)
   Probes: professional development, curriculum, practices, etc. How often? What are elementary campuses expected to do with these data? How have these systems or practices impacted your role and work?
6. What have been the effects of continuous improvement in elementary principals in this district? (Research Questions 2, 3 and indirectly 1)

Probes: Are the effects system wide? How are the effects measured? Are there any challenges?

7. What is the evidence of continuous improvement for elementary principals in this district? (Research Question 1 and indirectly 2 and 3)

Population and Setting

Within case sampling was used since the population is a specific department and elementary schools in the same school district. The goal of district leaders was to determine how they could support elementary principals and build capacity related to the PLC dimensions. To do this the PLCA-DS was administered to a 0-5 years-experience, 5-10 years-experience, and 10-15 years-experience elementary principal’s campus. The principal selection was determined by grouping 37 elementary campuses by like socio economic status. In AISD, the most tenured elementary principal is a principal with 10-15 years of experience at Jones Elementary in AISD. The middle of career principal has an average of 5-10 years of experience in AISD. The beginning career principal is 0-5 year principal experience in AISD. With this information, the selection of campuses was determined by like socio economic status and diverse elementary principal experience. At Jones Elementary, 22% of the students are economically disadvantaged, while the principal has 10-15 years of experience as the principal of Jones Elementary. At Harrison Elementary, 17% of students are economically disadvantaged, however the principal has 5-10 years of experience as the campus leader. At Mountain View Elementary, 16% of the students are economically disadvantaged with the principal being at Mountain View for 0-5 years. The schools are all Title 1 campuses. Given the diverse experience of the principals and
schools of similar socio-economic status, these three elementary school principals participated in one-on-one interviews after the PLCA-DS was administered to the certified teachers on their campus.

Purposeful selection was used to identify eight central office staff from the Curriculum and Instruction Department to be interviewed. The researcher chose these participants based on their role within Curriculum and Instruction and Human Resources. The participant’s role included various responsibilities and experiences with the PLC process. Each participant had a different role; however, they participated in the initiation and implementation of the PLC process. Purposeful selection allows for participants with shared experiences to engage in the study allowing the researcher to understand the research problem and questions (Creswell, 2014). The PLCA-DS was administered to the curriculum and instruction department. This department includes the deputy superintendent of curriculum and instruction, director of accountability and assessment, director of elementary instruction, director of professional development, elementary math coordinator, and elementary science coordinator. An organizational chart of the hierarchical structure of the curriculum and instruction department along with the inclusion of the assistant superintendent human resources and an elementary human resources director and elementary principals in ISD is in Figure 2. This figure represents the organizational structure of the interview participants.

In this district, the Deputy Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent are members of the Superintendent’s cabinet. Cabinet members are the highest level of advisement to the Superintendent.
Data Collection

The PLCA-DS was administered to the elementary curriculum and instruction department within the central office and three elementary campuses (see Appendix D for the survey). The participants used the PLCA-DS to score AISD on central office’s support of the five dimensions within a districtwide PLC. One of the elementary area directors emailed the PLCA-DS link, along with a description, to the elementary Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) Department. At one of the elementary C&I Monday meetings, I described the purpose of the study along with a description five dimensions of a PLC. Each member was given a PLC dimension description to keep as they completed the survey (see Appendix I for the PLC dimension description). A total of 17 elementary curriculum and instruction staff members completed the PLCA-DS. The three participating elementary principals allowed me to attend a staff meeting at their campus and personally describe the purpose of the study and the five dimensions of a PLC. Participants were
given a PLC dimension description to refer to as they completed the PLCA-DS. The principals emailed the link to the PLCA-DS to all certified staff. At Jones Elementary, 37 certified staff members completed the survey. Harrison Elementary had 31 certified staff members complete the PLCA-DS. At Mountain View Elementary, 38 certified staff members completed the PLCA-DS. A total of 123 participants out of 130 total within the elementary C&I Department and the three elementary campuses’ principals completed and signed a notice and consent form for the PLCA-DS.

Once the PLCA-DS was administered, the Director of Accountability and Assessment emailed the eight central office staff members and three elementary principals notifying them that I would be contacting them to conduct a one-one-one interview. I individually emailed each participant and scheduled a time to conduct the face-to-face interviews. Intensive interviewing took place allowing for open-ended questions to be asked of participants. Charmaz (2014) explains intensive interviewing, “explores a person’s substantial experience with the research topic” (p. 56). Questions were asked in a scaffolded measure, allowing specific and clarifying questions to be asked (Charmaz, 2014). The interviewees answered the interview questions and if there was something that needed clarifying, I asked a follow-up question during the interview.

Member checks were utilized to check for internal validity; member checking ensures inferences from the interview participants are consistent with the transcription (Creswell, 2014). I emailed each participant a copy of the transcript that included all of the codes within the interview. According to Creswell (2014), member checking determines whether the participants feel the information provided is accurate.

When participants mentioned specific texts, websites, and documents, they were retrieved and a further examination occurred. All documents were recorded on the document summary
form. By interviewing various participants from the central office and elementary campus, varying perspectives, experiences, and documents were analyzed in order for trustworthiness to be established by the triangulation of data from multiple sources and member checks.

Data Analysis

Document analysis was a supplemental source of data. When documents were referred to and mentioned in interviews, I retrieved the document and used it as a supplemental source of data. When interviews and documents are compared, Charmaz (2014) states this can, “spark insights about the relative congruence – or lack of it – between words and deeds” (p. 50). The document analysis allowed for a greater insight into the meaning within the interviews. As documents were retrieved, I was able to visually see and understand the use of the specific document within its context. I also read the books mentioned by the participants for a deeper insight into the thought and perspective of the participants.

The PLCA-DS was analyzed to determine how participants rank the central office support for PLC schools. The PLCA-DS derived a score for each of the five dimensions within a PLC. The five dimensions scored determined the central office’s strengths and areas of growth for implementing and supporting PLCs (Olivier et al., 2015).

Data analysis began with a general inductive approach as initial coding in the form of line-by-line coding was applied to each interview. A sample of this coding is in Appendix J. I used the software program, Quirkos to code each interview. When transcripts were received from TranscribeMe.com, I uploaded the transcripts to Quirkos and began initial coding each interview. A priori coding grounded in the capacity building conceptual framework allowed for strategic coding of the interviews (see Table 4 for the priori coding). “Coding is the process of organizing the data by taking the data gathered during the data collection, segmenting sentences
or images into categories and labeling those categories with a term based on specific language used by the participant” (Creswell, 2014, p. 198).

Table 4

**A-Priori Protocol Codes and Assigned Numbers for Annotating Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
<td>“Professional educators working collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults” (Hipp &amp; Huffman, 2010, p. 12).</td>
<td>Educators interdependently working together for a shared mission within specific structures to achieve shared goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Building Capacity</td>
<td>“Developing the collective ability – dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation, and resources – to act together to bring about positive change” (Fullan, 2005, p. 4).</td>
<td>Using experiences, collaboration, and data to improve ones professional ability and increased knowledge from application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shared Knowledge</td>
<td>Collective inquiry and study of the same information and experiences in order to align actions to a shared mission</td>
<td>Using shared professional learning experiences to streamline practices while sharing the knowledge gained from applying the shared professional learning experience. It’s an ongoing cycle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Educators working together sharing practices, having constructed conversations, and analyzing data for a common purpose.</td>
<td>Educators utilizing a common time to talk about practices, plan for lessons, analyze data from assessments, and talk about student progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Backwards Planning for Learning</td>
<td>“The process of analyzing TEKS/standards to determine learning outcomes and planning for learning to meet the needs of students” (ISD Professional Learning Communities Common Vocabulary)</td>
<td>Educators break apart and collaborate on grade level essential TEKS. Educators define student behaviors, teacher behaviors, learning outcomes, and methods to formatively assess.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Role</td>
<td>A central office staff member and the elementary principal position and purpose within the school district.</td>
<td>Educators provide various levels of support based on their position. Roles expand into partnerships and teams created around a shared mission and vision for the district.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
Table 4 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Various scaffolds provided by educators based on the position of the campus or department within the school district.</td>
<td>Central office staff provide different levels of support to the elementary principal based on experience or current status of the elementary campus. Principals also apply various levels of support for specific teams based on the experience and professional capital of the team members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>A common connection between educators where variables exist to determine how strong or weak the relationship is between the central office staff and elementary principal/campus</td>
<td>Relationships are a connection between central office staff and the elementary school. They are a connection between the principal and the teachers at the elementary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Educators use a measurable period within a given process.</td>
<td>Educators use time within the schedule of the day to participate in processes purposeful and specific to their position. Embedded time is set aside for central office staff members to meet as well as elementary teams to meet within the day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Organization system designed around the connection to a whole system</td>
<td>Structures exist as an organized procedure directly related to the goal of the district or school. Structures are in place to allow educators to collaborate, set goals, and work to meet goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A priori codes were defined prior to analyzing interviews. A priori coding was used as a way to organize and structure data where an existing process is in place and participants are familiar with components of the conceptual framework (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) (see Appendix J). Codes used within a-priori coding were determined based on language from the conceptual framework, AISD essential document, and AISD vocabulary document.

With the inductive coding process new themes and patterns emerged from the close readings and line-by-line coding of the interviews. I started with 1,130 initial codes and 58 categories. These codes were expanded upon and integrated with the A-priori codes. Subcategories were created based on reoccurring words, phrases, and overlapping codes.
throughout the interview. For example, Table 5, within the category of principal learning, the subcategories were principal learning team, principal book study, principal meetings, and principal reflections since they all structured and supported principal learning. The quotes from the interviews below are examples of the overlapping and similar codes used within the subcategories to form the principal learning category.

Table 5

*Initial Coding Process with Categories and Subcategories*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Learning</th>
<th>Example of Quotes from Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Principal learning team</td>
<td>• They do the principal learning teams, the PLTs that they meet vertically. So all of these systems or structures are in place to support the ongoing learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal book study</td>
<td>• Meetings with the PLT’s, that’s huge. We are meeting this year with teams that are just like schools really.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal meetings</td>
<td>• Principal’s meetings and our books studies, I’ve really enjoyed that. I felt like we’ve been able to look at the leader of the 21st century, and how that is so changing from 20, 30 years ago, and being on that cutting-edge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal reflections</td>
<td>• And I think because we’ve been able to maintain the PLT team that I have for the past couple of years, we’ve really built that trust.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The themes and categories were reduced to a small summary of the most important themes and categories with the combining and linking of subcategories into one core theme or category (Thomas, 2006). The subcategories were combined into 17 classification categories: structures and systems, PLC process, PLC journey, principal relationships, culture of trust and vulnerability, continuous learning, change, feedback and reflection, roles, support with central office roles, elementary principal perception of support from central office, support rapid growth,
principal learning, new principal learning, focus, uses of data, and student achievement data. From the 17 classification categories, I reduced and combined redundant and similar categories. For example, keywords such as, *structures, systems*, and *PLC* surfaced a combined total of 302 times within the 1,130 initial codes. Based on the previous research and current practices within AISD, the a priori code of structure and PLC were assigned before the data were gathered. Therefore, PLC journey, structures and systems, and PLC process were combined to create the theme – PLC infrastructure. Principal relationships and culture of trust and vulnerability were combined to create the theme – collaborative culture. Roles, coaching as support, elementary principal perception of support from central office, and support rapid growth were combined to create the theme – supportive central office. Principal learning and new principal learning were combined to create the theme – differentiated opportunities to learn. Table 6 shows the 17 classification subcategories used to create the six most important themes: (a) PLC infrastructure, (b) supportive central office, (c) collaborative culture, (d) continuous improvement, (e) differentiated opportunities to learn, and (f) data use.

Memos recorded after each interview and through each phase of the coding process allowed for connections between the interviews and the coding of the interviews. Memo writing was used to bring clarity of codes, determine meaning between coding, and increase the analytic value of the study (Charmaz, 2014).
Table 6

Subcategories Used to Generate Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• PLC Journey</td>
<td>PLC Infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Structures and Systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PLC Process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Roles</td>
<td>Supportive Central Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coaching as Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Elementary Principal Perception of Support from Central Office</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support Rapid Growth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal Relationships</td>
<td>Collaborative Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New Principal Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continuous Learning</td>
<td>Continuous Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Change</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feedback and Reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal Learning</td>
<td>Differentiated Opportunities to Learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New Principal Learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus for Principals</td>
<td>Data Use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses of Data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student Achievement Data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Validity of Research

According to Creswell (2014), reliability must be ensured within a study. Validity is “based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the research, the participant, or the readers” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 124). Strategies must be in place throughout a study to ensure credibility and validity. To ensure this study is valid, strategies were embedded throughout the study. Triangulation is defined as determining themes within a study by using various sources of information and evidence to justify using the theme (Creswell, 2014). Within the current study, triangulation is used by grounding the study within a
conceptual framework that consists of four major concepts: professional capital, intrinsic motivation, educational change process, and professional learning communities.

Validity is also strengthened within qualitative research when more than one approach is used to gather data. In the current study, document analysis, administering the PLCA-DS, and in-depth interviewing were the methods used to collect data. After the participants were interviewed within this qualitative study, participants had the opportunity to participate in member-checking to ensure the data analysis was correct. By allowing participants to ensure the information provided is their accurate perception increased validity within this study. In order to earn the confidence and ensure trustworthiness, multiple strategies to increase validity were grounded throughout the study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Limitations

The results of the study may not be generalizable to any other institution since the study was conducted within the same district. This study relied on the perceptions and content knowledge of the study of central office staff and elementary principals. The participants’ specific experiences and culture of their campus or department could become a limitation. Bias may exist with the participants being interviewed in the study with specific concepts. Since I have worked on campuses within the district, and I am currently working in the central office of the district being studied, my own bias is also a limitation. With the PLC process currently being developed and cultivated within the central office, I have been a member from the initiation phase of this process, which could also serve as a limitation. To mediate the limitations, I have no professional relationship with two of the three elementary campuses chosen in the study. In the curriculum and instruction department, the identified participants have no professional performance connection to me.
Ethical Considerations

Completion of the National Institutes of Health’s online course and certification process as well as completion of the University of North Texas’ Institutional Review Board established participant protection. The school district and participants within the school district were kept confidential. Pseudonyms were used for the school district, elementary campuses, and all participants within the study. Participants voluntarily signed consent forms to ensure their confidentiality and willingness to participate in the study. Privacy and confidentiality was reiterated throughout the process of completing the PLCA-DS and interview process. Member checking was utilized as well as follow up interviews in order for participants to confirm overall perceptions, experiences, and analysis of their specific contribution to the study (Charmaz, 2014).

Summary

In Chapter 3, I reviewed the purpose of the study and the three guiding research questions. The methodology outlined establishing the research design with the population and sample by outlining document analysis, the administration of the PLCA-DS, and open-ended interview questions. Data collection and data analysis procedures were described within the chapter. The methodology also explained the procedures integrated throughout the study to increase validity. The chapter concluded with the limitations of the study along with the ethical considerations within the study.
CHAPTER 4
DATA FINDINGS

The purpose of this research was to describe the current process Abby ISD (AISD) has in place to support capacity building in elementary principals. This case study examined practices and procedures within a districtwide professional learning community (PLC) and how the process is used to support continuous improvement in elementary principals. This chapter provides the results of the PLCA-DS by providing the percentages scored within each of the five dimensions from three elementary schools and the elementary Curriculum and Instruction Department. A document analysis occurred from the AISD PLC Essentials and AISD Common Vocabulary document as well as documents mentioned by participants during the interview process. Six themes resulted from analysis of interviews from 11 participants: (a) PLC infrastructure, (b) supportive central office, (c) collaborative culture, (d) continuous improvement, (e) differentiated opportunities to learn, and (f) data use. The six themes and subcategories were viewed through the building capacity conceptual framework, which offers ways of recognizing and understanding professional capital, intrinsic motivation, the educational change process, and professional learning communities as they culminate to be visible components within Abby ISD’s districtwide PLC. The data analysis responds to the research questions within this study:

1. What is the central office staff’s role in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growth district?

2. How does central office staff use the PLC process as the main driver in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growth district?
3. How are the five PLC dimensions used to support capacity building in elementary principals?

Professional Learning Community Assessment – District Support

In order to determine how the central office utilized the five PLC dimensions to support PLCs and build capacity within elementary principals, the Professional Learning Community Assessment – District Support was administered to the AISD Curriculum and Instruction Department and three elementary campuses through Survey Monkey. The survey consisted of 68 attributes within the five PLC dimensions. The sentence stem at the top of each dimension was District leaders . . . followed by the attribute. The survey was anonymous, however, I was able to time stamp the dates and times I was at the three elementary campuses and elementary C&I meeting to administer the PLCA-DS. By time stamping the survey, I was able to disaggregate the average of all the dimensions by campus and central office staff. Each separate dimension is a cumulative percentage of the elementary Curriculum and Instruction Department and the three elementary campuses on a Likert scale of 0 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree.

Figure 3 shows the PLC dimensions shared and supportive leadership with average of 4.7 out of 6. The attribute, district leaders clearly communicate the importance of alignment of curriculum, instruction, received the highest percentage of 5.0 (agree) within the shared and supportive leadership dimension. District leaders collaborate with school staff to assign personnel based on school needs and district leaders provide opportunities to engage school staff in district-level decision making both received the lowest average of 4.1 (somewhat agree).
Figure 3. Abby ISD shared and supportive leadership.

The dimension of shared values and vision, shown in Figure 4, had a cumulative average of 4.9 out of 6. The attribute, district leaders communicate high expectations for teaching and learning to continually reinforce the shared vision, received the highest average within the dimension of 5.2 (agree). District leaders emphasize shared values in assisting schools to create the shared vision received a 4.6 (somewhat agree).

The third PLC dimension, collective learning application, shown in Figure 5, was the lowest average scoring dimension with an average of 4.5 (somewhat agree) out of 6. The attribute, district leaders collaborate with school staff to implement curricula aligned to state standards that guide instruction, had an average of 4.9. District leaders meet regularly with teacher teams to facilitate sharing of instructional practice scored the lowest of 4.0.
The fourth PLC dimension, shared personal practice, as shown in Figure 6, contained an overall average of 4.7. The attribute, district leaders model respectful interactions between district and school staff, was the highest scoring attribute of 5.0 (agree). District leaders facilitate interactive communication with stakeholders, district leaders foster an inclusive culture by seeking a variety of perspectives related to teaching and learning, and district leaders promote a culture of trust between district and school staff scored an average of 4.5 (somewhat agree).

The fifth PLC dimension, shared and supportive structures shown in Figure 7 also had an average of 4.7. The attribute, district leaders provide a comprehensive data system to facilitate access to data, was the highest scoring attribute within the dimension with an average of 4.9 (somewhat agree). District leaders provide scheduled opportunities for instructional staff to collaborate across the district scored a 4.4 (somewhat agree) within the dimension.
**Figure 5.** Abby ISD collective learning application.
**Figure 6.** Abby ISD shared personal practice.

Figure 8 reports the AISD central office support of the five PLC dimensions from the PLCA-DS for the identified sample. The figure illustrates the overall average of each dimension from the elementary C&I Department, 0-5 years experienced principal and staff, 5-10 years experienced principal and staff, and 10 or more years experienced principal and staff from the PLCA-DS. The principal with 0-5 years-experience at Mountain View Elementary had the highest cumulative average of 4.9 within the shared and supportive structures PLC dimension, while the elementary C&I Department had the highest average within the shared personal practice and shared and supportive leadership PLC dimensions. The elementary C&I Department and Mountain View Elementary both scored the same within the collective application and shared vision and values dimension. The elementary C&I Department and
Mountain View Elementary had either the same average or the highest average within the PLC dimensions.

**Figure 7.** Abby ISD shared and supportive structures.
Figure 8. Abby ISD suggested sampling PLC dimensions from PLCA-DS.

