SYSTEM LEADERS' SUPPORT TO SCHOOL LEADERS: EMBEDDING AND SUSTAINING THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS WITH THE PURPOSE OF IMPROVED STUDENT PERFORMANCE

A Doctoral Research Project

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

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This comparative case study approach was used to conduct a study of two schools in

good standing in two different districts to investigate how superintendents support principals in

implementing, embedding and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) with

the goal of student improvement.

The study showed that system leaders, through a balanced leadership approach, played

the role of thought partner, leadership developer, guide, and evaluator to principals. They utilized

a data