The results of the PLCA-DS demonstrated how the PLC five dimensions were supported by the central office. The shared values and vision dimension was the highest scoring dimension while the collective learning application dimension was the lowest scoring dimension. Figure 8 demonstrated the alignment of support provided by the central office between the elementary C&I department to the elementary schools. Mountain View Elementary’s principal has 0-5 years of experience. Mountain View Elementary’s score of the PLCA-DS was the same as the elementary C&I Department within the collective application dimension and shared values and vision dimension. This finding shows the perception of alignment between the elementary C&I Department and the staff at Mountain View Elementary with a 0-5 year principal.
Document Analysis

Since document analysis was used as a supplemental source, documents and texts mentioned by participants were noted and retrieved at the time of the interview. The documents collected and analyzed support the conceptual framework as they generate a shared mindset and common language around the PLC process. The Abby ISD PLC Essentials Document and Abby ISD PLC Common Vocabulary are intricate documents that guide and support the districtwide PLC. These two documents support districtwide shared language on specific vocabulary terms and provide a districtwide focus on the three essentials of learning, collaboration, and results. The Abby ISD Data Protocol guides campuses as they work through the PLC process of analyzing data and implementing a change in practices. The data protocol guides campus with specific questions to ask as teams are working through analyzing data. The PLC Districtwide PLC Rubric allows teams to work through the change process as they rate progress with specific initiatives. Teams use the PLC Rubric during the PLC Academy’s and Booster’s as they assess goals and generate action steps to move forward. Intrinsic motivation surfaced with the PLC Rubric as teams reflect on progress and create action steps to continue moving forward. The campus action plan was mentioned by D3 as a way the C&I department supports campuses to meet campus goals within the districtwide PLC. The Instructional Coach (IC) role mentioned was used as a guide for the campus instructional coach as they support instruction on the campus. The Instructional Coach role contains building capacity as IC’s support teachers moving through changing instructional practices and working within a PLC. Eighty Critical Issues for Team Consideration was mentioned by D1 as a way for teams to self-assess and reflect as a team when they attend the PLC Academy’s and Booster’s, which supports social and human capital professional capital component of the conceptual framework. Teams with various
experiences collaborate and commit to goals as they work through the scoring rubric of the Eighty Critical Issues for Team Consideration. All components of the Building Capacity conceptual framework were visible within the documents.

*Learning By Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (Dufour et al, 2010) and *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact* (Fullan, 2014b) contain the research on professional capital, capacity building, and intrinsic motivation. Elementary principals participated in the book study which evidence from the interviews supports the application of the knowledge gained from the book study. All of the documents collected and analyzed support the PLC process, change process, professional capital, and intrinsic motivation components of the conceptual framework. Table 7 is a complete list of documents and materials mentioned, analyzed, and included in the appendices.

Table 7

*Documents and Materials Collected During Data Collection Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents</th>
<th>Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Abby ISD PLC Common Vocabulary Document</td>
<td>• <em>The Principal Three Keys to Maximizing Impact</em> – Fullan (2014b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Abby ISD Data Protocol</td>
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<td>• The PLC Districtwide Rubric</td>
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<td>• Campus Action Plan</td>
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<td>• Instructional Coach Role</td>
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<td>• Eighty Critical Issues for Team Consideration (see Appendix K)</td>
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**Interviews**

Eleven participants were interviewed for this study. The participants included two cabinet members the Deputy Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction (CM1) and the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources (CM2). The four directors who participated in the
study were the Director of Professional Development (D1), Director of Assessment and Accountability (D2), Area Director of Elementary Curriculum and Instruction (D3), and Director of Elementary Human Resources (D4). Two elementary coordinators (C1) and (C2) along with the three elementary principals: 10 years or more principal (TP), 5-10 years experienced principal (MP), 0-5 years experienced principal (BP) participated in the study.

The data presented in this section are based on the perception of the 11 participants within AISD. This section of data is divided into the six most important themes found within the data: (a) PLC infrastructure, (b) supportive central office, (c) collaborative culture, (d) continuous improvement, (e) differentiated opportunities to learn, and (f) data use which support each component within the conceptual framework.

Theme 1: PLC Infrastructure

Hipp and Huffman (2010) describe a professional learning community as educators interdependently working together for a shared mission within specific structures to achieve specific goals. Structures can be explained as organized procedures directly related to the goals of the district or school. Each participant described clear structures that were in place to allow collaboration, goal setting, and learning to transpire among educators in the school district. Since PLCs exist within a structure, and every participant referred to structures and systems along the PLC journey, this led me to create the theme PLC infrastructure. The PLC journey, structures and systems, and PLC process are included and described within this theme.

PLC Journey

In AISD a specific system is in place to create a districtwide PLC. In the current study, a districtwide PLC is modeled by the central office. The C&I Department uses a coordinated approach to a districtwide PLC by creating a shared mindset with the PLC Essentials and
The Professional Learning Culture Community’s journey actually began with campuses, and we had a few high school and a couple of principals attend the institute, Professional Learning Communities at Work Institute several years ago. But then, I would say it was a collective effort starting about three years ago, maybe when the Title I campuses went together plus a couple of others, we had about 13 or 14 campuses that attended together. It was the first effort, so they attended and started the ball rolling on their own. Now, all but four have attended an institute. So the first year, they go through PLC Academy, which is three times a year. The first year, it was actually three times a year for two consecutive days. It was from Solution Tree, and it was a scripted kind of a laid out agenda. This is the Coaching Academy. They got a tool kit of supplies, videos, books. So we need something to support them. We did the academy three times for those that just attended the institute, and then we did the Boosters for those who had the following year who had attended the academy. The structure of each of those, the Academy and the Booster, is they bring their leadership team, preferably the team that attended the institute so they can continue the work. In ’15-’16 we had the hybrid. We had just a few new campuses that had never been or went to the San Antonio Institute, and everyone else stayed for the hybrid. What happened with the hybrid is they were allowed to take more people because we were making sure that we didn’t want them to feel left out.

D1 explained the structure of the supports in place once a campus attended the PLC Institute. The Boosters and Academies exist for central office and all campuses to be on the PLC journey in order for a districtwide PLC to exist. TP3 expressed, “What is really powerful is that all of the campuses are all on that journey together in our district.”

Structures and Systems

All participants referred to structures and systems throughout the interviews. CM1 spoke about establishing clear structures in order to achieve high levels of student learning.

Having a system and structure that is owned by everyone in the organization, is important for us to maintain high levels of learning and maintain that excellence as we add another high school, more middle schools, and more elementary schools.
CM2 mentioned the importance of having structures in place to recruit quality candidates. CM2 described having quality candidates to interview begins with recruitment. A developed recruitment system is essential within a PLC infrastructure as it allows for a focus to be placed on hiring candidates that have experience with PLC practices. It also allows for assessment of candidates to provide specific learning experiences for new hires as they enter the districtwide PLC. Professional capital and the PLC process work together in this example as CM2 describes hiring quality candidates. The candidates hired come from varied backgrounds with varied experiences which allow them to their individual practices which supports the PLC process of professional learning from sharing practices from individual experiences.

From an HR (human resources) standpoint, we’ve tried to support principals by looking even at our system for getting people on board and into our district. From the time of recruitment we try to make sure that principals have a fantastic applicant pool. While we look at recruitment, expanding where we recruit and how we recruit, because while we get a lot of numbers, we want to make sure there’s always quality. And if we are looking at things like diversity, diversifying staff as being a goal of our district overall, we’ve got to make sure that principals have access to qualified candidates of all kinds of backgrounds. We make sure that we have the support structures in place, because we want most of the resources to be on the campuses, and sometimes that means you may not have as much at central office.

D2 referred to structures as a systemic approach for PLCs to exist within the district.

First the system of just the PLC structure itself became the district initiative where that’s really becoming the foundation piece of our continuous improvement process within the PLC structure. The PLC structure is our baseline and then everything else fits into that. The PLC structure is where you have that group buy-in and everybody knows we’re going for this end product. For a lot of campuses this year, some of the goals and strategies were to just get that PLC structure and foundation as the bedrock.

The remaining participants refer to specific systems and structures created to align and support AISD PLC. For example, meetings such as collaborative planning, curriculum and instruction meetings, professional learning opportunities, and data meetings are referred to as specific structures. D1 refers to specific professional learning opportunities and data meetings as specific systems in place to support PLCs.
Systems in place are the PLC Boosters, the PLC Academies, Principal meetings, the Curriculum and Instruction and Assessment (CIA) meetings. The systems that are in place that continually support and hit the learning because your reading book studies. They do the principal learning teams, PLT’s that meet vertically. So all of these systems or structures are in place to support the ongoing learning. Data talks are huge. When you walk in and they are sitting in a collaborative team, and they’re talking about the formative assessment. You’ve got teams talking about formative assessment and being able to differentiate and intervene – take kids and remediate based on the needs.

D3 referenced the CIA meetings and principal learning teams as a structure created for learning for everyone involved in AISD.

The CIA meetings are four times a year for three hours each time and that’s all learning. Whether it’s about curriculum instruction or about leadership or about change process or about The Way We Work, The PLC document. The principal learning teams is like a little cadre of schools where they set their own goals because they have similar needs. We also have assistant principal learning teams where it's aligned too. So they have similar goals too. They’re all working together to solve a problem, or do almost like an action research. Then for next year, we’re going to bring on Instructional Coach Leadership Teams, so they’ll all be aligned. We have to create these structures to make sure that their needs are met and they’re also challenged to continue their learning too, but do it in a safe environment so that they know that we’re alongside them learning together.

D4 also spoke about the hiring process and the structures created to save principals time during the hiring process within a rapid growth district.

We’re not looking as principals as that manager so much where they really can focus on leadership skills and not thinking about "Okay, what systems should I use to get someone hired?" We’ve kind of taken that away from them. Where all they need to know is a person’s name and their email address and that’s really it. Once they have that name and email address we can run it through. We can process it. We can get, check now with our application system and get the references, background, and fingerprinting done.

While C2 spoke about restructuring the curriculum coordinators in order to provide more support for campuses by stating, “We’ve even restructured as a coordinator group in C&I to try to help meet the needs of those campuses.” C1 explained curriculum support as a structure in place supports continuous learning within a PLC. “Campuses can have coordinators come out and really support with their structural knowledge if they need help in a specific area.”
The principals described structures specifically initiated and implemented by curriculum and instruction such as vertical alignment, curriculum practices, collaborative planning, and backwards planning as specific structures in place within a PLC. TP explained:

Workshop model has been powerful in us all having that urgency, and everybody looking at what a mini-lesson is, and the heart of the workshop, and pulling kids for individual instruction to sharing and reflecting. I think that has been really a good system that’s been put in place with elementary.

MP referred to vertical teams and principal learning teams as structures in place within the districtwide PLC.

I think the addition of vertical teams this year because of structures of letting us have conversations with other building principals and through PLT we’re able to move forward. I feel like I grow each year, I’m not perfect. I’m never going to be perfect. I’m never going to know it all. But I feel like the structures they’ve put in continue to allow you to grow if you’re willing to grow.

BP refers to backwards planning for learning as a specific structure in place to support their learning and ability to move teams forward.

The district is good at modeling the system of learning never ends. The district having that system of, “We’re going to sit down and unpack the standards and learn about those every year.” “We’re going to determine our essentials every year.” The district giving us that system has helped me support teachers in our learning community. The systems have really helped support me in what I do, and I’m hoping they continue.

PLC Process

Within the theme PLC Infrastructure, creating a common language, shared knowledge, and shared practices were described. The PLC Essentials created by the C&I Department in AISD, and DuFour and Fullan’s (2013) four critical questions surfaced as common vocabulary setting the foundation for the PLC process.

CM1, D2, and BP focused on the AISD PLC Essentials. CM1 articulated, “We constantly focus our work on learning, collaboration, and results. We have to validate the efforts to reinforce that engagement, learning, collaboration, and focus on results.” While D2 focused
on the results essential within the AISD PLC Essentials, “We focus on results. You always have
to come back to the results. It’s the results of goals and needs analysis.” BP explained, “The
PLC process is supported because of the documents that the C&I Department has rolled out.”
This shows the principals connection between PLC Essentials and Common Vocabulary
document collected and analyzed within the document analysis.

Dufour and Fullan’s (2013) four critical questions were mentioned as a component within
the PLC process as a scaffold to attain the results within the AISD PLC Essentials. CM1, C2,
TP, and MP articulated how the four critical questions are used within the PLC process. CM1
stated:

PLC work on four questions is really important that we know what we want our students
to learn and we understand and know how we will know students learned it. Before we
jump to how are we going to intervene if they haven’t learned it or if they already have it.

C2 explained, “Within the PLC components we have to look to see if we are operating
around the four essential questions.”

TP stated the four essential questions are embedded within our culture in order for the
PLC process to exist:

Are we teaching our kids what they are supposed to learn? Are they learning at the level
they are supposed to be learning? What are we doing for the kids who haven’t learned?
And what are we doing for the kids that have already learned? And so, that’s a big
system in place, I think we talk about it more and more. It’s in our culture now so that’s
a huge system.

MP expressed, “We focused in on the four questions. What did the kids learn? What
didn’t they learn? Where are you going to go with that, and leaving with a plan.”

The AISD PLC Essentials and Dufour and Fullan’s (2013) four PLC questions surfaced
as participants described the PLC process within AISD. The PLC process also exists with the
structure of embedded time for specific practices, for sharing practices, and for dialogue
opportunities. This strategic use of time helps to create a district community with a shared mindset. CM1 explained:

It would be any time we are together. Certainly that has to be a priority, that at our principal meetings, a significant portion is used for job embedded professional development for principals to share with each other, and for there to be that two-way dialogue between principals and central office as well. When barriers exist such as not understanding how to utilize a data tool, that doesn’t stop that from happening. We need to break down those barriers and we have to create time. We know that’s critically important. If we don’t create time, and make it a priority, and make it an ongoing part of our work, that’s not going to happen. We were not doing that at the highest levels either. So that was one of the goals we set as a C&I leadership team this year. This year we implemented data review meetings. We have those about four, five times throughout the year to hold me accountable, and to hold our C&I leadership team accountable.

CM2 utilized the principal meetings as a time when elementary principals come together once a month to share information.

We have our principal meetings where they not only get information but it’s time for them to do book studies, to have conversations about things they’re doing on their campuses to share. Even though we have breakout sessions there are still opportunities for the principals to be together to hear some of the same information that’s common to us across the district. It’s a time to interact and network.

D1 also discussed the component of time within a PLC.

It’s protected time. They come together for a day, and they’re able to reflect, plan, see where they are, see where they want to go, and create an action plan to get there. They really like the protected time of sitting, working, and having the conversations.

Shared language was also described as an essential to the districtwide PLC process. Creating a common vocabulary allowed for consistency among the central office and principals. According to CM1, “Ongoing exchange and dialogue, I think it’s one of the most powerful things we can do, and it has to occur in a multifaceted way.” While C2 agreed, “More intentional conversations around how we can make connections exist among the content areas.” D3 delineated that the language among the principals and teachers has changed, “Their language, I think it’s changed and teachers too. I think their language has changed.”
D1 and D2 expressed shared language creates coherence and fidelity when using specific terms and processes in central office and with principals. They used examples of shared language that correlates from the central office to conversations with elementary principals. D1 stated:

We work alongside the area directors, work alongside the curriculum coordinators, and the data department. It’s such a collective network, but we’ve got to be collaborative. We’ve got to be coherent, and we’ve got to be working together so that support, it comes from everyone. They’re all saying the same things.

D1 also discussed an example of shared language and dialogue with elementary principals and their teachers at their campus.

The growth that we’ve seen has been in the growth of the principal and the conversations that they’re having on their campuses – just the data talks. You look at some of the campuses that are doing the data talks and have their kids posted and mark where they are and mark their improvements. I would say, those are the biggest ways to see gains based on the campuses to the talks that they are having within the campus. Area director’s supporting that one-on-one with elementary principals is huge. It’s making sure they’re having those conversations. Then we bring that back to the director group and C&I group and say, “What are the needs?” “What are we noticing?” We really try and fill in the support that way.

D2 explained the process of creating fidelity with specific terms while also expressing using dialogue and conversations around the terms for student progress. D2 described the use of common language and dialogue:

We have to create some common language throughout the district of why we use data. We create that common language, because if we’re really going to use data as a part of our PLC process we’ve all got to know what it means and how we use it. We have to use the accountability system to have better conversations with their kids or with the teachers on campus for their kids. We have to talk about how can we take that and use that in the setting of the PLC to have conversations about growth and learning, or getting kids to that higher student achievement.

CM2 shared a similar experience of advancing surface level conversations to rich conversations based on having a shared understanding of data.

Looking even at our PLC model and what a difference that has made not just for
principals in building that collaborative culture, but also for teachers. The level of conversation and discussion they have about students and the focus that happens within those meetings and just the professionalism that’s built.

While D4 agreed on the depth and richness of sharing a common language by change in the level of conversation. On the April professional development day in AISD, each campus has a day where they assess data and set goals for next year, “I feel that on our April days, our goal-setting days, we’re actually having conversations, like real conversations with our staff and real conversations with even our campus improvement teams where it’s been surface level.”

The principals also mentioned the importance of a shared language and common vocabulary as it relates to growth and instructional coaches (ICs). TP stated:

I think just to know that we are all thinking the same vocabulary, the same concepts, I think it’s important in a district that’s growing so fast. Having a common vocabulary and common form of how we’re going to help our kids is important.

While BP confirmed, “Bringing all the instructional coaches (ICs) together and make sure we’re all talking the same language is important.”

Within the PLC process shared practices existed among the participants. Shared practices conform from the shared knowledge and common language used to formulate the consistent practices. These practices activate the action from central office, elementary principals, and teachers to the ultimate student learning outcome. CM1 explained the PLC process starts with the central office by modeling the language and practices expected within the learning community. While the principals echoed the message as it benefits their knowledge and student learning. CM1 articulated:

It’s an enlightening process. Out of that discomfort is coming new learning. And again, that’s important for our continuous improvement. It’s also important because it’s challenged us at our level to engage in the PLC process as well that we’re expecting our teachers to and our principals to engage in. If we don’t go through that ourselves then we don’t understand how difficult and complex that really is. I think the sharing of best practice, the sharing of ideas and practices and behaviors that are working, which has also led to some advances in our district-wide change processes. We look at moving through
a continuum of implementation of PLC, and wanting to spread that effective practice
district-wide as we have principals that are engaging in that work and sharing that with
others. That has increased as well.

TP shared:

Then we practice with that in, bringing that and helping train our teachers, and helping
them understand what are shared practices, what do we look for in good instruction. We
talk together as teams and share our kids. We are all following the same practices
together, whether we have different cultures on our campus. We’re still moving in the
same direction. We’ve worked horizontally the last couple of years, especially this year,
and vertically with our teams. I think that has really helped us. We all see we’re all
together with all of our kids, everything we say and do.

BP echoed, “We have C&I meetings a couple times a year where the C&I department has helped
us to make sure everybody’s on the same page.”

Within the PLC process, time, shared and common language, and shared practices
cultivate to form shared knowledge. Shared knowledge exists from creating a shared knowledge
base from learning together and applying what is collectively learned. Shared knowledge uses
the shared professional learning experiences to streamline practices while sharing the knowledge
gained from the learning experience. D1 and D3 conveyed how shared knowledge exists and is
created through conversations and shared practices.

Build that foundation. Everybody go hear the same thing so that you can build it
together. You’ll get to that, but it may not be this year. So start with the foundation
pieces. Make sure everyone understands. Because that collective few and that capacity
of just a few then go out and teach the others is so important, especially with this. (D1)

We’re constantly working with our current principals, but we feel like we have to work
with our assistant principals (APs) and our ICs, because we know in the near future they
will want to advance and move up. We’re trying to do the learning we’re doing with the
principals. APs are getting the same things, the ICs are getting the same things. We are
trying to be very intentional about letting elementary principals have time to debrief and
reflect together, with their peers, because we feel like that’s where the learning takes
place. We make connections for them or with them about what they’re learning and tie it
back to what they’re trying to accomplish on their campuses. (D3)
Connection to the Conceptual Framework

The PLC Infrastructure theme connects to the conceptual framework by incorporating the subcategories of the PLC Journey, Structures and Systems, and PLC Process. Together the subcategories contained components from the conceptual framework. Within the PLC Journey, the PLC component is supported as shared learning experiences as mentioned by the interviewees. The educational change process from the conceptual framework is visible as the shared learning experiences from principals reciprocate a shift and change within practices on the campus. This leads directly into the structures and systems subcategory which connects to the conceptual framework by providing clear and safe structures and systems for implemented practices.

The systems and structures of professional learning, collaborative learning, hiring, and data meetings were mentioned by participants as specific structures and systems in place within the districtwide PLC to allow for ongoing capacity building to transpire. Within the specific systems, the hiring systems supports the professional capital component of the conceptual framework as candidates from various backgrounds are recruited to join the districtwide PLC. New hires bring experiences to their campuses and share practices within the PLC which allows colleagues to continue learning from the varied background of new team mates within teams. The professional learning and collaborative learning systems supported all components of the conceptual framework as safe environment within the structures must exist which allowed for the visibility of social capital along coupled with intrinsic motivation as new learning occurs and transferred to student learning within a districtwide PLC to support the ongoing change individually and collectively.
The PLC process subcategory also supported the PLC, intrinsic motivation, educational change process, and professional capital by cultivating a districtwide shared language which leads to shared practices. Shared language and shared practices support the shared knowledge exists through feedback and reflection once, a shared language and shared practices exist.

The three subcategories within the PLC Infrastructure theme connected to the conceptual framework by including specific practices and behaviors from the professional capital, intrinsic motivation, educational change process, and the PLC component to support ongoing continuous individual and collective capacity building.

Theme 2: Supportive Central Office

The data in the current study revealed the primary role of the central office staff was to provide support to elementary principals. The a priori code description for support in this study referred to when the central office staff provides different levels of support to the elementary principal based on experience or current status of the elementary campus. In turn, principals also apply various levels of support for specific teams based on the experience and professional capital of the team members. The supportive central office theme includes roles, coaching as support, elementary principal perception of support from central office, and supporting rapid growth.

Roles

The central office staff members provide various levels of support based on their position within AISD. Roles expand into partnerships and teams created around a shared mission and vision for the district. The central office staff members primarily described their role of being a support mechanism to the elementary principals. “It is our role and responsibility to guide and
support high levels of learning for each and every one of our students. That only can occur through continuous improvement on the part of all of us within the organization” (CM1).

We work with hiring of staff, recruitment of staff, also documentation and monitoring and support of staff, looking at ways to help to develop people. We work in conjunction with the professional development department, but also looking at wellness for staff, benefits, compensation, and employee relations. We try to build the network within principals so that they’re able to support each other. (CM2)

I’d say our role is just to make sure that everybody’s coming along and new principals are getting the foundation. Once we hear the need we say, “How can we provide that support?” Our role is also to provide support for the sustainment of the culture. (D1)

My role is more helping get that focus, that priority of needs of when the campus comes together. As a learning team, they have a focus for their improvement not just random guesses of gut feelings. I help principals ask reflective questions like: What are we doing well? What do we need to improve? Then establish those teams to help go over that data and prioritize where do we need to start using data to make changes. Then using that to help campuses kind of figure out what their needs are. (D2)

Our main function is to support and guide campuses to build capacity in campus leadership. We work with our coordinators and other support staff to make sure that they are supported in their endeavors. We are here to support the campus leadership team not just the campus principal, but assistant principals and instructional coaches. You have to meet the elementary principals where they are at and provide that support and personalize it for them. It gets really tight. At the end of the day that’s our role – supporting, guiding, our campuses. (D3)

We are definitely the support mechanism. I look at our role as a support to the leadership campus. I look at it as more of a support role, because I’m in a non-evaluation, non-evaluative role. I think I am there to lead and guide principals into making problem solving and making decisions for that continuous improvement. I think it’s my responsibility to be knowledgeable and credible and to understand and read what they’re (principals) are reading, to know what the PLC should look like, and what that culture should be. (D4)

“My role has been to support learning alongside within the PLC and being in an atmosphere of support” (C1). “I’m there to support principals with the implementation of curriculum and instruction in the classroom and also provide support to their instructional coaches at their campus” (C2).
Elementary principals saw their role as supporting teachers with instructional practices and being the learning leader for their campus. “My role in the district is support the instruction, and make sure the kids do well in school. That’s my role. I’m an instructional leader-learning leader” (BP).

My role is to support teachers to make sure high quality instruction is going on while also meeting the needs of individual teachers. My role is to be flexible and prioritize what’s important and best for kids. I see my role is more of the guide on the side, equipping the teachers to do well, really empowering them to make instructional decisions that are best for their students. I believe in serving, do as I do, walk the walk I walk and lead by example. (MP)

My role is a learning leader. It’s to continue learning so that I can share. It’s really transparency with my staff that I’m learning. It’s helping my teachers learn, whether it’s best practices with kids who need to be challenged or children who need a lot of intervention. My number one job is learning and modeling on my campus. Another important role is going to be working in there with my teachers with my shirt sleeves up, and being out there on my campus and knowing the heartbeat, the heartbeat with the parents, the heartbeat with the teachers, and with the children. It’s knowing what is needed and what’s next for our campus and our kids. Another important role is to learn and to help teachers learn and know where to go next so they know we’re going to a better place. (TP)

Coaching as Support

The central office directors, coordinators, and instructional coaches provide many facets of support. The insights to the support provided in the study were coaching from consultants and the directors, specific curriculum support from the coordinators, and the role of support from the instructional coach on every elementary campus.

The support elementary principals received was coaching by their area director. Coaching consultants were brought in to AISD to train principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches in a whole group setting. Instructional coaches are assigned to each elementary campus and support the leadership team and teachers with curriculum content.
Elementary principals were also given the opportunity to hire an outside principal leader coach to have one-on-one coaching with professional and campus goals.

The area director meets each principal once a month for one-on-one coaching individualized and personalized for elementary principals. Participants from central office describe the support the area director coaching gave to elementary principals. CM1 described the coaching support given by the area director: “A lot of individual coaching, support, and guidance is given through the area director. Our elementary directors provide a significant amount of responsive and differentiated support to the individual principals on an ongoing basis.” CM2 espoused the individualized support the elementary principals receive as a result of the meetings each principal has with central office directors.

Our elementary directors, elementary area directors, and the HR directors meet monthly with new principals and as of last year, they did it as soon as they were named. The area directors I think are absolutely incredible in getting out to campuses and working individually with principals, as well as working with them during principal’s meetings and other types of professional development to look at what we need as a district.

C1 described the role of coaching support for elementary principals:

I know elementary principals are getting some personal coaching from the directors. I think that’s gone a long way in helping them personalize the learning for principals. The directors go out, they meet with them, and they guide them if they need some extra guidance. That’s who helps bring in more individual coaching. Other coaching support has been bringing in coaching consultants to have personal coaching. Individuals travel to their campus. They also have opportunities to learn coaching techniques that their ICs use with teachers so they can help build those relationships on the campus.

C2 explained coaching from the coordinator, director, and support from the instructional coach:

I think with directors and coordinators being on campuses, we’re able to make those observations and coach our principals and coach our instructional coaches through also. The district’s work with instructional coaches and how we support the ICs benefits all of our elementary principals since the IC is a member of the leadership team on that campus.
MP utilized the outside coaching consultant on her campus. MP articulated the importance of having the autonomy to use the coaching consultant to coach the principal on specific needs for the campus.

There are coaching opportunities I took advantage of when it was announced. The coaching opportunity for me this year, I was very excited about and it’s helped me grow as a leader. It’s given me the opportunity that I could use additional budget money to continue that. I like that the district gives us that flexibility, and it’s not like you can only do the six sessions and you’re done. It’s if you want to grow, I feel like it gives the power back to me. I’m going, “This is something that I still need to grow in.” The district is recognizing the need to bring in coaching for us to be instructional leaders which keeps bringing the PLC to the forefront. Like this year, and it’s now year three of the journey of PLC, I’m just like, “Oh, that’s what we really meant on clear expectations.” I see the ripple effect, but I got that through going to coaching. The reflection pieces along with the coaching pieces really help.

Elementary Principal Perception of Support from Central Office

The three elementary principal each described the support they receive from the central office based on their experiences. From these descriptions, the documentation is clear regarding the elementary principal’s level of support from the central office. Overall the three principals expressed a high degree of differentiated support from the curriculum and instruction department.

Being a principal for many years you would think that I would have it all down. I need support and they (curriculum and instruction) provide that to me. The curriculum department gives us the vision that I want to give to my staff. I adjust that to meet the needs for my teachers, kids, and community. The central office staff is fabulous in that the last couple of years they helped me know where I go next. They support with learning, where I have needs, networking if I feel like I’m weak in certain areas, there’s training for us, training for me. Our curriculum writers and our coordinators, I really feel are with us. I don’t feel like we head to assessments and then those assessments are looked at to say, “Oh, they’re not doing a good job.” It’s really powerful the last couple of years that spirit from the top all the way to the children. We’re looking at growth, not just passing or not passing. (TP)

I feel like a lot of the support that comes from the central office is really filtered through more of the instructional coaches now. I can call coordinators at any time if I need things. One of the challenges is that with having the three coordinators with so many schools, a need may come up that’s unexpected that I might not be able to plan for. The
availability sometimes is difficult. However, feedback through email or a phone call is sufficient. I feel like they’re giving us the skills we need through C&I. (MP)

We are encouraged to meet with our coordinators and we do that. We work with our coordinators on our campuses and help them understand where we are and let them get some insight into where they can best support us. The superintendent and assistant superintendent came out and met with me last year. That was just to kind of give us some cohesion so they could understand us and where we are and how they can support us, and kind of see what we do on our campus. I can call any of the directors and get support and feedback from them. There’s just a lot of infrastructure there that helps us succeed. It helps the first year principal succeed and helps me maintain. I see the district modeling the PLC culture all the time. I know that’s what they hold upfront. I know they’re tight about that. I know that I want to make sure my mission and vision are in line with the district’s mission and vision. Those things are modeled for me at the district level. Then I am able to take that back to my campus. The district gives us that system that has helped me support teachers and we’re a learning community. I’m looking forward to seeing where we go in curriculum and instruction because I feel like the greatest thing you can do for a principal or AP is help scaffold their understanding of what good curriculum is or what it should look like and how that’s developed. (BP)

Supporting Rapid Growth

Central office staff supports elementary principals with specific campus goals, learning experiences, and support with curriculum and instruction. In the current study, the district is growing at a rapid speed and the central office staff adjusts their role to support the rapid growth. Central office along with elementary principals face challenges of growth. I found it interesting in this study that when most participants mentioned a challenge most often a remedy for the challenge was also given.

CM1, CM2, D1, D2, D3, and MP principal expressed a challenge with rapid growth coupled with a remedy to the challenge:

Challenge: When we have a central office of a certain size, when financial constraints will only allow so much expansion of that, and unfortunately, they allow very limited expansion of that. Our central office staff, in terms of actual personnel to support the campuses is not growing at the same ratio that we are increasing in regards to campuses. I would say also managing stress levels, particularly when they’re (elementary principals) early in the stage. They’re just starting to implement and there’s not that clarity yet, that understanding yet. (CM1)
Remedy: The process of growth is not going to slow down and so it would be impossible for us to continue to sustain that high level of learning for our students if we did not have a model of continuous improvement that again, was owned and that we all had reciprocal accountability in, it would be impossible for central office to drive that. That very much has been one of the positive effects, that as we face that, that can be very overwhelming. I think as we engage in that work, you see in the professionals an awareness, excitement, and a relief that we can do this when we are focused. We’re focused on what’s most important then we know what to stop doing. That is very difficult in a community and in a school district with such high expectations with the rapid growth. (CM1)

Challenge: We grow so much, people may not have that opportunity to be in a position for a very long or to really get to dig deep with a particular position. Also, being able to individualize while maintaining, whether it’s development or growth opportunities, for everybody. (CM2)

Remedy: We have a really good retention rate when you look at the state or districts our size which is a wonderful thing. It’s not just about those who are principals now, but in a fast-growth district you’re always thinking about those next four schools that are coming on board. You’ve got this number of people who could be eligible for retirement, so it’s also about the development of our leadership pipeline. We are always working to develop our leaders. (CM2)

Challenge: Just when you think, I’ve attended this for three years (PLC conference). My campus is moving and shaking. Then they have people that transfer and have new people. You talk about that group dynamics. You always start back at forming. I would say, it’s a challenge for campus principals to recognize where they are. Then how that relates to us (central office) is that we have to recognize where they are so that we could continue to grow and support. (D1)

Remedy: Let’s try and identify where people are and assess where they are so that we can meet the needs and make sure that we’re not leaving anybody behind. But still, that fast runner (elementary principal), making sure that we’re providing the support that they need as well. It’s a widespread challenge, but it’s definitely something that we want to make sure that we’re doing because that support is what sustains the culture. (D1)

Challenge: It’s one to one connection with principals. The biggest challenge is knowing where each person, in this case, the elementary principals, really is with the process. As we’re getting bigger and bigger, it’s knowing our people well enough to know who’s not there, and then we know who’s not at a certain spot so we can provide them support they need. If we don’t know then we can’t provide the support. (D2)

Remedy: It starts with central administration, we’ve got to set up that structure where it’s okay for teachers or principals to not be comfortable, not knowing everything and be comfortable coming to us and saying, “No, I don’t get that.” As we get bigger and bigger and just faster and faster with our growth that’s a challenge. (D2)
The second remedy for the D2 focused on supporting by creating an online tool to reach more educators regarding data usage.

Remedy: Here’s the report. Here’s how you can interpret it. Here’s how you can use it. It will show up on the computer screen and reach more people if they’re actually having a tutorial as they are going through the data. (D2)

Challenge: I think it’s challenging for central office because just the fast growth and number of campuses and management alone. There is not enough of us. It’s tight but it’s going out to campuses, meeting with individual principals or the ILT (Instructional Leadership Team), and providing that support. It’s challenging because there’s not enough of us. (D3)

D3 stated, “We have to leverage our campus leadership team as a remedy to the challenge of the tightness of supporting the elementary principals.”

MP discussed challenges of rapid growth along with a remedy for the challenges.

The biggest challenge is just shifting their (teachers) mindset toward more of that PLC. Time is a challenge. Response time with coordinators isn’t anything that’s an issue, it’s just there’s not enough of you all. The caseload of centralized programs I have on top of my resource caseload. Those impact me getting into collaborative learning and some training sometimes.

MP mentioned remedies to the challenges with the PLC mindset, curriculum support, and management of caseloads:

With PLC they’re (teachers) getting there, but it’s definitely a journey. You can’t do it fast. We’re realizing there are some pieces we need to go back and put in the foundation. Our ILT has to work together to build each other’s capacity. It’s keeping the dialogue open and being there to support.

Connection to the Conceptual Framework

The supportive central office theme encompassed the PLC, professional capital, and educational change process components of the building capacity conceptual framework. The Roles subcategory supported the educational change process component within the conceptual framework. Central office staff leaders mentioned supporting principals with the implementation of curriculum, providing a focus for goals, meeting principals where they are in the
principalship, and guiding them along the way. Principals expressed their role was to be the learning leader and support teachers with instruction. This supports ongoing continuous improvement as support is provided as principals move through the change process within a districtwide PLC.

Coaching as a support subcategory encompassed the conceptual framework component of professional capital, intrinsic motivation, and the educational change process. The one-on-one coaching from directors, outside consultant coaches, and instructional coaches allowed principals to build trusting relationships with their directors as they receive support to move through implementing specific action oriented goals. The movement through change based on the feedback and encouragement from their directors or outside coaching consultant illustrates intrinsic motivation as principals continue to individually improve.

The subcategory of elementary principal perceptions of support from central office connects to the professional capital and PLC components within the conceptual framework. Professional capital within this subcategory is demonstrated by district coordinators supporting elementary principals and changing the level of support based on the experience of the principal. Through support, trusting relationships must exist in order for the principals to feel safe enough to reach out to the coordinator. The PLC components surfaced as two principals mentioned receiving support for creating a campus vision from central office and central office always modeling the PLC culture.

The PLC component and professional capital existed within the supporting rapid growth subcategory. Challenges and remedies for the challenges were mentioned by participants. The challenges mentioned were remedied by implementing the culture of a districtwide PLC. Another challenge coupled with a remedy was limited central office staff and movement to
various positions with little experience in the current position. Professional capital is connected through retaining staff members that contain a shared mindset within the districtwide PLC.

Building capacity surfaced within this theme as support structures are in place through differentiating support roles, continuous coaching, meeting rapid growth challenges with solutions, and specific support provided for rapid growth.

Theme 3: Collaborative Culture

A collaborative culture theme was created from the central office staff and elementary principal’s articulation and focus on principal relationships and a culture of trust and vulnerability within AISD. Social capital surfaced within this theme as interconnected relationships and cultures were mentioned by the central office staff and elementary principals. In the current study, relationships were the connection between central office staff and the elementary principals. Relationships also refer to the connection among the elementary principal group and their teachers. Collaboration focused on utilizing time to share practices, have conversations, and analyze data for a common purpose such as student progress. This section displays principal relationships and culture of trust and vulnerability, which exist within a collaborative culture.

Principal Relationships

Elementary principals developed and fostered relationships from principal learning teams. The elementary principals described the principal learning teams where specific goals are set and they collaborate to reach their goals. Through this focused collaboration, components of relationships such as transparency and trust increase. TP, MP, and BP described their experiences with principal learning teams. It was interesting to hear the impact the principal
learning teams had on each principal. TP primarily referred to the principal learning team as a time to learn about instruction from each principal.

The principal learning teams are huge. We are meeting this year with teams that are “like” schools (similar socio and demographic population). The learning team met at my campus last month to see how we are providing enrichment and intervention times within the day.

MP describes the principal learning team as a team that has had a positive professional impact on MP principal’s role. MP explained in detail the impact of the relationships within the PLT (Principal Learning Team).

I think because we’ve been able to maintain the PLT that I have the past couple of years, we’ve really built that trust. I’m kind of hoping that doesn’t change. I’d love to get more ideas from other people, it takes time to build trust within a group and now that we have that trust, we can really be vulnerable and say, “I’m really not getting this,” or “My teams are struggling with this.” There’s no judgment. If we create new teams, we will rebuild the trust. This district is smart in setting up the PLT. I think there’s benefit to it.

BP expressed, “I’m learning with other principals in my PLT. Being able to work as a principal learning team, like a campus works sometimes. I think it’s a good thing.”

The central office staff discussed the importance of the principal learning teams for elementary principals to develop relationships as they learn with and from each other. D3 commented on the work of the principal learning team.

It’s like a little cadre of like schools where they set their own goals because they have similar needs. They’re all working together to solve a problem or do an action research project. The PLT identifies the strengths and needs and try to come up with some creative ways to solve it.

D4 explained the collaborative work principals undertake within the PLT, “The collaborative mindset there, as we look at our principals, the great thing is they’re collaborative among each other.”

Making connections and the importance of the similar groups surfaced from D2 when talking about the importance of relationships within the principal learning team.
We break the principals up into learning comparable groups. I think that’s a piece that’s helped kind of make more connections to each other, make more connections to similar problems, similar solutions, and kind of create a team within a team.

While C2 commented on the overall purpose of the principal learning teams. “The elementary principals have learning teams that they work on, smaller principal groups have learning teams that they work on and they decide a goal and what they need to learn. Then they pursue that as a team.”

Culture of Trust and Vulnerability

Within the theme of a collaborative culture, it was noted central office staff members and principals agreed on the importance of not having to have all the answers when questions or situations arise. A healthy culture is described from trusting relationships between central office staff and principals and principals and their teachers. TP reflected on the message sent to the staff while also being a continuous reflective learner.

I have to reflect and determine if I have teachers transferring out of my school. To me that capital – human capital – is the biggest piece I’ve seen through my years. If I can keep teachers who truly are focused on the right work that the district is focused on then we are all right. I also have to determine if we are working together. It’s an everyday assessment teachers make for administrators on my campus. They assess, “Are we all together on this?” You have to have a team moving, staying, and growing with you. They also (central office staff) help me know that I’m on a journey just as everyone else is. Where I’m developing is an okay place to be as long as I’m learning still.

MP stated that you have to be comfortable and transparent enough to admit to your staff you’ve made a mistake.

I’m taking the PLC process as a learning opportunity to be transparent with the staff and say, “Hey, I botched this up. I wasn’t clear, now I have clarity.” I think if the district does a good job of letting us have those mistakes and learn from them without that judgment. I think you just have to go through it and just be vulnerable as you go.

MP also described how creating and having relationships with the supervisor and other principals when transitioning into the role of principal impacted MP:
I was able to call existing principals that I had a good working relationship with. I had my supervisor I could go to but I had to rely heavily on other principals. There becomes that trust when you transition from an AP (assistant principal) role to a principal. You don’t have that trust with principals yet because you may not know them.

BP expressed that it was having trust from the central office staff to make the best decisions for the teachers and gauge the PLC process on the campus.

They (central office staff) trust that I know what my teachers need, and I’m really involved in being able to make those decisions. The support the district gives me in the PLC process is the happiness of this campus. I feel like the people here are happy in their work.

The central office staff agreed to create a culture of trust, the pressure on principals to always have the right answer has to be shifted as we learn together. CM2 explained the importance for principals to connect and guide teachers, “We’re in this with you. We’re knowledgeable about it, and we’re trying to prepare you for what’s coming.” It also starts with central office staff being transparent and vulnerable with the elementary principals. CM1 described the importance of modeling vulnerability in the role.

We know that we have to share about our professional practice, and what’s going well. We have to share what’s not going well, and what our challenges are in an open, safe, and trusting environment. We’ve really worked to build that culture. I think it has really paid off. One thing that we very much see is that our new principals are very open to looking at and examining, as far as their instructional leadership behaviors. They very much embrace the PLC process. You see an increase in vulnerability. You see an increase in renewal, in terms of maybe our principals and district level leaders who have been at this a while. It’s renewed excitement and enthusiasm for approaching our work together.

D2, D3, and D4 discussed the district’s acceptance of practicing vulnerability by not having to have the answers for elementary principals.

It’s that whole vulnerability of setting that system of trust up enough that people can be vulnerable and realize it’s okay to ask questions and be uncomfortable. It goes back to the way we communicate things, to how it’s interpreted, to having that trust and vulnerability when they are not getting things. Then for central administration to teach and find out what principals need and provide that support. (D2)
The elementary principals are challenged to continue their learning, but do it in a safe environment so that they know that we’re alongside them, learning together. I think the elementary principals felt like they had to have all the answers. They were hired to be this person and they were, I mean you are head of the campus so when somebody comes to you with a problem or a question you have to have the answer or you make up something because you don’t want to come across like you don’t know. I think the continuous learner mindset has given them permission not to know something. It’s okay if you don’t know something because everybody has room to grow, and there’s no way one person can know and do everything. (D3)

We’re visiting elementary principals and saying “How can I help you?” “What support can I give?” in a non-threatening type of way. That collaborative mindset is there, as we look at our principals the great thing is they’re collaborative among each other and so I did feel like they had a camaraderie that they can share that. I think there are times that sometimes I have to help them maybe see that they are a little more vulnerable than they are than they want to admit and that’s hard to do. That you don’t know something or I’ll say to them, “Let me look at policy, I’m not sure.” That vulnerability I think it’s important for me to model that too. Since we meet once a month with all our principals, we have noticed a significant change. We have noticed that they’re more successful because they can be in a setting that’s vulnerable, they can be very transparent in that setting and just put it out there. We will laugh and not judge them. (D4)

Connection to the Conceptual Framework

Social capital which exists within the professional capital component of the conceptual framework blanketed the Collaborative Culture theme through the culture of trust and vulnerability and principal relationships subcategory. The connection to professional capital was made with the subcategory of principal relationships when principals meet within their principal learning team. The PLT is made up of principals with various experiences and backgrounds. The trusting environment where principals feel they are not judged and feel free to admit mistakes allowed for the connection to professional capital.

The subcategory of the culture of trust and vulnerability supported the connection to professional capital as the relationships between central office staff and elementary principals were mentioned by participants as crucial to a districtwide PLC. Principals and central office staff members echoed each other by articulating it was important for principals to feel safe
enough to not have all the answers. This evidence demonstrated the importance and connection to the professional capital component within the capacity building conceptual framework.

The Collaborative Culture theme encompassed the professional capital component of the conceptual framework as it connected the various experiences of principals and central office staff members cultivating a safe, transparent environment to lead through the PLC process. This finding is critical to be in place in order for the Building Capacity theme to exist.

Theme 4: Continuous Improvement

Continuous Improvement refers to building capacity in an educator’s professional ability from experiences, collaboration, and application within this study. Improving one’s ability through gaining knowledge empowers and motivates individuals to continually learn. Continuous learning, change, and feedback and reflection are described in the theme: Building Capacity.

Continuous Learning

Central office staff and elementary principals described the continuous learning mindset and actions in place in order to foster capacity building in AISD. D1 referred to transferring learning back to the campus.

So our role in that big change and the growth of the principals really is to provide that support and reminder maybe that you got to go back, catch everybody up, and bring them along. I have been very impressed with how the elementary principals have taken this on, and they want to improve. They want to get better.

D3 articulated the constant individual learning that must occur in order to lead elementary principals along with the continuous improvement mindset elementary principals possess.

We have to stay one ahead too so that we can nudge but pull at the same time kind of thing. Elementary principals are not coming in to their role as a novice or never having
not heard of PLC or continuous improvement. They come in knowing and that’s exciting.

D4 mentioned the importance of elementary principals learning along with teachers on their campus.

They have to be in there with their teachers learning what they’re learning, and I’m not talking about content. I’m talking more about understanding content and the application of it. What they need to understand is how I’m going to support that teacher when she comes to me with question.

The elementary principals mirrored verbatim the same mindset of their individual continuous learning occurring for them individually and their campus. TP described individually and the district as having a mindset of continuous improvement.

My goal is to continue to learn so that I can share. I know that I’m valued wherever I am, but the goal is to improve. That’s how I feel with the support with curriculum. The culture in our district is continuous learning. At our campus we have brought in training specific to our needs. We train and practice. The district following up with us has been exciting.

MP discussed the job embedded opportunities to individually grow as well as using the role of the instructional coach to build capacity for the ILT and the campus.

The IC’s get that monthly training piece that I believe is beneficial because they’re able to see the big picture, then bring it back to the leadership team on campus and we have a deep discussion of where our campus is and where do we need to go. I also like that the district gives us the opportunities to grow even within the work week. Although it takes us off campus, I do feel like I gained more out of it verses having to do it after work or in the summer. I’m able to have time to process it this way. We also feel like it’s important for our staff to see that we’re learning and growing with them.

BP stated the district modeled the expectation of being a learner by implementing a PLC.

Your learning never ends. The district is good about modeling that type of system. By unpacking standards, we have been able to learn. If we really want to be a true PLC then we really are learning. It’s not handed to you. You’re going to have to learn.
Change

In order to continuously improve and build capacity participants in this study mentioned changing specific practices and maneuvering through stages of the educational change process. CM2 explained risk taking is involved in any initiative to improve.

Change is never necessarily easy, but I think one of the great things is our folks are accustomed to it. I think we probably do it as well or better than most people across the state because we’ve had to do it so much. I think we’re able to implement it more quickly, and to do so with fidelity and that’s just something I’ve noticed in how we do what we do while preparing people for change.

D1 referred to changing the sustainability process of the PLC learning by adjusting the PLC Booster and PLC Academy content and facilitators. D1 expressed, “By the second session we were saying this isn’t what we need, so the third session we brought in Peter Noonan.” Tweaks and changes are constantly made as the participants in the study move through the PLC process.

D2 expressed the positive perception that educators are good at taking action and implementing things, but following through and measuring the effectiveness is an area of growth.

We identify what we’re doing well in areas for improvement and we support those changes. We create change in the district. As educators we’re great at implementing stuff, but we really never know if it works—truly know what works. We’re not there yet, but I think it’s getting more of that, what results are we getting with kids. It’s becoming more of a focus to our continuous improvement process.

D4 agreed change is a process and action constantly in motion. “I look at it as if the elementary principals are embracing the change and actually have a plan of action. Sometimes I think they have a good intention, but they don’t have a plan of action.” Whereas C2 mentioned change in reference to adding new campuses every year within AISD, “I think it’s just constantly readjusting and realigning, based on the sheer volume of campuses we add on each year.
Each principal references a specific example with change. TP referenced the initiation of formative assessments and teachers assessing, changing their practices, and re-assessing based on student behaviors. MP used the term “shift” in reference to changing what teaching looks like within a PLC.

You’re seeing a shift of what teaching should look like. It’s been a painful shift, because for those who aren’t on board with it, it causes other variables that you as a building principal have to address. Whether it causes dissension among a team or people feeling like others aren’t pulling their weight, it’s a good shift.

BP explained the implementation dip the campus is currently experiencing since BP came to the campus. The shifts and changes with a new principal are to be expected and with that comes the effects of the shifts and changes. “We have an implementation dip. I’m changing a lot of things and I’ve had a lot of steps to change. This year, I’m fully expecting a little bit of a dip in our data because of all the change.”

Feedback and Reflection

In this study within the theme building capacity, feedback and reflection practices were naturally embedded within the responses from the central office personnel and the elementary principals. Through feedback and reflection, the central office staff and elementary principals improve and adjust questions they internally ask themselves or others to extend their thinking. The central office staff used the PLC sustainability process, personal conversations with elementary principals, questioning, and engaging in the PLC work as examples of reflection and feedback. CM1 referred to the engaging work within a PLC.

Learning and engaging in the work is messy. It also provides that feedback and formative assessment. Just like the teachers who are engaging in the PLC, our principals who are engaging in the PLC, as they engage in this work as a leader, are constantly receiving that formative assessment and need to be adjusting.

D1 referred to the PLC sustainability process and the continuums within the process:
Because it’s a continuum piece. You say, “Where are you?” They do it individually, then talk about it as a team, and then decide. “Where are you on this continuum?” When we are done, we ask, “Did it improve maybe here and not so much there?”

D2 expressed, “We help principals ask reflective questions;” D3 referenced the conversations and goal setting with elementary principals as a piece of reflection and feedback.

It’s when you are having conversations with them (elementary principals), you can tell that they’ve been reflecting on their own. It’s through their reflections and the types of goals that they want to set. It tells you what they want to work on and it tells you they’re so involved day-to-day. They’re in it with their teachers, because they know exactly where their teams are. They know their strengths, weaknesses, and what they’re doing to offer support. They can really talk it. It’s genuine dialogue and conversation.

D4 discussed principals reflecting on their personal practice and how it’s been a shift to be reflective. “We do have principals that are reflecting on the practice and voicing that, where in the past I don’t think we’ve had that.”

Connection to the Conceptual Framework

In the Continuous Improvement theme, continuous learning, change, and feedback and reflection mirror the conceptual framework components of the educational change process and intrinsic motivation. In the continuous learning subcategory, the central office staff and elementary principals demonstrate the importance of continually learning and transferring the learning back to the campuses. This supports the educational change process within the conceptual framework of building capacity as elementary principals constantly improve and apply their learning.

In the change subcategory, the educational change process is evident as central office staff members explain taking risks and constantly improving while each principal mentioned a specific stage of change they were currently experiencing within the change process. The subcategory of feedback and reflection supported the intrinsic motivation conceptual framework. The central office staff members referred to receiving feedback while implementing the
districtwide PLC process. The feedback allowed for the district to adjust professional learning and training experiences. Central office staff also mentioned principals being reflective of their goals with their directors. Principals open themselves up to receive feedback. The feedback and reflection whether in the context to the districtwide PLC or from director to principal allows for intrinsic motivation to be apparent as growth within specific initiatives is recognized. This allows for continued motivation as new goals and action steps are generated.

In the Continuous Improvement theme, the subcategories of continuous learning, change, and feedback and reflection allowed for the intrinsic motivation and educational change process components of the conceptual framework to be intricate processes in continuous improvement as individual and collective capacity is cultivated within the district. The Continuous Improvement theme of ongoing learning is the building block for the next theme: Differentiated Opportunities to Learn.

Theme 5: Differentiated Opportunities to Learn

Theme 5 encompasses the many opportunities for elementary principals to learn and build individual and collective capacity. Differentiated opportunities to learn include elementary principals learning for a specific need. It’s not a one size fits all model in this study. The learning opportunities are structured for principals to have individualized learning experiences. This section portrays various opportunities for principal learning and new principal learning experiences individually and collectively.

Principal Learning

The central office staff members communicated numerous opportunities for elementary principals to learn, partnered with strategies and examples of effective learning opportunities. “A significant portion of our principal meetings are used for job-embedded professional
development for principals to share with each other, and for there to be that two-way dialogue between principals and central office as well” (CM1)

In the human resources department, it’s more about trying to provide those services specifically to campuses. So while we also attend the principals meeting and while we always have some agenda item that we’re sharing about the best hiring practices or what we do here, we use opportunities to sit with principals and talk through a particular situation as they work with the teacher, you know? How can they monitor the teacher? How can they help them to grow? If they’re not growing and doing what’s best for kids, then how do we help them to make choices that will be best for kids? We also look at the PLC conferences, those days that principals either for half-days, or sometimes for a full-day, are pulled into PD sessions, the opportunity with the book studies, that happen within principals’ meetings and sometimes happen just in small groups. So those kinds of things are opportunities for them. (CM2)

Elementary principals want the opportunity to share what they’re doing. So that one campus isn’t doing it, another campus having to do it themselves because they didn’t have the opportunity to share. It’s having more collaboration between principals – between campuses so they can learn. At the PLC Hybrid we offer sessions from the foundation ones to more advanced sessions. RTI is a big training for those that are ready to move there. Hopefully the campuses that don’t have a mission or vision will not attend during the PLC Hybrid. They will stay and create their mission and vision. (D1)

We offered a training where we went over STAAR results but also talked about how to use data to drive the PLC process. We talked about the purpose of data and how principals can help their teams when they are ready to analyze their data. Ideally I’d like to do training for each campus and present it to each leadership team, meeting their individual needs. Then the needs determine the campuses professional development. (D2)

The book study and principal meetings are a learning piece for elementary principals. Elementary principals are creating campus learning opportunities for their student needs. Monday is professional learning day. The principals are energized by the concept. They are so excited about it. (D3)

D4 stated, “I think we do a good job with the PLC Boosters, and we also offer a best practice in hiring training for elementary principals.”

They (elementary principals) can reach out to the professional learning department if they see an area where their campus and themselves need to grow. I would provide support to them as well. I think that’s something that’s still developing. We provide mentorships, PLC Hybrids, Boosters, and the PLC Academy. (C1)
The professional learning is more of a TOT model where we’re kind of building the capacity of the instructional coach and assistant principal. They go back and deliver the professional learning from curriculum and instruction. We also offer online and blended learning activities as an option for providing professional learning for our elementary principals. (C2)

The elementary principals describe their learning opportunities as personal and professional growth opportunities. Learning opportunities described range from the PLC conference to job-embedded learning specific to their campuses need.

We attend the PLC updates. It’s constant and continuing. It’s what we need. I feel like we need it as a campus – good support and good learning. We also bring professional development to our campus. (TP)

We have the opportunity to attend the PLC type conferences and the Booster. I think the district is really starting to realize if we’re moving towards a PLC, it’s a growing pain. You have to live through it. What I know now after three years of PLC conference to what I knew three years ago, I would say I wish I had a do-over button. But, then I don’t want that, because I would’ve never grown. (MP)

We go to the PLC conference every summer. I have trainings all the time within the district as far as the PLC Booster. We are encouraged to attend trainings with the teachers and I’ve been to one of the meetings. On-the-job training is very encouraged. We expect that should be the way we do things, and that’s huge to me. I know that works. (BP)

Other opportunities for principals to learn are the principal book study and principal meetings. The book study the principal’s participated in was the *The Principal: Three Keys to Maximizing Impact* by Michael Fullan (2014b). The book study was mentioned many times by participants in the study.

D1 expressed, “We continually support and hit the learning by reading through a book study with principals.” D3 agreed, “Making connections about what their learning ties back to what they’re trying to accomplish on their campuses. We’re trying to connect that book study to our new Texas Principal Standards so all the connections happen.” While D4 maintained “I think through the book study we provide professional development.” TP also explained, “Our
book studies, I’ve really enjoyed that. I felt like we’ve been able to look at the leader of the 21st century, and how that has changed from 30 years ago.”

New Principal Learning

Within this study, principals in their first year of the principalship had opportunities to learn with fellow new principals. CM1 described the collective learning process of first year principals.

We annually have to induct and support our new principals in regards to where we’re at as an organization and how they can step into their school. Honor, respect the culture and then place them at where the school is operating presently. Then we take steps to set that vision for moving the school forward. The elementary area directors also meet with new principals, and they have meetings targeted specifically on an ongoing basis for our new principals.

CM2 expressed naming principals early within the school year for the next school year allows the new principals time to acclimate and transition.

I think the fact that we’re able to name principal’s fairly early, even at the elementary level, so that we have that time to begin working with them prior to them fully assuming the roles helps with the new principal learning.

Connection to the Conceptual Framework

In the theme Differentiated Opportunities to Learn the subcategories Principal Learning and New Principal Learning connect to the educational change process and professional capital component of the conceptual framework. The educational change process components surfaced when principals use the multiple learning opportunities such as the book study, PLC Hybrid, Academy, Booster, principal meetings, and professional learning sessions to continue improving the intentional work within the districtwide PLC.

The professional capital component of the conceptual framework is connected with the collaborative learning that occurs within the principal meetings, new principal meetings, and mentorships. Within the Differentiated Opportunities to Learn theme, the building capacity
conceptual framework was supported as principals participated in new differentiated learning opportunities based on principal experience and campus goals.

Theme 6: Data Use

In this study, data allowed the elementary principals and central office staff to have a primary focus point. Sources of data were used to measure the effectiveness of current practices and processes. Student achievement data was the primary source within the data theme discussed from the participants.

Focus for Principals

Data allowed principals to have a starting point and specific focus when it comes to goal setting and creating plans in this study. The elementary principals explained the support of the Curriculum and Instruction Department gave them a focus to know the path to take to guide their campuses. The Curriculum and Instruction Department used district data to narrow the focus and guide principals.

TP explained, “Curriculum and instruction gives the support where we have a real specific target and it’s been really beneficial. At my campus we have to ask if we are all focused on the right thing?” MP agreed, “I think it’s (data) going to allow us as principals to really narrow in and focus.”

Uses of Data

Within this study, the central office staff members and elementary principals talk about many uses and forms of data. CM1 indicated:

Data is significant. Data within our culture is seen as something that informs us in regard to what our students need us to do differently and to validate and identify what’s going well, so we can continue with those practices and spread those practices district-wide. When we have our mission and then we set our vision, we identify what’s tightly held and what’s loosely held. One of the things that we hold tightly is that we are going to hold ourselves accountable for results and not intentions. That means using that data to
inform our practice. Keeping data out in front of us has been critical. We’ve mirrored that process with the elementary principals and supported them in doing that.

CM2 mentioned the district goals and needs based on the current data and conversations used to respond to the data.

We look at what needs are based on student data, based on the goals of the district, based on what we know to be things that our district needs to address, and being able to make sure that principals have, whether it’s professional development or to have someone to have those collegial conversations with. We also look to see if students are happy coming to school? What do parents and the community say about the school district? I think that’s a huge part of it.

D1 explained the utilization of the rubrics within the Learning by Doing (DuFour et al., 2010) book and survey data. See Appendix L for the districtwide rubric.

If elementary principals and their teams answer those and look at those, that’s a source of data. Some PLC teams are really doing well with the formative assessment pieces. Survey data that helps us know what the needs are and where to move next.

D2 voiced data as starting with the end in mind and using data to clearly know where the goal or plan needs to start.

You start with the end and then go forward, so using the data and then helping principals with the whole campus action plan. We look at needs base upon various sources of data. We identify a goal and then what strategies we are going to use for that goal. We ask how are we going to achieve it and what is the timeline? It’s the results of the goals. The results need analysis. It starts with that needs analysis. Goals and strategies will be identified through a good analysis. Going through the continuous improvement process, you always have to come back to the results.

D3 expressed moving away from passing standards and focusing more on using data to guide specific processes on campuses.

At a campus, the IC came in jumping for joy because this team she had been working with was coming prepared to collaborate. You see in hard data. You see a lot in just observations too.

D4 conveyed the use of soft data, such as surveys, and assisted elementary principals when interpreting those surveys.
I spend a lot of time looking at data. I spent a lot of time helping and coaching them to what that survey may say, and I’m talking about some of the personal surveys that they may give from the parent perspective or from the teacher perspective. We also need to look at our students growing and are we measuring kids from where they are or where they can be.

Central office staff member C1 articulated, “Doing learning walks and seeing them work as a team (principals), it’s a lot of soft data.”

The elementary principals expressed understanding what the data means is challenging and takes time to understand, however the elementary principals understand the importance of using data to provide enrichment and intervention for students. TP communicated the use of data on the campus and how data changes as the result of changing student behaviors.

Looking at data, it should be changing and knowing what’s next with our kids. It’s more about growth than taking assessments and seeing who passed or didn’t. We’re really starting to shift to helping our kids grow individually. We can get data on engagement through my walkthroughs and the AP’s walkthroughs, learning walks, and teacher observations. We use our surveys we get each year and have evidence at Parent Teacher Association meetings on parents who are happy or calling administration.

MP explained that one of the campus goals this year was to learn and use data since it is a big learning piece. The data protocol introduced this year by the data department within curriculum and instruction was used on the campus as a way to know what the teachers data said about students. See Appendix M for the data protocol.

Data’s different because every campus is different. I think you have to take initiative to learn data and where are we focusing our needs. But I do think the protocol they introduced is a good tool. One of campus goals this year is teachers have a plethora of data, but we don’t know what to do with it. We know they can get the data, but it’s the follow through. What we’ve done this year is we’ve put in that data protocol. We are using common formative assessments on Google so teachers get immediate feedback and begin pulling kids right away.

BP explained the use of data at the Title I campus comes with more responsibilities as well as the data protocol for how data is used on the campus.
I’m a Title I school, so I have a little bit more meetings and a few more responsibilities as far as taking more data or keeping track of that data in a specific way. The system for data is a little different. When we go to understand data, we are able to look at data in a lot of ways. The training for us has been on how to use a tool to look at your data and how you can pull your campus’s data and look at it by teacher, class, or by campus. We’ve also been trained to compare yourself to another campus and how to look at the STAAR data. The data piece I feel like I could get a little more support on. I feel like that model is not solid. I don’t feel like I have the time to analyze my district’s data. We use surveys. I use qualitative data such as conversations with teachers.

Student Achievement Data

Within this theme, data was used to show student progress and growth. Participants in the study articulated methods data is used to reach the student achievement outcome. CM1 delineated:

Student achievement data is ultimately where it all rests. We can be doing all sorts of fabulous learning and all sorts of fabulous collaboration and it does not mean anything if it is not resulting in high levels of learning for our students.

While other central office staff members associated student achievement data to student growth, C2 expressed the use of various types of student achievement data used to show student growth.

Student achievement data comes in multiple sources. You can look at STAAR data. You can look at CBA’s. You can look at how students are progressing on different reading instruments if they’re growing or not. The student achievement data ultimately, absolutely shows our students moving and growing.

D1 articulated the emphasis of taking the PLC process to heart by using student achievement data as a way to show students growing.

When teachers are moving students and seeing if they are growing or not, I think that is the evidence that people are really taking this to heart. It’s talking about students one by one, and moving that student along in growth. A lot of campuses are doing that, and it’s really impressive.
While MP expressed that with the structure of the PLC process in place, “I think you’ll see a big increase in student achievement.” BP agreed by stating, “It’s the improvement with the work we do with kids.”

Connections to the Conceptual Framework

In the theme, Data Use, the conceptual framework component PLC is supported with the subcategories of focus for principals, uses of data, and student achievement data. The PLC conceptual framework component connects to the shared goals and practices and conversations that were generated as a response to data. The central office staff members mentioned using data to generate goals. The goals created and the action steps involve purposeful and intentional collaboration around a shared goal that aligns to the district goals. The PLC component was also supported as data was used to guide specific processes, such as the PLC process. The data protocol generated was to guide teams through the PLC process of starting with the end goal and taking the necessary steps to accomplish the goal. Within the subcategory of student achievement data, the PLC process was used to show student growth through collaborative conversations.

In the theme Data Use, the PLC process is vital for student growth and teacher growth to impact student achievement. Principals explained through collaborative conversations about specific student behaviors, teachers were improving practices and purposeful conversations about improving student achievement occurred. The PLC component of the conceptual framework is supported through the Data Use theme.

Summary

The eight central office staff members and three elementary principals who participated in this study shared their perceptions of the support the district provides in the areas of: PLC
infrastructure, supportive central office, collaborative culture, continuous improvement, differentiated opportunities to learn, and data use. They have all been part of the initiation and implementation stage of the PLC process within AISD. Each participant answered each interview question from their individual and collective experience within the district. The six themes and categories shown in Figure 9 were generated from the participants interviewed, defined the central office role in building capacity in elementary principals, the components aligned to determine how the PLC process is the main driver, and clearly illustrated components within the PLC dimensions. Within each of the six themes examples of evidence from professional capital, intrinsic motivation, educational change process, and professional learning communities surfaced to support the building capacity conceptual framework. The discussion of the six themes will be the foundation of the Chapter 5 Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations.
Figure 9. Themes and subcategories for capacity building and PLC support.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore the role of central office utilizing the PLC process to build capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growth district. By administering the PLCA-DS and interviewing eight members of central office and three elementary principals, six themes were generated to correspond with the conceptual framework. Within a rapid growth district, I was able to determine clearly the role of support central office provides in building capacity in elementary principals. The support was individualized depending on the principal and the campus. Ten of the 11 interview participants mentioned support as the role central office provides to build capacity in elementary principals. Furthermore, through the interview responses, the PLC process was used within structures and systems in Abby ISD (AISD) by creating a common language, shared knowledge, and shared practices. The five PLC dimensions are actively in existence within the generated themes supporting capacity building in elementary principals.

The research questions stated in this study were:

1. What is the central office staff’s role in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growth district?
2. How does central office staff use the PLC process as the main driver in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growth district?
3. How are the five PLC Dimensions used to support capacity building in elementary principals?

Through this study, central office staff’s role, use of the PLC process, and five PLC dimensions were identified within the six themes created from the categories generated from initial codes.
during the interview process. In the conclusions section, the six themes and the subcategories of each theme, coupled with components from the conceptual framework, demonstrate how central office staff supports and builds capacity in elementary principals. The six themes are (a) PLC infrastructure, (b) supportive central office, (c) collaborative culture, (d) continuous improvement, (e) differentiated opportunities to learn, and (f) data use. Figure 10 shows the finding for building capacity and PLC support.

![Diagram of findings for building capacity and PLC support in Abby ISD.](image)

**Figure 10.** Findings for building capacity and PLC support in Abby ISD.

Findings and Conclusions

PLC Infrastructure

The theme PLC infrastructure was created from three subcategories: PLC journey, structures and systems, and PLC process as shown in Figure 11. These subcategories described
the steps taken by the district to develop structures and systems that lead to a process of creating a districtwide PLC process.

Figure 11. PLC infrastructure as a theme.

PLC journey. Abby ISD began the districtwide PLC initiative three years ago when 13-14 campuses attended the PLC Institute in San Antonio, Texas. The director explained the collective effort of the PLC initiative quickly spread as the campuses returned and began putting practices in place. Currently all but four campuses have attended the PLC Institute in San Antonio. This process allowed campus leaders to attend the three-day training to gain a shared understanding of practices within a professional learning community. PLC Boosters and Academies currently exist within AISD as a mechanism of sustainability for all campuses. The PLC Academies exist for campuses who have attended the PLC Institute in the previous summer, three times throughout the year for two consecutive days. The PLC Boosters program exists twice a year for campuses that attended the PLC Institute two years ago. The central office staff and campus leadership teams attend the PLC Boosters and Academies while an outside facilitator guides the work for each campus regarding next steps within the PLC process.

Central office staff members in AISD created the PLC Essentials along with the Common Vocabulary document to streamline a focus and shared understanding of practices and terms
throughout the rapid growth district. Currently AISD hosts a PLC Hybrid event for two days in the summer for campus leadership and central office to attend, share practices, and receive training on PLC practices. This structure supports the research by James et al. (2014) who studied Saskatoon Public school, the largest district in Canada where shared ownership of ongoing professional learning for central office staff members and campuses have created a common and shared knowledge for central office staff and principals. This study explained the continuous collaboration between central office and school leaders as they initiated and implemented districtwide initiatives. This study also supports research by Psenick et al. (2014) as they studied a district in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, where the school aligned all structures and systems by defining leadership and professional learning. The district team revised and created documents that described the structures and systems in place to support the district mission and vision. This process was incorporated within every central office department and allowed for the work to be owned by all departments. This research parallels with the work from AISD central office to create PLC Essentials, Common Vocabulary document, professional learning from the PLC Institute, PLC Boosters, and PLC Academies.

Structures and systems. All 11 participants in the current study mention structures and systems in some capacity. Structures and systems were described as a foundation to have a shared mindset and understanding for student learning throughout the district and continuous improvement for principals. Hord and Sommers (2008) state the PLC dimension of supportive conditions encompasses having structures of common times to meet and collaborate on specific goals. The second major area within the supportive condition dimension is relationships. Within this area, trust is the most influential factor to determine the success of the relationships (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Researchers describe systemness as structures aligned based on a district’s
mission (Fullan, 2010; Hargreaves, 2007; O’Day, 2004). Alignment of structures for professional learning, collaborative practices, and data analysis exist to collectively form relationships and partnerships and build capacity collectively and individually (Fullan, 2010; Hargreaves, 2007; O’Day, 2004). Participants in the current study exude similar practices of sharing and owning specific systems and structures in order to foster student learning and continuous improvement through a trusting partnership with the central office.

Having said that two participants referred to attaining a shared ownership as a way to foster structures, a cabinet member explained, “Systems and structures must be owned by everyone in order for high levels of learning to exist for students.” A director commented for the PLC structure to exist, group ownership and buy-in must be in place and everyone must know the end outcome. The rest of the central office staff members’ responses supported research within the PLC dimension of supportive conditions. The central office staff members indicated support and trusting relationships from the central office to the elementary campus were critical for structures and systems to exist and continuous improvement to occur. A director also explained, “Structures are created to support and meet elementary principal’s needs while challenging them to continuously improve in a safe environment.” Another cabinet member and director explained a supportive recruitment and hiring system allowed high quality candidates to be interviewed and saved elementary principal’s time during the hiring process. The coordinators described the restructuring of the coordinator team to meet the individual needs of campuses and providing curriculum support as a structure in place to support elementary principals.

Research by Senge (2000) contends systemness requires continuous improvement from sharing and collaborating with others, which strengthens the individual person and collectively
the system. Two elementary principals echoed this research. One principal mentioned individually growing each year with the structures central office put in place to allow one to grow. While another principal clearly stated, “The district is good at modeling, the system of learning never ends.” According to this principal, the systems in place also helps to support her individually as well as supporting teachers.

PLC process. The way the central office clearly uses the PLC process as the main driver to build capacity was reported by all participants. Three subcategories used by all participants to describe the PLC process were a common or shared language, shared practices, and shared knowledge. The PLC Essentials and Dufour and Fullan’s (2013) four critical questions existed as the foundation for creating a vocabulary and common focal point for the districtwide PLC. These two components gave participants a specific area to focus for the PLC process to exist. These findings echoed the research by Dufour and Marzano (2011) which states the need for central office to have a common language to communicate clearly is essential. Dufour’s (2011) four critical questions support the PLC process and also the PLC dimension of shared personal practice (Hord, 2008). By using the four critical questions to guide conversations, specific practices are shared to guarantee learning together occurs (Dufour & Fullan, 2013). The central office staff members and elementary principals mentioned the AISD PLC Essentials, which illustrated learning, collaboration, and results as the essential focus to create a common vocabulary. They also expressed the four critical questions were used for the PLC process to exist.

The PLC process also existed with structure of embedded time to use the PLC Essentials and four critical questions. Central office and the elementary principals on their campuses used these components of the districtwide PLC during collaborative times. This supports the
structures within the supportive condition PLC dimension and research by Hord and Sommers (2008) which explains scheduling allows for extra time during the instructional day to provide time for a common and shared language to exist. Collaborative time within the instructional day improves learning for teachers and students (Mertens et al., 2010). Denver and Lash’s (2013) research parallels the PLC process by stating common planning time must be an inclusive entity of the PLC culture rather than a separate entity. The cabinet members and a director mentioned the need to create and protect time to have student centered conversations and reflect on current practices. Within the current study, it became clear, since embedded time existed within the PLC process, a common or shared language developed among district and school staff.

Central office staff members described sharing the same language critical for the PLC process to exist. The director expressed central office staff members have different roles and responsibilities, therefore, it is important for everyone in the Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) Department to collaborate and share in order for shared practices to exist and meet the current campus needs. For example, the area director meets with the supervising principal one-on-one. If a common trend is noticed by the area directors from conversations with the principals, the area directors then collaborate with the other directors and coordinators to support the need or adjust the practice. One of the cabinet members described the level of conversation about students, focus within the meetings, and the professionalism built as a result of collaborative conversations where common and shared language is developed. A coordinator mentioned more intentional conversations happened among content areas to make specific connections across content. A director also explained creating a common language specific to data practices and protocols as a crucial component of the districtwide PLC. Two of the three principals mentioned ensuring everyone “talking and thinking the same” as important components of the PLC process.
Shared and common language is used to generate shared practices, which also exist within the districtwide PLC process. These findings support practices within the shared personal practice PLC dimension. Hord (1997) defines shared personal practice as a “teams desire for individual and community improvement enabled by the mutual respect and trustworthiness of staff members” (p. 17). One of the cabinet members supported Hord’s (1997) notion of shared personal practices by explaining the central office staff must model the language and practices expected with the districtwide PLC. The cabinet member stated, “If we don’t go through the practices ourselves then we don’t understand how difficult and complex this process really is.”

The elementary principals mentioned collaborative times when teachers share specific practices and learning from the C&I Department. A principal conveyed the importance of sharing practices to provide teachers the opportunity to know what good instruction looks like. While another principal expressed, “The C&I department helps make sure everyone is on the same page with specific practices by offering C&I meetings several times throughout the year.” The participants supported Hipp and Huffman’s (2010) research on shared personal practice that explains teachers need opportunities to learn from each other in a trusting environment in order for individual and collective capacity to exist.

Once shared vocabulary and shared practices were implemented within the PLC process, shared knowledge existed, which replicated the PLC dimension of collective learning and application. Two directors expressed how shared knowledge existed within the PLC process. One director conveyed the importance of everyone participating and hearing the same message in order to build the foundation and to build collective capacity. Another director explained they aligned trainings and learning experiences for principals, assistant principals, and instructional coaches to receive the same message. The director commented, “When the learning is aligned
with their peers, they will debrief and reflect with each other while connections are made which allows for shared knowledge to exist.” This finding parallels with research on the PLC dimension collective learning application, which suggests team members who dialogue together will learn new strategies to improve teaching and student learning as well as build the collective capacity of the team (Hord, 1997; Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Supportive Central Office

The subcategories of roles, coaching as support, elementary principal perception of support, and support with rapid growth combined to generate the theme supportive central office as shown in Figure 12. In this theme, the supportive roles central office used to support elementary campuses are described in the first sub-category. In the second subcategory, various components of coaching were mentioned as avenues of support offered from the central office. The elementary principals explained the support offered individually to them and their campus in the third sub-category. The fourth subcategory describes the support offered by central office for the rapid growth throughout the district.

Figure 12. Supportive central office as a theme.

Roles. The theme, supportive central office identified the role of central office staff as important in building capacity in elementary principals. Honig’s (2012) study of growing districts in Atlanta, GA, New York City, NY, and Oakland, CA, found five practices essential to
become successful instructional leaders. The five practices were joint work between the central office and the principal, which focused on prioritizing the instructional capacity of the principal. Differentiating support to principals based on need was the second practice followed by modeling expected behaviors by the central office. The fourth practice was support for data to measure growth. While the fifth practice was a term called *brokering* which referred to assigning a central office support staff other than the ILD (Instructional Leader Director) to support the principal (Honig, 2012). All participants in this study mentioned these practices in some context. Of the eight central office staff members, seven out of the eight recalled providing support as the primary role of the central office staff to build capacity in elementary principals. The cabinet members and a director echoed each other by stating the primary role was to support and guide campuses in building capacity and high levels of learning. Two more directors explained since they are not directly tied to elementary principal evaluation, they support by meeting needs, assisting with problem solving, and making decisions. The coordinators both described their primary role of support alongside and within the districtwide PLC as they provided a level of support for specific content curriculum. Another director described his primary role of providing elementary principals with a focus on data by helping principals ask reflective questions. The cabinet member mentioned the central office must “model practices” expected within a PLC. Central office staff members, with the exception of modeling expected behaviors, mentioned all five practices found in Honig’s (2012) study. Two elementary principals said their role was to model learning and continuous improvement on their campus. The other principal expressed being a learning leader as her primary role. This finding concludes that central office staff are the primary support mechanism for elementary principals in a rapid
growth district. As campuses and districts grow, support for principals and teachers is clearly critical for success and continuous improvement.

Coaching as support. A practice mentioned by the cabinet members, coordinators, and a principal was the individual coaching provided by the area directors, campus instructional coaches, and outside consultants in AISD. In the current study, the one-on-one and differentiated support provided to the elementary principals by the area director allowed for a response to each principal’s professional, individual need. Personalized support was also provided to elementary principals by an outside district supported coaching consultant that met individually with the principals to provide professional coaching. This process allowed the elementary principals to increase capacity individually in a specific area. The principal explained how the outside consultant coach has influenced her professionally and supported the PLC process by stating, “This is something I still need to grow in. The district is recognizing the need to bring in coaching for us to be instructional leaders which keeps bringing the PLC to the forefront.”

The coordinator mentioned the support of the instructional coach on each campus. The instructional coach (IC) supports the principal with curriculum and instruction strategies on the campus. The IC received personalized support from the coordinators with strategies in curriculum, which allowed for the IC and principal to partner and make sound instructional decisions for their campus. The participants mentioned three methods of coaching as roles of support within the study: coaching by the area director, outside consultant, and instructional coach. This personalized coaching approach individually supports and builds capacity with the elementary principals. This approach follows Syed’s (2014) research, which explains principal supervisor’s role changes with the principal’s ever changing role. In conclusion, the principal
supervisor must focus on supporting the principal to become more of a coach and problem solver.

Elementary principal perception of support from central office. In the current study, it was important to gain the perception of support provided by the central office from each elementary principal. Covey’s (1995) research models the cyclical process of creating a shared vision by reflecting on desires and utilizing individual visions to achieve one shared mission. This research supports two of the three principal’s perception as they explained how the C&I Department gave them the vision to model for their staff. One of the principals mentioned her perception of support from central office was the differentiated support to build her capacity individually. She mentioned C&I supported her weak areas and guided her next step. Another principal focused on working with C&I to meet specific campus needs on her campus while providing a system to help her support teachers. She explained that having the Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent visit her campus to offer support and understand her vision and plan for the campus was most helpful. She also mentioned seeing the district leaders model the PLC culture at meetings and in their daily interactions has offered clarity and support making sure the campus mission and vision aligns with the district mission and vision.

The PLC dimension of shared values and vision supports this finding as Hipp and Huffman (2010) describe this dimension as the realistic picture of the organization coupled with the commitments to reach the organizations shared goal. Huffman’s (2003) research supports this notion of C&I sharing and modeling the vision for campuses by stating, “The tasks of the leader is to share and combine the personal visions of faculty members into a collective vision molded and embraced by all” (p. 22). Dufour’s et al. (2010) research states a vision provides a sense of direction for campuses to commit in order to reach their ideal state. The PLCA-DS
administered to the elementary C&I and the three elementary campuses had the dimension of shared values and vision scoring the highest of the five PLC dimensions with a score of 4.9 out of 6. The current study shows the most aligned support by central office to the campus is the clear communication of the expectations of a shared vision through teaching and learning. The current study results also demonstrates that through communication from the C&I Department with campuses, practices to support an aligned mission and vision can be developed and sustained.

The third principal said most of the support is filtered through the instructional coach now because they can individualize the support for their specific campus. She mentioned a challenge was only having three coordinators to call when an unexpected need might arise. However, with the IC on campus, support is available any time. When the IC and principal partner together individual and collective capacity of the campus is sustained. The work between the principal and instructional coach in the current study aligns with Zepke’s (2007) research on distributive leadership, which explains when people work together, motivation and trusting relationships develop allowing power and trust to transfer, and leadership and improvement occur.

Supporting rapid growth. In the current study, six participants mentioned challenges with rapid growth coupled with remedies for the challenges. Challenges from the cabinet member and director included limited central office staff coupled with the remedy of being very focused on the mission which allows for focus on essentials. Another remedy was individually and collectively building capacity in the campus instructional leadership team. The participants supported research, which explains that systems must focus and define essentials, provide
direction, and possess the supports to build capacity in the individuals within the system (Floden et al., 1995; Hargreaves 2007).

Two directors expressed the need to know the amount of support to provide to principals while making personal connections and building trust with principals. These challenges are complex in a growing district, however developing relationships and making connections is critical. The remedies mentioned for the challenge were to assess and know where people are to meet their needs, and create a culture within central office where principals know it is all right to not know everything. Woody’s (2014) research supports the finding from these two directors by stating district leaders must keep the lines of communication open in order for trust to exist. Woody’s (2014) study also expressed central office staff members must be very intentional and clear with the principal and the support they can provide.

Another cabinet member indicated a challenge with continued growth is the lack of time people may have spent in a position before moving to another position. The remedy mentioned was always thinking ahead and putting practices in place to develop leaders. One principal’s biggest challenge with rapid growth on the campus is shifting teacher’s mindset within a PLC while balancing the caseload of extra centralized programs on the campus. The principal mentioned reflecting with teachers and going back to the foundational pieces within the PLC were helpful strategies. Building the capacity with the instructional leadership team (ILT), and being there to support teachers by having open dialogue were also remedies to the challenges. Fullan’s (2006a) research on lateral capacity building supports the cabinet member and principal by stating two-way collaboration strengthens relationships between the district and the campus. The district and campus leaders work through processes to achieve shared goals. When this
collaboration and interaction occurs, educators learn from each other and students achieve at higher levels.

Collaborative Culture

In the collaborative culture theme, the principal relationship subcategory describes the structures that exist in order for relationships to be cultivated and sustained. This theme consists of two subcategories that describe behaviors and relationships central office staff members, principals, and teachers must practice for trust and vulnerability to exist within the culture. Figure 13 shows the theme and subthemes.

![Figure 13. Collaborative culture as a theme.](image)

Principal relationship. The three elementary principals along with the directors and a coordinator described principal learning teams (PLT) as an intricate structure within the districtwide PLC to build capacity in themselves and their peers. The principal learning teams consisted of four or five elementary principals of schools that had similar socioeconomic and demographic school characteristics. The principals in the study expressed through the PLTs, they learned instructional practices from each other. By having a specific goal and action plan to focus on, the principals were able to share practices and increase their individual and collective capacity as they interacted with each other. Trusting relationships existed within the PLTs. One
principal mentioned, “There’s no judgment and we are free to admit weak areas we need to work on within the PLT.” Collaborative conversations existed and the principal’s capacity increased when a non-judgmental atmosphere existed. Research on social capital supported this finding as principals trusted each other, shared the same interests within their PLT, and authentic conversations and learning transpired (Fullan, 2011b; Taliaferro & Seigler, 2012). Considering Pink’s (2009) four essential ingredients to build capacity, the first is participating in meaningful work. By participating in meaningful work, the second ingredient exists which is increased capacity. The third ingredient is the autonomy to make decisions which leads to the fourth ingredient of developing collective capacity within the organization. The four ingredients are evident in this finding as principals in the PLT focus on meaningful work and learn from each other to build individual and collective capacity.

Culture of trust and vulnerability. Fullan’s (2011a) research maintains when high social capital exists, motivation with education practices exist and capacity is built as it is cultivated throughout a culture. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) explain social capital must be the catalyst for human capital to exist within a culture. Social capital exists when individuals are clear on their purpose and trust exists within the culture. Maguire’s (1994) states when clarity exists on the shared purpose, members are motivated to work towards a goal developing and cultivating relationships through the focused work. Social capital and the PLC dimension of relationships within supportive conditions is evident within this finding as 10 out of the 11 participants expressed the importance of trust and vulnerability. Three principals highlighted building social capital through being vulnerable and transparent. One of the principals commented on ensuring that teachers stay on her campus by focusing on the right work being supported by the district, and growing together. Another principal referred to going through the PLC process as an
opportunity to be transparent with the staff as clarity is gained, and they go back and revisit PLC components. This principal commented on the importance of being vulnerable, “When I make an error it’s important to explain what I’ve learned from the mistake with my staff.” The third principal said that by knowing the central office relies on her to know what’s best for her teachers, two-way trust develops with the central office.

The central office staff also expressed the PLC process allows vulnerability to exist throughout the district culture. The cabinet member commented on seeing an increased vulnerability as principals and central office work together through the PLC process. Three of the four directors indicated the importance of shifting from principals feeling like they have to know everything and have all the answers. One director mentioned they had a trusting system where people can be vulnerable and feel safe to ask questions. Where the second director focused on approaching continuous improvement within a safe environment as permission to not have all the right answers, the third director expressed, “Principals are successful because they feel safe to be transparent and not judged.” These findings support the research by Fullan (2011a), Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), and Maguire (1994) on ensuring a high level of social capital exists, which encompasses trust and vulnerability while developing relationships between central office and elementary principals.

Continuous Improvement

Continuous learning, change, and feedback and reflection subcategories developed the continuous improvement theme. This theme was developed from principals and directors constantly learning and improving practices. Change was an active process in this district with continuous growth and continuous learning in practice. The effectiveness and sustainability of the change exists with feedback and reflection from individuals as individual and collective
capacity is created. Figure 14 shows the theme of continuous improvement and its subcategories.

*Figure 14. Continuous improvement as a theme.*

Continuous learning. In examining capacity building for elementary principals, continuous learning surfaced from six of the 11 participants. Three out of the four directors focused on continuous learning for principals. One director mentioned how impressed she was with how principals take their learning and individualize it to fit their campus. Another director expressed, “Principals are now coming into the principalship ready to lead the PLC process on a campus.” The third director centered on the principal learning with teachers as they worked and learned together to answer their questions. The three principals mentioned teachers seeing them, as learners learning alongside them, and the district modeling the continuous learning process by following up with them as critical components. This finding illustrated the principals’ understanding of shared learning experiences used to build capacity. Fullan’s (2011b) research supports this finding by stating people must develop talent from deliberate repeated practices. With principals in this study practicing, participating, and sharing their learning with their
campus, they cultivated knowledge and developed the capacity within themselves and their campus. The collective learning application and shared and supportive leadership PLC dimension is also supported in this finding as Hord’s (2008) research refers to the principal as a facilitator in order to increase the capacity of teachers through the process of sharing and facilitating their learning as principals with their staff members.

The director also focused on continuous learning in her current role. She mentioned learning herself so she can pull and nudge principals through the PLC process. Fullan’s (2013) research on the push pull strategy is echoed in this finding by stating that people must be pulled in to motivate, be willing to learn, and committed to spread positivity throughout the district in order for collective capacity to be built.

Change. Fullan (2001) explains that moral purpose is positively making an impact by clearly aligning actions to meet the final outcome. In the current study, adjustments and changes were made for continuous improvement to be embedded within the culture. Structures, practices, and behaviors were changed to reach the end outcome. This shared mindset of continuous improvement provided the capacity and momentum to attain the third component from the PLC Essentials document, results. Four participants, from the central office staff mentioned change being a constant motion in the district due to the sheer volume of growth and mindset to create change in order to improve continuously. Research supports this finding as change is a cyclical and systemic process shared by all stakeholders clear on and adjusting behaviors based on the moral purpose of the organization (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves, 2004).

Participants in the current study mentioned three phases of the educational change process. Fullan (2001) explained the three phases of change are in constant motion. Participants in the current study explained practices within each phase of the change process. A principal
referred to the first stage within the change process of initiating formative assessments with teachers by changing practices and responding to the generated data from the formative assessment in order to increase student results. Another principal used the term ‘shift’ for what teaching now looks like within a PLC. A director explained, “We are really good at implementing initiatives, but we forget to measure the effectiveness to see if it’s working.” Fullan’s (2007) research parallels this finding by explaining that educators begin initiatives, but often do not have a process or the capacity to see the initiatives come to fruition.

The third principal managed to explain how her campus is currently in an implementation dip with the changes occurring since she came to the campus. Fullan (2001) describes this term as a “dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings” (p. 40).

A director focused on monitoring and adjusting the PLC sustainability effort by adjusting the PLC Boosters and Academies to meet the specific needs of AISD. Fullan’s (2006) research mirrors this finding by suggesting that within the sustaining stage of the change process energy must increase as reflection and feedback lead to the next new expectation or standard. In AISD, the constant monitoring and adjusting of practices for the support of the district wide PLC process helps to know how to classify initiatives within the three phases of educational change and to know what the next step is in the continuous improvement process.

Feedback and reflection. Five of the 11 participants mentioned feedback and reflection in connection with various contexts to building capacity. The cabinet member used feedback and reflection as a method to formatively assess the district and determine adjustments based on the feedback. Two directors referred to the sustainability process of the districtwide PLC by asking reflective guiding questions such as “Did it improve maybe here and not so much there?” The
other two directors focused on elementary principals being reflective and motivated by having a two-way dialogue to allow principals to express concerns on practices and goals created or adjusted based on the reflection and feedback. Having the opportunity to see how feedback and reflection offers clarity and intrinsically motivates people in the current study, supports the research on individual and collective motivation increasing when people are self-reflective and embrace feedback (Conchie, 2013; Fullan, 2011b; Koestner et al., 1987; Larson & Rusk, 2011; Panagiotakopoulos, 2014).

Differentiated Opportunities to Learn

In the theme differentiated opportunities to learn, principal learning and new principal learning exist as the subcategories for the theme as shown in Figure 15. This theme contains the learning experiences for existing principals and learning experiences for new principals in AISD.

![Figure 15. Differentiated opportunities to learn as a theme.](image)

Principal learning. In examining professional learning opportunities to support elementary capacity building, every participant mentioned a learning opportunity. However, the most intriguing finding was individualized learning and collaborative learning opportunities
allowing for increased individual and collective capacity. Participants mentioned the principal meetings as an opportunity to share practices and learn from collaborating with each other.

The director mentioned the PLC Hybrid breakout sessions were individualized for campuses to receive training and support in an area specific to the campuses goals. The coordinators along with the three principals expressed the PLC Boosters and Academies gave principals time with their leadership teams to learn the content, individualize, and apply the learning on their campuses. The research on the shared and supportive leadership PLC dimension supports this finding as these learning opportunities allow for members of the leadership team to transfer their learning back to the campus to increase others’ capacity as the elementary principal supports and guides this process (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Pearce et al.’s (2014) research emphasizes the importance of leadership being a social process rather than a hierarchical process.

Roseler and Dentzau’s (2013) research indicates collaborative learning opportunities allow for shared knowledge and understanding to exist through the shared learning experience. This research is mirrored in the current study as the cabinet member, directors, and elementary principals mentioned the principal book study increased their individual capacity as they were able to make connections, share the connections at principal meetings, and apply them on their campus. The other cabinet member also stated the individualized learning for principals is situational based on the specific circumstance or opportunities that arise on campus. This finding supports research on the PLC dimension of shared personal practice by indicating opportunities to learn together and from each other increase individual capacity, while also increasing trust and vulnerability (Hipp & Huffman, 2010).
New principal learning. For new principals in AISD, a structure in place to support individual learning described by one of the coordinators is the principal mentorships where each new principal receives a principal mentor for their first year as principal. New principals receive individual support from area directors on an on-going basis throughout the inductive year collectively and individually. One of the cabinet members expressed honoring where the campus is currently and meeting with the new principals to create a vision for moving each school forward with the new principal. This process of receiving heavy support by the cabinet members, area directors, and mentor principal provided the new principal with many individual learning opportunities. New principals also meet and collaborate together during their first year as a principal. This system of shared and supportive leadership paralleled the findings in other shared and supportive leadership research that allows for influence of team members to be reciprocated and accepted by the new principal. The perspectives, effectiveness, and professionalism is increased in the new principal resulting from the support system and new learning from others during the first year (Hord, 2008; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Muethel & Hoegl, 2013).

Data Use

In the data use theme, the subcategories are focus for principals, uses of data, and student achievement data as show in Figure 16. The subcategory focus for principals describes how data allows principals to focus on specific areas. The second subcategory focuses on the multiple ways data is utilized in the district. The third subcategory student achievement data explains how student data determines the focus for ongoing learning in the districtwide PLC.
Focus for principals. In the current study, the elementary principals expressed data gave them a focus point to start setting goals. Curriculum and instruction used district data to help to support the principals and campus in narrowing a specific focus based on the campus data. Two of the three principals mentioned the data support from C&I helped narrow the instruction focus and gave them a target. This practice mirrors the research that focuses intentionally on aligned goals between the district and campuses within a PLC starts with and is the collective responsibility of the central office (Carney, 2010; Russell, 2013).

Uses of data. In a study by Fullan (2013), Sanger Unified school district doubled its achievement scores within a year by focusing and monitoring data. Fullan (2006, 2011a) focuses his research on collecting and using data to build the lateral capacity within a district and disaggregating data which led to transformation of school systems. Hord’s (1997) research on the collective learning and application PLC dimension also supports this finding by stating that people must collaborate about student data. When this practice occurs, teachers improve their practice, which ultimately improves student practices.

The findings in the current study support Fullan’s (2006, 2011a) and Hord’s (1997) research and show data used in a variety of ways in AISD, however, the depth of data and methods may need targeted support from the C&I team. The central office staff expressed using
data as a way to strategically plan while the elementary principals mentioned specific ways to use data on their campuses. Participants from the central office staff expressed using data as a formative assessment and to create campus action plans. See Appendix N for the campus action plan. The central office staff participants were very strategic in using data by having the end outcome in mind. A director mentioned using survey data to determine next steps with professional learning. The other director was process focused when referring to data, by indicating that based on the data, specific processes should be put in place such as collaborative planning. A director also coached principals on understanding what data from surveys may mean.

The coordinator maintained learning walks gave soft data to the C&I Department and principals. This finding also supports the shared personal practice PLC dimension and Steiny’s (2009) research. By establishing a focus based on data, a shared purpose exists as teachers visit classrooms followed by a debriefing time where shared knowledge is generated as teachers discuss the teacher and student behaviors noted during the learning walk focus (Steiny, 2009). This finding clearly indicates the various ways data is used in AISD among the central office staff members.

The principals referred to analyzing data from walkthroughs, learning walks, surveys, and teacher observations. Two of the three principals mentioned they were in the early stages of using data. A principal referred to using the data protocol the district initiated this year to support principals with a data structure. She expressed having a lot of data on the campus and really not knowing what process to use and then follow through. Another principal indicated using the data protocol as well as pulling data specific to teacher and grade level. She also stated
that she would like to be able to analyze the district data to ensure her data aligns with the districts.

Student achievement data. Student progress and growth surfaced as the ultimate outcome of education in the current study. The collective learning and application PLC dimension continues to be fluid within this finding as members within the districtwide PLC determine learning that needs to occur based on student data. The action step could involve professional learning or training to increase student achievement (Hord, 1997, 2008; Hipp & Huffman, 2010). The findings support this research as the participants indicated using various data determines student growth. One of the cabinet members asserted everything rests on student achievement data. While a coordinator focused on using data to measure student growth. A director expressed that it is the evidence of teachers progressing students as well as having the dialogue about students and their growth with their teammates. In this study, student growth encompassed continuous improvement for elementary principals in order for student achievement to occur. As mentioned by the participants, student achievement occurs from collecting and having dialogue about data in order for continuous improvement to exist within the culture.

Final Discussion

In order to combine and analyze the findings, it is important that I address the findings within the original research questions. Research Question 1 - What is the central office staff’s role in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growth district? Seven of the eight central office staff members specifically mention supporting elementary principals as their primary role. They explicitly suggest their support is for building elementary principal’s capacity to impact student learning coupled with solving problems and creating solutions. Participants also talked about supporting with curriculum content and how it can be used within
a PLC. The director explained the primary role in building elementary principal’s capacity was to provide focus for elementary principals. Six themes were generated within this study incorporating support for building capacity in elementary principals. Theme 1, PLC infrastructure, provided alignment with support structures and systems in order for effective support to be received. Participants focused on their specific role of providing support for elementary principals as well as the individual coaching support principals received from an outside consultant, area director, and instructional coach in Theme 2, supportive central office. See Appendix O for the instructional coach role. In Theme 3, collaborative culture, participants focused on learning and collaborating with each other through a trusting and vulnerable culture within the PLT structure. This displays support, by learning from and with each other in a safe environment. Research supports this notion that learning will exceed with a culture of safety and transparency exists (Fullan, 2011a; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Support is encompassed in Theme 4, continuous improvement, as central office provided learning opportunities to meet elementary principals’ needs as well as improved their own learning in order to be able to provide support for elementary principals. Support with initiating and implementing change was also mentioned in Theme 4. Participants talked about the district offering PLC Hybrid’s, PLC Boosters, and PLC Academies as support provided for principal’s to differentiate their learning in Theme 5, differentiated opportunities to learn. Theme 6, data use, provided specific protocols and supports in place to support principals with disaggregating and using data. However, within this theme, it should be noted that elementary principals mentioned, “not knowing what to do with the amounts of data” and “wanting time to analyze district data” which shows that the district should provide heavier and focused support with this process.
Research Question 2 - How does central office staff use the PLC process as the main driver in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growth district? In Theme 1, PLC infrastructure the subcategory, PLC process was generated by three components, shared and common language, shared practices, and shared knowledge. Shared and common language was the first subcategory central office staff members mentioned having different roles, but ensuring shared language among the different roles. Participants talked about having deeper and targeted conversations, which allowed for shared language to develop. Once a shared and common language existed shared practices developed within the PLC process by having aligned structures and systems in place. The elementary principals mentioned modeling shared practices to support teachers while also receiving support from the C&I Department to ensure practices are aligned. The third category in the PLC process is shared knowledge. Two central office staff members talked about everyone hearing the same message, and aligning trainings and learning experiences in order for a shared knowledge to exist. This process begins with generating a shared understanding and meaning by generating shared and common language, which leads to shared practices. Going through those two processes leads to shared knowledge, which develops from feedback and reflection based on shared language and shared practice. Participants also described having an embedded and protected time to collaborate was essential within a PLC process. In Theme 2, supportive central office, two participants mentioned their role being to support curriculum content within the PLC process.

In Theme 3, collaborative culture, participants engage in the PLC process by creating collaborative cultures through trust and vulnerability. Four participants mentioned creating a culture of continuous improvement by shifting principals to learners that do not have to have all the answers. In Theme 4, continuous improvement, participants expressed utilizing the change
process with ongoing learning opportunities for principals to support the PLC process. Within Theme 5, differentiated opportunities to learn, participants expressed individualized learning as they transferred the learning from the PLC Hybrid, PLC Booster’s, and PLC Academies back to their campus as part of the PLC process. Five participants mentioned continuous improvement for principals as principals collectively engaged in a book study. In Theme 6, data use, participants mentioned analyzing data to determine next steps for student and teacher learning to support the PLC process.

Research Question 3 - How are the five PLC dimensions used to support capacity building in elementary principals? The five PLC dimensions are fluid throughout all six themes generated in this study. The dimensions are explicitly mentioned within each theme in the Conclusions section of the study. Table 8 shows each theme, subcategory and the PLC dimensions embedded within each category and theme.

Final Thoughts

From the conclusions and discussions, several key thoughts should be addressed. First, a focus and data prioritization on campuses surfaced as a needed priority within Abby ISD. The central office staff members referred to data as a way to generate goals and a focus, and elementary principals focused on specific ways to use data. A common districtwide way to first understand data is suggested. In addition, elementary principals expressed the large amounts of data they had and not knowing how to use it. By prioritizing and creating an essential process to analyze data for campuses, this will decrease the time and energy spent using non-essential data. By increasing the focus, conversations, and time spent on the campus analyzing and using data, data processes will become a naturally embedded practice on the campus. It should be noted, that this is a positive needed area to prioritize as the six themes generated in the study first have
to be activated before data can be emphasized within a district. A focus on data is a natural next step for this district.

Table 8

*Connections with Themes and PLC Dimensions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Theme Subcategory</th>
<th>PLC Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: PLC Infrastructure</td>
<td>Structures and Systems</td>
<td>• Supportive Conditions – Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Supportive Conditions – Structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PLC Process</td>
<td>• Shared Personal Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Supportive Conditions – Structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Collective Learning Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Supportive Central Office</td>
<td>Elementary Principal’s Perception of Support from Central Office</td>
<td>• Shared Values and Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Collaborative Culture</td>
<td>Culture of Trust and Vulnerability</td>
<td>• Supportive Conditions – Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Continuous Improvement</td>
<td>Continuous Learning</td>
<td>• Collective Learning Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Shared and Supportive Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Differentiated Opportunities to Learn</td>
<td>Principal Learning</td>
<td>• Shared and Supportive Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6: Data Use</td>
<td>Uses of Data</td>
<td>• Shared Personal Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Achievement Data</td>
<td>• Collective Learning Application</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second thought I would like draw attention to is a method to ensure practices mentioned within this study are consistent across the 38 elementary campuses. Specific data practices were mentioned along with common formative assessments. It is critical to ensure all
campuses share the same understanding and use practices with consistency within the districtwide PLC.

Data from the PLCA-DS indicated in the school where the principal with 0-5 years experience was, the staff members felt the district supported their campus with the PLC five dimensions the most. The PLCA-DS scores were similar between the elementary C&I Department and Mountain View Elementary. This supports the data collected from the interviews and explained that by implementing a districtwide PLC, principals hired within the district come to the position ready to lead the campus through the PLC process.

Another thought to mention is the relationship between the shared values and vision PLC dimensions within the PLCA-DS and the elementary principals stating the central office gives them the vision for their campus. The shared values and vision dimension was the highest scored dimension with a 4.9 out of 6. Two of the three principals mentioned the central office giving them the vision for their campus. The focus the central office provides on practices within the districtwide PLC, support the districtwide vision, which transfers to campuses wanting to align their campus vision to the district vision.

Recommendations and Further Research

Although there were only 11 participants interviewed in this study, the perspectives and experiences are extensive. While participants are only a minimal representation of the elementary principals and central office staff members in rapid growth districts, their reflections align with the research on central office practices to build capacity. Participants in this study believed continuous improvement increased their individual capacity while also increasing the collective capacity of the district. First as I reflect on this research and the process, several questions emerge, I wonder if participants in this study were increased would the findings yield
different results? Since I was an employee of the district in this study, would the results be different if someone from outside the district interviewed the participants? Also, would the responses be different if I interviewed participants who did not know me in a different rapid growth district?

Interviewing the central office staff members and elementary principals gave insight into practices within a districtwide PLC in a rapid growth district. Further research on other rapid growth districts initiating the PLC process would be beneficial. What is their central office’s role in building capacity in elementary principals? Would their perceptions of building capacity be different from Abby ISD personnel’s perceptions? More research on districtwide PLCs would also be beneficial. The PLC process has clearly been defined in Abby ISD, but how would that differ or align with another districtwide PLC initiative?

Conducting this study and administering the PLCA-DS in this district two to three years later after the PLC process is in the possible beginning stages of sustaining, would allow for even deeper insight to the districtwide PLC process. It would also reveal more practices integrated or eliminated in this process.

Specific practices were mentioned in this study in relation to building capacity in elementary principals. In a rapid growth district, is the perception and behavior of the practice consistent across the district? How can the practices mentioned be consistent within a rapid growth district? Does this practice of disaggregating data differ from another practice of disaggregating data? Does a response to the common formative assessment differ from another response to the same common formative assessment question?

Researching elementary principals in small school districts embarking in rapid growth, compared to elementary principals in large school districts continuing rapid growth, and the
support received from their central office staff, would be interesting. Do elementary principals in small schools receive as much or more support as elementary principals in larger districts?

In this study, I presented the role of central office staff along with utilizing the PLC process related to building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growth district. I also incorporated the use of the five PLC dimensions to support elementary principals in this study. Further research needs to build on this by finding the most effective ways to use the dimensions in a rapid growth district. I presented research of supports, structures, and systems utilized to build capacity in elementary principals. There is room for research to build on this study by investigating specific conditions within the school system to utilize specific supports, structures, and systems.

Summary

Research has established the role of central office support with building capacity in elementary principals in a districtwide PLC. This dissertation was designed to create a greater insight and understanding of capacity building utilizing the PLC process in a rapid growth district. My goal was to describe and investigate the processes used by central office staff members in a rapid growth district in Texas to support capacity building in elementary principals using a PLC framework. By examining the roles and practices of central office staff members and the perception of elementary principals, six themes emerged to support capacity building in elementary principals in a rapid growth district. The six themes were (a) PLC infrastructure, (b) supportive central office, (c) collaborative culture, (d) continuous improvement, (e) differentiated opportunities to learn, and (f) data use. These findings contribute to research and practices by examining the role of central office staff members as they support capacity building in elementary principals through the PLC process. The findings also documented how the five
PLC dimensions are utilized as a support mechanism for elementary principal capacity building.

The data collection, analysis, and conclusions were determined from the perceptions of the district participants who were using and applying the practices reported in this research.
APPENDIX A

UNT INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
December 21, 2015

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Jane Huffman
Student Investigator: Jacye Jamar
College of Education
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 15524

Dear Dr. Huffman:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled “District Support: Strategies for Building Capacity in Elementary principals in a Rapid Growth District.” The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(e) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, December 21, 2015 to December 20, 2016.

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use this form only for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications. If continuing review is not granted before December 20, 2016, IRB approval of this research expires on that date.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst at extension 4643 if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Chad R. Trulson, Ph.D.
Professor
Department of Criminal Justice
Chair, Institutional Review Board
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

For interviews

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

**Title of Study:** District Support: Strategies for Building Capacity in Elementary Principals in a Rapid Growth District

**Student Investigator:** Jacye Jamar, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of College of Education. **Supervising Investigator:** Dr. Jane Huffman.

**Purpose of the Study:** You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves the investigation of a rapidly growing school district, and how central administration builds capacity and supports elementary principals within the professional learning community framework.

**Study Procedures:** You will be asked to participate in an interview about your experiences and perceptions of the support central office provides to support continuous improvement for elementary principals in a rapid growth district by Jacye Jamar. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes.

**Foreseeable Risks:** No foreseeable risks are involved in this study

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you; but we hope to learn more about how systems and structures are aligned districtwide in order to accommodate on-going growth and elementary principals

**Compensation for Participants:** You will not receive compensation for your participation.

**Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records:** The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. Participants; or school names will not be used. Pseudonyms will be assigned to protect identities. All records and information will be kept on a remote storage device and locked in the office of the Supervising Investigator. As per federal regulations, the research participants’ information will be maintained for three years and then will be deleted.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Jacye Jamar at jamarj@friscoisd.org or Dr. Jane Huffman at jane.huffman@unt.edu
**Review for the Protection of Participants:** This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-4643 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

**Research Participants' Rights:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- Jacye Jamar has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

______________________________
Printed Name of Participant

______________________________
Signature of Participant

______________________________
Date

**For the Student Investigator:** I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

______________________________
Signature of Student Investigator

______________________________
Date

**APPROVED BY THE UNT IRB**

FROM 12/21/15 TO 12/20/16

Office of Research Integrity & Compliance
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Notice

For PLCA-DS

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: District Support: Strategies for Building Capacity in Elementary Principals in a Rapid Growth District

Student Investigator: Jacye Jamar, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of College of Education. Supervising Investigator: Dr. Jane Huffman.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves the investigation of a rapidly growing school district, and how central administration builds capacity and supports elementary principals within the professional learning community framework.

Study Procedures: The attached survey was developed as part of a research study of Professional Learning Communities to assess the level district support for the professional learning community process. You are asked to participate in the study by completing a 67-item survey that should take no more than 15 minutes.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you; but we hope to learn more about how systems and structures are aligned districtwide in order to accommodate on-going growth and elementary principals

Compensation for Participants: You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. Participants; or school names will not be used. Pseudonyms will be assigned to protect identities. All records and information will be kept on a remote storage device and locked in the office of the Supervising Investigator. As per federal regulations, the research participants’ information will be maintained for three years and then will be deleted.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Jacye Jamar at jamarj@friscoisd.org or Dr. Jane Huffman at jane.huffman@unt.edu

Office of Research Integrity & Compliance
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

Page 1 of 2
Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-4643 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants’ Rights: Your participation in the survey confirms that you have read all of the above and that you agree to all of the following:

- This form has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You understand the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You understand you may print a copy of this form for your records.

Continue with the survey.

Close your browser to exit the survey.

Thank you.
APPENDIX B

PLC ESSENTIALS DOCUMENT
The Way We Work: Professional Learning Community Essentials

A professional learning community is an ongoing school improvement process that builds a culture and an infrastructure, or a way of working together, which results in continuous improvement.

Abby ISD’s mission is to know every student by name and need. We embrace the professional learning community framework as a way of accomplishing our mission. As educators, this mission requires us to learn, collaborate, and achieve results. We have a shared responsibility for each student’s learning and growth.

Our collective vision is that members of a professional learning community will support and work interdependently to inquire, reflect, and improve professional practice that will operationalize our mission.

Learning
We acknowledge that the fundamental purpose of our schools is to help all students achieve high levels of learning, and therefore, we are willing to examine all our practices in light of their impact on learning.

The priorities for our shared work will include the following:

A. Schools will build collective knowledge of the TEKS and use the Frisco ISD Scope and Sequence to create learning targets.
B. Schools will develop and implement common formative assessments to monitor student mastery and guide instructional decisions.
C. Schools will plan for learning to meet the needs of each student by responding to the four essential questions of a professional learning community:
   • What do we want students to know and be able to do?
   • How will we know if students have learned it?
   • How will we respond when they have not learned it?
   • How will we respond when they already know it?
D. Schools will create and implement rigorous and relevant learning opportunities that meet the needs of each student, including intervention and enrichment.

Collaboration
We are committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose of learning for all. Collaborative teams will be inclusive and work interdependently with all departments to meet the needs of each student.

The priorities for the shared work of our collaborative teams are:

A. Schools will protect the time collaborative teams are given during the school day and year to meet on a regular basis.
B. Schools will work in collaborative teams to clarify what students must learn, gather evidence of student learning, analyze the evidence, identify best teaching strategies, and share these strategies across all teams.
C. Schools will ensure that collaborative teams implement the Frisco ISD curriculum while empowering the teacher to differentiate instructional activities to meet the various needs of students.

D. Collaborative teams will analyze common assessments to guide instructional decision making and planning.

Results
We assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams, and schools seek relevant data and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement. The priorities for our shared work are:

A. Schools will analyze data from various sources, including assessments, to identify strengths and areas for growth in curriculum and instruction.

B. Schools will respond to the data by differentiating instruction and personalizing student learning opportunities.
Our mission is to know every student by name and need.

Professional Learning Communities in Abby ISD: A Common Vocabulary

Language itself is a critical tool for successful collaboration (Bean, Grumet, and Bulazo, 1999). To ensure that all ISD leaders have a shared understanding of these critical terms for their work with Professional Learning Communities and Best Practices, this common vocabulary document has been created for 2014-2015. The definitions provided are to serve as a guide for a common knowledge of vocabulary across the district.

Professional Learning Community (PLC) - Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes 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. Schools that function as PLCs are composed of collaborative teams. The people on these teams have a shared responsibility to answer the four critical questions in ways that enhance the learning of their students: (1) What is it we want each student to learn, (2) How will we know when each student has learned, (3) How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning, and (4) How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient? (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

Professional Learning Community Essentials – The document that provides a framework for the way we work as a PLC. It contains the expectations and priorities for school personnel in the areas of learning, collaboration, and results.

Action Orientation - A predisposition to learn by doing; moving quickly to turn aspirations into actions and visions into realities. Members of PLCs understand that the most powerful learning always occurs in a context of taking action, and they value engagement and reflective experience as the most effective teachers.

Action Research - A process of collective inquiry in which individuals work together to become more proficient at identifying and solving problems. The steps of action research include: (1) formulating a problem, (2) identifying and implementing a strategy to address the problem, (3) creating a process for gathering evidence of the effectiveness of the strategy, (4) collecting and analyzing the evidence, and (4) making decisions based on the evidence.

Assessment - The systematic collection, review, and use of information about learning or instruction undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Common Assessment - An assessment of student learning that uses the same instrument or a common process utilizing the same criteria for determining the quality of student work. In a PLC, common assessments are also created by a team of teachers with collective responsibility for the learning of a group of students who are expected to acquire the same knowledge and skills. Team-developed common assessments provide members with the basis of comparison that turns data into information and help individuals identify strengths and weaknesses in their instructional strategies. They also help identify problem areas in the curriculum that require attention.

Common Formative Assessment - An assessment typically created collaboratively by a team of teachers responsible for the same grade level or course. These are used frequently throughout the year to identify (1) individual students who need additional time and support for learning, (2) the teaching strategies most effective in helping students acquire the intended knowledge and skills, (3) curriculum concerns—areas in which students generally are having difficulty achieving the intended standard—and (4) improvement goals for individual teachers and the team.

168
**Formative Assessment** - Assessments for learning that are a part of an ongoing process to monitor each student’s learning on a continuous basis. They are intended to inform teachers regarding the effectiveness of their practice and students of their next steps on the scaffolding of learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010). In a PLC, collaborative teams also use common formative assessments to (1) identify students who are experiencing difficulty in their learning, (2) provide those student with additional time and support in a way that does not remove them from new direct instruction, and (3) give them additional opportunities to demonstrate their learning.

**Summative Assessment** - Assessments that determine if students have met intended standards by a specified deadline (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010).

**Backwards Planning for Learning** – The process of analyzing TEKS/standards to determine learning outcomes and planning for learning to meet the needs of students by responding to the four essentials questions of a PLC:

1. What do we want students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know if students have learned it?
3. How will we respond when they haven’t learned it?
4. How will we respond when they already know it?

**Building Shared Knowledge** - Learning together. Members of professional learning communities always attempt to answer critical questions by first learning together. They engage in collective inquiry to build shared knowledge. This collective study of the same information increases the likelihood that members will arrive at the same conclusion. Members of a PLC, by definition, will learn together.

**Capacity Building** - “Developing the collective ability—dispositions, skills, knowledge, motivation, and resources—to act together to bring about positive change” (Fullan, 2005, p. 4).

**Celebration** – An important strategy for reinforcing the shared purpose, vision, collective commitments, and goals of the school or district. Celebration is the most powerful tool for sustaining the improvement initiative.

**Closing the Achievement Gap** - Our mission is to support the advanced academic achievement among all students. Specifically, we have an emphasis to increase the advanced academic performance of economically disadvantaged and the lowest performing student groups.

**Coaching** - To coach is to help an individual or a group take action toward the individual’s or group’s goals while simultaneously helping the individual or group to develop expertise in planning, reflecting, problem solving, and decision-making (Garmston and Wellman) (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

**Collaboration** - A systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results. In a PLC, collaboration focuses on the four critical questions of learning: What is it we want each student to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient?

**Collective Commitments** - The third pillar of the PLC foundation. Collective commitments (or values) represent the promises made among and between all stakeholders that answer the question, What must we do to become the organization we have agreed we hope to become?

**Collective Inquiry** - The process of building shared knowledge by clarifying the questions that a group will explore together. In PLCs, educators engage in collective inquiry into more effective practices by examining both external evidence (such as research) and internal evidence (which teachers are getting the best results). They also build shared knowledge regarding the reality of the current practices and conditions in their schools or districts.

**Collaborative Learning Teams** - People who are committed to working together to achieve a collective purpose of learning for all students. The teams meet on a regular basis during the school day. They clarify what students must learn, gather evidence of student learning, analyze the evidence, identify powerful
teaching strategies/best practices, and transfer strategies across all teams and to all team members. Teams develop, where appropriate, unified policies and procedures regarding content scope, sequencing, pacing, grading, and other assessment practices. The collaborative teams work interdependently together to create and achieve common SMART goals (Adapted from DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

Consensus - Consensus is achieved when (1) all points of view have not only been heard but also solicited, and (2) the will of the group is evident even to those who most oppose it.

Continuous Improvement Process – The ongoing cycle of planning, doing, checking, and acting designed to improve results—constantly. In a PLC, this cycle includes gathering evidence of current levels of student learning, developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning, implementing those strategies and ideas, analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not, and applying the new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement.

Culture - The assumptions, beliefs, values, and habits that constitute the norm for the school and guide the work of the educators within it.

Data Informed Decision Making - Data should not be used in isolation to make decisions and/or judgments. The purpose of data is to help us ask focused questions. These questions should help guide collaborative conversations that support our continuous improvement process whether that be for a specific item, student, student group, or programs.

Dialogue - A reflective learning process in which group members seek to understand one another's viewpoints and deeply held assumptions (Garmston and Wellman, 2009) (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

Efficacy - Refers to knowing that I have the capacity to make a difference through my work and being willing to take the responsibility to do so. Efficacy describes people who have internal resourcefulness; they take responsibility; they know they have choices and make choices; they are problem-solvers; and they take action (Costa and Garmston) (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

Efficiency - A level of performance that describes a process that uses the lowest amount of inputs to create the greatest amount of outputs.

Enrichment - A higher quality of work that is covered in depth, broadens the learning experience and promotes higher-level thinking.

Essential Outcomes - The critical skills, knowledge, and dispositions each student must acquire as a result of each course, grade level, and unit of instruction. Essential learning may also be referred to as essential outcomes, power standards (Reeves, 2002), guaranteed and viable curriculum (Marzano, 2003), essential academic goals (Lezotte, 1991), learning intentions and success criteria (Hattie, 2009), or learning expectations and tangible exemplars of student proficiency (Saphier, 2005).

Essential Questions of Collaborative Teams - In a PLC, collaboration focuses on four critical questions of learning: (1) What is it we want each student to learn, (2) How will we know when each student has learned, (3) How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning, and (4) How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient?
Foundation of a Professional Learning Community - PLCs rest upon a shared mission of high levels of learning for all students. In order to achieve that mission, educators create a common vision of the school they must create, develop collective commitments or values regarding what they will do to create such a school, and use goals as measurable milestones to monitor their progress.

Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum - A curriculum that (1) gives students access to the same essential learning regardless of who is teaching the class and (2) can be taught in the time allotted (Marzano, 2003).

High Expectations - Positive inferences teachers make about the future academic achievement of their students based on what they know about their students (Good & Brophy, 2002). “High expectations for success will be judged, not only by the initial staff beliefs and behaviors, but also by the organization’s response when some students do not learn” (Lezotte, 1991, p. 4).

Intervention - A vital, sequential part of the instructional program that provides additional time and support to any student demonstrating the need to enrich, accelerate, or address learning gaps (Buffum, Mattos, and Webber, 2009) (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

Lateral Capacity Building - This process involves fostering substantial professional learning communities within schools, and clusters of schools learning from each other. This is working together with peers and professionals to learn from them and share resources, ideas, and knowledge.

Learning Walks - A focused visit to classrooms in a content area, or throughout an entire school, to gather information, provide feedback to teachers, then reflect on a specific instructional practice for the purpose of continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

Learning Organization - “Organizations where people continually expand their capacities to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p. 3). Members of a PLC engage in the ongoing study and constant reflective practice that characterize an organization committed to continuous improvement.

Mission - The fundamental purpose of an organization. Mission answers the question, Why do we exist?

Moral Imperative - “Acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole” (Fullan, 2001, p. 3). Fullan lists a commitment to moral purpose as a critical element of effective leadership and contends leadership must be ultimately assessed by the extent to which it awakens and mobilizes the moral purpose of those within the organization.

Prerequisite Skills - The knowledge, and dispositions essential for success in the next unit, course, or grade level (Reeves, 2002).

Professional Development - A lifelong, collaborative learning process that nourishes the growth of individuals, teams, and the school through a daily job-embedded, learner-centered, focused approach (National Staff Development Council, 2000).

Professional Learning - A comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving all employees’ effectiveness in their role for the ultimate purpose of raising achievement for each FISD student. Professional learning fosters collective responsibility for this purpose and for the overall effectiveness, efficiency, and customer satisfaction of FISD. It must be ongoing, aligned, embedded in the workplace, collaborative, data-driven, clearly defined, and assessed for effectiveness.
RTI - A systematic school-wide plan that ensures every student in every course or grade level will receive additional time and support for learning as soon as he or she experiences difficulty in acquiring essential knowledge and skills. The multi-tiered intervention occurs during the school day, and students are required rather than invited to devote the extra time and secure the extra support for learning.

Reciprocal Accountability - The premise that leaders who call upon members of the organization to engage in new work, achieve new standards, and accomplish new goals have a responsibility to those members to develop their capacity to be successful in meeting these challenges: “For every increment of performance we ask of educators, there is an equal responsibility to provide them with the capacity to meet that expectation” (Elmore, 2004, p. 93). For example, principals of professional learning communities recognize they have an obligation to provide staff with the resources, training, mentoring, and support to help them successfully accomplish what they have been asked to do.

Shared Leadership - The organization fosters shared leadership that is widely distributed throughout departments and schools rather than vested in an individual person or position. Emphasis is placed on interdependence and developing the capacity of people throughout the organization to assume leadership roles.

Shared Vision - Building a sense of commitment in a group by developing shared images of the future the group seeks to create and the principles and guiding practices by which it hopes to get there (Senge, 1994) (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

Simultaneous Loose and Tight School Culture - A leadership concept in which leaders encourage autonomy and creativity (loose) within well-defined parameters and priorities that must be honored (tight). The concept has also been referred to as “directed empowerment” (Waterman, 1987), a “culture of discipline with an ethic of entrepreneurship” (Collins, 2001, p. 124) and “defined autonomy” (Marzano and Waters, 2009) (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

SMART Goals - Goals that are Strategic & Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Timebound (O’Neill & Conzemius, 2005).

Team - A group of people working interdependently to achieve a common goal for which members are held mutually accountable. Collaborative teams are the fundamental building blocks of PLCs.

Team Norms - In PLCs, norms represent collective commitments developed by each team to guide members in working together. Norms help team members clarify expectations regarding how they will work together to achieve their shared goals.

Trust - One’s willingness to be vulnerable to another based on the confidence that the other is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent (Mishra, 1996; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 1998, 2000). Trusting relationships allow colleagues to engage in honest dialogue, make commitments to one another, hold each other accountable, and collectively focus on better results for students (Adapted from Lencioni, 2003) (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2010).

Values - The specific attitudes, behaviors, and collective commitments that must be demonstrated in order to advance the organization’s vision. Articulated values answer the question, How must we behave in order to make our shared vision a reality? See also collective commitments.

Vision - A realistic, credible, attractive future for an organization. Vision answers the question, What do we hope to become at some point in the future?
APPENDIX D

PLCA-DS – SURVEY
Professional Learning Communities Assessment – District Support

Directions:
This survey assesses your perceptions about your school district’s support for the development and implementation of PLCs in schools. The survey contains statements describing actions district leaders take to support schools in the PLC process. Read each statement and use the scale to select the point that best reflects your level of agreement. You may also write comments in the space provided after each section.

Definition:

Key Terms:
- District Leaders – All central office staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students (e.g., superintendent, associate/assistant superintendents, directors, department coordinators, curriculum coordinators, instructional strategists)
- School Leaders – Principals, Associate/Assistant/Vice Principals, Deans, Instructional Coordinators (e.g., Strategists, Coaches), Department Chairs, Team Leaders, Grade/Content Leaders
- School Staff – All professional staff associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students (e.g., school leaders, teachers, counselors, librarians)
- Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) – Teachers collaborating for the purpose of improving teaching and learning (e.g., strengthening teaching skills, enhancing instructional strategies, examining student work, aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment).
- Stakeholders – Parents and community members

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)
2 = Disagree (D)
3 = Somewhat Disagree (SWD)
4 = Somewhat Agree (SWA)
5 = Agree (A)
6 = Strongly Agree (SA)
A sample section of the 67 item survey is included

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Shared and Supportive Leadership</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>District leaders…</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 …model effective leadership practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 …share leadership responsibilities with school level administrators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 …build leadership capacity among school staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 …provide opportunities to engage school staff in district-level decision making.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 …share information with school staff to guide school improvement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 …promote a sense of shared responsibility for the learning of all students in the district.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 …provide opportunities for collaboration between the district and schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 …provide access to relevant data to school staff in order to make decisions about instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 …collaborate with school staff to assign personnel based on school needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 …establish clear expectations for improvement initiatives, with flexibility for implementation based on school needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 …clearly communicate the importance of alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 …encourage shared accountability among district and school staff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 …monitor implementation of effective teaching and learning practices.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14 …support decisions about teaching and learning based on a shared vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 …ensure local education boards adopt practices that support the district vision of schools as professional learning communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 …model professional learning practices in district staff meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:
APPENDIX E

PLCA-DS - INFORMED CONSENT
Title of Study: District Support: Strategies for Building Capacity in Elementary Principals in a Rapid Growth District

Student Investigator: Jacye Jamar, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of College of Education.

Supervising Investigator: Dr. Jane Huffman.

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves the investigation of a rapidly growing school district, and how central administration builds capacity and supports elementary principals within the professional learning community framework.

Study Procedures: The attached survey was developed as part of a research study of Professional Learning Communities to assess the level district support for the professional learning community process. The goal of my study is to learn more about how central office supports continuous improvement for elementary principals through professional learning communities. You are asked to participate in the study by completing a 67-item survey that will take no more than 15 minutes. Your name will not be collected, and reports of the results will be reported using only group data. Your answers cannot be traced to you. There are no foreseeable risks to participation. Participants may withdraw at any time from the study.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you; but we hope to learn more about how systems and structures are aligned districtwide in order to accommodate on-going growth and elementary principals.

Compensation for Participants: You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. Participants; or school names will not be used. Pseudonyms will be assigned to protect identities. All records and information will be kept on a remote storage device and locked in the office of the Supervising Investigator. As per federal regulations, the research participants’ information will be maintained for three years and then will be deleted.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Jacye Jamar at jamarj@friscoisd.org or Dr. Jane Huffman at jane.huffman@unt.edu
**Review for the Protection of Participants:** This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-4643 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

**Research Participants’ Rights:** Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- *Jacye Jamar* has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

______________________________
Printed Name of Participant

______________________________  ____________
Signature of Participant      Date

For the Student Investigator or Designee: I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

______________________________  ____________
Signature of Investigator or       Designee      Date
Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

**Title of Study:** District Support: Strategies for Building Capacity in Elementary Principals in a Rapid Growth District

**Student Investigator:** Jacye Jamar, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of College of Education.

**Supervising Investigator:** Dr. Jane Huffman.

**Purpose of the Study:** You are being asked to participate in a research study which involves the investigation of a rapidly growing school district, and how central administration builds capacity and supports elementary principals within the professional learning community framework.

**Study Procedures:** You will be asked to participate in an interview about your experiences and perceptions of the support central office provides to support continuous improvement for elementary principals in a rapid growth district by Jacye Jamar. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. Participants may withdraw at any time from the study.

**Foreseeable Risks:** No foreseeable risks are involved in this study

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you; but we hope to learn more about how systems and structures are aligned districtwide in order to accommodate on-going growth and elementary principals

**Compensation for Participants:** You will not receive compensation for your participation.

**Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records:** The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. Participants; or school names will not be used. Pseudonyms will be assigned to protect identities. All records and information will be kept on a remote storage device and locked in the office of the Supervising Investigator. As per federal regulations, the research participants’ information will be maintained for three years and then will be deleted.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Jacye Jamar at jamarj@friscoisd.org or Dr. Jane Huffman at jane.huffman@unt.edu
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- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.
APPENDIX G

CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Central Office Staff Interview Protocol

Interviewee:

Interview Date and Time:

Location

**Explanation of Study:** I will explain that I am conducting a study on how the central office supports continuous improvement for elementary principals in a rapid growth district. The purpose for interviewing members of the central office staff in Curriculum and Instruction department and elementary principals is to gather information about experiences and perception of the central office’s support for elementary principals in a rapid growing district.

**Interview Process, Consent and Confidentiality:** I will review the informed consent form which provides detailed information about the study as well as the ramifications for confidentiality. I will also inform the participant of their right to leave the study at any time. I will have the participant sign the informed consent form stating the participant has been made aware of their rights. I will provide an explanation regarding the tape recording of the interview and that they will be allowed to review their responses once the transcription is completed.

Interview questions:

1. Describe your role in this district? (background).

2. Please describe central office’s role in continuous improvement with elementary principals? (research question 1 and indirectly 2 and 3)

3. What professional learning opportunities are provided for elementary principals? (research question 1, 2 and indirectly 3)

4. How has the central office managed rapid growth and continuous improvement of elementary principals? (research question 2, 3 and indirectly 1)
   **Probe:** How do these practices connect to continuous improvement of elementary principals?

5. What specific systems has central office implemented to support continuous improvement in elementary principals? (research question 1, 2, and 3)
   **Probes:** professional development, curriculum, practices, etc. How often? What are elementary campuses expected to do with these data?
   - How have these systems or practices impacted your role and work?

6. What have been the effects of continuous improvement in elementary principals in this district (research question 2, 3 and indirectly 1)
   **Probes:** Are the effects system wide? How are the effects measured?
   - Are there any challenges?
7. What is the evidence of continuous improvement for elementary principals in this district? (research question 1 and indirectly 2 and 3)

End of interview: I will conclude the interview by asking the participant if they have any further questions and thanking them for their insight and perspective as well as their time.

Research Questions

Cross-reference of interview questions with the three research questions:

1. What is the central office staff’s role in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growing district?

2. How does central office staff use the PLC process as the main driver in building capacity in a rapidly growing district?

3. How are the five PLC Dimensions used to support capacity building in elementary principals?
APPENDIX H

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Elementary Principal Interview Protocol

Interviewee:

Interview Date and Time:

Location

Explanation of Study: I will explain that I am conducting a study on how the central office supports continuous improvement for elementary principals in a rapid growth district. The purpose for interviewing members of the central office staff in curriculum and instruction department and elementary principals is to gather information about experiences and perception of the central office’s support for elementary principals in a rapid growing district.

Interview Process, Consent and Confidentiality: I will review the informed consent form which provides detailed information about the study as well as the ramifications for confidentiality. I will also inform the participant of their right to leave the study at any time. I will have the participant sign the informed consent form stating the participant has been made aware of their rights. I will provide an explanation regarding the tape recording of the interview and that they will be allowed to review their responses once the transcription is completed.

Interview questions:

1. Describe your role in this district and elementary school? (background).

2. Please describe how the central office supports continuous improvement for you and your school? (research question 1 and indirectly 2 and 3)

3. What professional learning opportunities are provided for you? (research question 1, 2 and indirectly 3)
   **Probe:** professional learning experiences, outside training, job embedded training?

4. How have you seen central office manage rapid growth and continuous improvement of elementary principals? (research question 2, 3 and indirectly 1)
   **Probe:** How do these practices connect to continuous improvement for you and your school?

5. What specific systems has central office implemented to support your role as an elementary principal? (research question 1, 2, and 3)
   **Probes:** professional development, curriculum, practices, data etc. How often? How do you use the data gathered from these systems in place at your campus?
   - How have these systems or practices impacted your campus?

6. What have been the system wide effects with central office’s support for continuous improvement with your role in this district? (research question 2, 3 and indirectly 1)
   **Probes:** How are the effects measured?
   - Are there any challenges?
7. What evidence have you seen as a result of central office’s support for continuous improvement for your role in this district? (research question 1 and indirectly 2 and 3)

End of interview: I will conclude the interview by asking the participant if they have any further questions and thanking them for their insight and perspective as well as their time.

**Research Questions**

Cross-reference of interview questions with the three research questions:

1. What is the central office staff’s role in building capacity in elementary principals in a rapid growing district?
2. How does central office staff use the PLC process as the main driver in building capacity in a rapidly growing district?
3. How are the five PLC Dimensions used to support capacity building in elementary principals?
APPENDIX I

PLC DIMENSION DESCRIPTION
### Five Dimensions of a Professional Learning Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Leadership</strong></td>
<td>&quot;School administrators share power, authority, and decision making, while promoting and nurturing leadership.&quot; (Hipp &amp; Huffman, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Values and Vision</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Shared visions have an undeviating focus on student learning and support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.&quot; (Hipp &amp; Huffman, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Collective learning and application</strong></td>
<td>&quot;The staff share information and work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning opportunities.&quot; (Hipp &amp; Huffman, 2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shared personal practice</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Peers meet and observe one another to provide feedback on instructional practices, to assist in student learning and to increase human capacity.&quot; (Hipp &amp; Huffman, 2010)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive conditions - Relationships</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Relationships include respect, trust, norms of critical inquiry and improvement, and positive, caring relationships among the entire school community.&quot; (Hipp &amp; Huffman, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Supportive Conditions - Structures</strong></td>
<td>&quot;Structures include systems and resources (personnel, facilities, time, and materials) to enable staff to meet and examine practices and student outcomes.&quot; (Hipp &amp; Huffman, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX J

SAMPLE OF LINE-BY-LINE CODING
We're always able to attend the after school PDs. I myself, unfortunately, haven't been able to get to a lot of them due to other conflicts on campus, but I just need to know how to time and plan it out because I would like to go. I think it's just there's coaching opportunities I took advantage of that when it was announced. When any opportunities are sent out, either from Katie or just your directors, I kind of look to see if it fits the needs I need right at that time. It's not that I don't want to grow, but if it's not what I need right at that moment, I may pass on it.

Because I want to really focus and not have so much PD, but really targeted PD. So the coaching opportunity for me this year, I was very excited about and it's helped me grow as a leader. And given the opportunity that I could use additional budget money to continue that, I like that the district gives us that flexibility, and it's not like you can only do the six sessions and you're done. It's if you want to grow, I feel like it gives the power back to me. I'm going, "This is something that I still need to grow in." So I want to. I like that the districts gives us the opportunities to grow, even within the work week. Although it takes us off campus, I do feel like I gained more out of it versus having to do it after work or in the summer. Because sometimes PD is so late in the summer, I don't feel like I could come back and implement it all, I need to process through it.

So like, the PLC Booster has been great. A wish with that is - I know it's space and probably the availability of the people coming in, but when you can't have your whole IT team there - your AP principal and IC - I think that causes a disconnect, because the three of us need to work together to build that capacity. For example, earlier in the fall, we feel like it's important for our staff to see that - we're learning and growing with them. So I sent my AP in the Fall, but now I'm going in the Spring. But I feel like even going, there's going to be a disconnect because I wasn't there in the Fall. And we can talk and we have great dialogue, but I think you learn by doing.

And I think it's critical that - to move forward in anything - we need to be a unit, to be honest with you, because I need my AP and my IC and me to be on the same page [laughter]. And I can't always grasp what they're talking - because I wasn't there in the moment. And you take different things. The Kathy Key training, I think that was great. I think the district's really starting to realize if we're moving towards PLC, it's a growing pain. You have to live through it.

What I know now after three years of PLC conference to what I knew three years ago, I would say I wish I had a do-over button. But then I don't want that, because I would've never grown.

So for me, I'm taking it each as a learning opportunity and it allows me to be transparent with the staff of saying, "Hey, I botched this up. I wasn't clear, now I have clarity." I think if you-- the
APPENDIX K

CRITICAL ISSUES FOR TEAM CONSIDERATION
Team Name:

Team Members:

Use the following rating scale to indicate the extent to which each statement is true of your team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not True of Our Team</th>
<th>Our Team Is Addressing This</th>
<th>True of Our Team</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1. ____ We have identified team norms and protocols to guide us in working together.

2. ____ We have analyzed student achievement data and established SMART goals to improve upon this level of achievement we are working interdependently to attain. (SMART Goals are Strategic, Measurable, Attainable, Results oriented, and Time bound. SMART Goals are discussed at length in chapter 6.)

3. ____ Each member of our team is clear on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions (that is, the essential learning) that students will acquire as a result of (1) our course or grade level and (2) each unit within the course or grade level.

4. ____ We have aligned the essential learning with state and district standards and the high-stakes assessments required of our students.

5. ____ We have identified course content and topics we can eliminate to devote more time to the essential curriculum.

6. ____ We have agreed on how to best sequence the content of the course and have established pacing guides to help students achieve the intended essential learning.

7. ____ We have identified the prerequisite knowledge and skills students need in order to master the essential learning of each unit of instruction.

8. ____ We have identified strategies and created instruments to assess whether students have the prerequisite knowledge and skills.

9. ____ We have developed strategies and systems to assist students in acquiring prerequisite knowledge and skills when they are lacking in those areas.

10. ____ We have developed frequent common formative assessments that help us determine each student's mastery of essential learning.
11. ___ We have established the proficiency standard we want each student to achieve on each skill and concept examined with our common assessments.

12. ___ We use the results of our common assessments to assist each other in building on strengths and addressing weaknesses as part of an ongoing process of continuous improvement designed to help students achieve at higher levels.

13. ___ We use the results of our common assessments to identify students who need additional time and support to master essential learning, and we work within the systems and processes of the school to ensure they receive that support.

14. ___ We have agreed on the criteria we will use in judging the quality of student work related to the essential learning of our course, and we continually practice applying those criteria to ensure we are consistent.

15. ___ We have taught students the criteria we will use in judging the quality of their work and provided them with examples.

16. ___ We have developed or utilized common summative assessments that help us assess the strengths and weaknesses of our program.

17. ___ We have established the proficiency standard we want each student to achieve on each skill and concept examined with our summative assessments.

18. ___ We formally evaluate our adherence to team norms and the effectiveness of our team at least twice each year.

(Learning By Doing, 2010, p. 130)
Data Norms:
We will analyze data to: identify focused, specific questions; identify strengths and areas of growth; identify best practices; create focused, purposeful improvement efforts based upon specific needs; work smarter, not just harder; improve student learning; respond to student needs.

What is the data source? (e.g., STAAR, CBA, written responses, any formative assessment, etc...):

What is our purpose? (e.g., identify specific outcomes, identify strengths/weaknesses of a group or individual students, develop interventions for students, assess lesson design, track student growth, etc.)

Background Information
What is the most important background information that may assist us? (e.g., consider previous assessment results; consider instructional approach)

Observations
What are our initial observations?
1. 
2. 
3. 

What are some areas of strength?
1. 
2. 
3. 

What are some areas for growth?
1. 
2. 
3.
Do we see any patterns in the data?

- 

What was surprising or unexpected?

- 

Do we need any additional data or information?

- 

Data Focus

  On what parts of the data do we want to focus? (e.g., specific TEKS; targeted student group; specific student; student growth; process standard, readiness standard, or student expectation, etc…)
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 

Possible Theories

  What are possible theories/explanations/causations for the data we have identified? (e.g., What TEKS were taught? At what level were the TEKS taught? What was the level of student engagement? What was the instructional method? Grouping? Amount of time? Student related factors? Attendance? Etc…)
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 

Action Steps

  How are we going to respond to this information? What is our plan of action?
  1. 
  2. 
  3. 

Plan(s) for the Future

  1.
APPENDIX M

PLC DISTRICTWIDE RUBRIC
The Professional Learning Communities at Work™ Continuum: Learning as Our Fundamental Purpose (Part I)

DIRECTIONS: Individually, silently, and honestly assess the current reality of your school’s implementation of each indicator listed in the left column. Consider what evidence or anecdotes support your assessment. This form may also be used to assess district or team implementation.

We acknowledge that the fundamental purpose of our school is to help all students achieve high levels of learning, and therefore, we work collaboratively to clarify what students must learn and how we will monitor each student’s learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Pre-Initiating</th>
<th>Initiating</th>
<th>Implementing</th>
<th>Developing</th>
<th>Sustaining</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We work with colleagues on our team to build shared knowledge regarding state, provincial, and/or national standards; district curriculum guides; trends in student achievement; and expectations for the next course or grade level. This collective inquiry has enabled each member of our team to clarify what all students must know and be able to do as a result of every unit of instruction.</td>
<td>Teachers have been provided with a copy of state, provincial, and/or national standards and a district curriculum guide. There is no process for them to discuss curriculum with colleagues and no expectation they will do so.</td>
<td>Teacher representatives have helped to create a district curriculum guide. Those involved in the development feel it is a useful resource for teachers. Those not involved in the development may or may not use the guide.</td>
<td>Teachers are working in collaborative teams to clarify the essential learning for each unit and to establish a common pacing guide. Some staff members question the benefit of the work. They argue that developing curriculum is the responsibility of the central office or textbook publishers rather than teachers. Some are reluctant to give up favorite units that seem to have no bearing on essential standards.</td>
<td>Teachers have clarified the essential learning for each unit by building shared knowledge regarding state, provincial, and/or national standards; by studying high-stakes assessments; and by seeking input regarding the prerequisites for success as students enter the next grade level. They are beginning to adjust curriculum, pacing, and instruction based on evidence of student learning.</td>
<td>Teachers on every collaborative team are confident they have established a guaranteed and viable curriculum for their students. Their clarity regarding the knowledge and skills students must acquire as a result of each unit of instruction, and their commitment to providing students with the instruction and support to achieve the intended outcomes, give every student access to essential learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010, p. 106)
APPENDIX N

CAMPUS ACTION PLAN
### District Goal 2

#### Campus Goal 2

**Objective 1**

We will provide a meaningful and challenging curriculum that acknowledges and supports individual differences.

Teaching teams will engage in a set of practices that bring clarity, coherence, and precision to every teacher’s classroom work. (New 2014-2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Staff Responsible</th>
<th>Resources / Implementation Evidence</th>
<th>Formative and/or Summative Evaluation</th>
<th>Benchmark Timeline</th>
<th>Progress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1.1</td>
<td>Instructional Coach (IC) will demonstrate quality instructional practices, provide job-embedded PD, and observe and provide coaching feedback that is focused on effective, research-based pedagogy (K-5)</td>
<td>Administrators, Instructional Coach (IC), Teachers</td>
<td>IC resources, SCE Funds - 1 FTE @ $33,794, meeting agendas, meeting notes</td>
<td>IC work log, Walkthrough Data Report, Lesson Plans, student formative and summative assessment results, administration observations, teacher surveys</td>
<td>May 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.2</td>
<td>Teachers will work collaboratively to unpack essential standards, identify prerequisite skills and clarify what every student needs to learn (K-5)</td>
<td>Teachers, IC, Administration, Teachers</td>
<td>OSIS, Student and Teacher Behaviors, reflection pages, agendas and meeting notes, SCE Funds - 1 FTE @ $45,000</td>
<td>Collaborative meeting notes and agendas, student formative and summative assessment results, administration observations, teacher surveys</td>
<td>May 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.3</td>
<td>Teachers will work collaboratively to monitor student progress along the way by developing common formative assessments, (K-5)</td>
<td>Teachers, IC, Administration</td>
<td>IC resources, SCE Funds - 1 FTE @ $33,794, formative assessment rubrics, collaborative planning agendas and notes</td>
<td>Collaborative meeting notes and agendas, student formative and summative assessment results, administration observation, teacher surveys</td>
<td>May 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.4</td>
<td>Time will be built into the master schedule providing students with additional time to learn standards not yet mastered, and demonstrate deeper mastery of standards already learned. (K-5)</td>
<td>Teachers, Administration</td>
<td>Formative and summative assessment results, master schedule, tools, Chrome Books, apps and other software, math manipulatives, shared reading Big Books, guided reading books, etc.</td>
<td>Teacher surveys, student formative and summative results, administration observation</td>
<td>May 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Abby ISD Handbook lists the objectives of the elementary instructional coaching program in the District as to:

- Clarify the Instructional Coaching Program defined by the District;
- Define and align the roles and responsibilities of instructional coaches, administrators, elementary content coordinators, area directors, and teachers;
- Promote a knowledge base of effective strategies;
- Assist teachers in improving their practice through coaching and instructional modeling;
- Refine instructional strategies and provide feedback through the coaching cycle;
- Collaborate with teacher planning teams;
- Serve on campus Instructional Leadership Team (ILT);
- Facilitate on-site professional learning; and
- Participate in on-going and extensive professional learning (campus and district).

**Knowledge and Skills Required of an Instructional Coach**

The knowledge and skill base an instructional coach must possess is vast. The District Abby ISD Handbook delineates that an elementary instructional coach must:

- Possess, demonstrate and cultivate the pedagogy of teaching and the ability to select appropriate instructional strategies based on student needs;
- Demonstrate effective verbal and written communication;
- Possess advanced skills in planning, prioritizing and taking actions which lead to self and campus development;
- Be knowledgeable in the change management process in leading people to achieve a desired result;
• Have strong interpersonal skills and ability to establish trusting relationships;

• Be a skilled collaborator;

• Be an evaluator of curricular and instructional needs;

• Be skilled in planning, delivering and supporting professional learning; and

• Be solution driven and reflective.
REFERENCES


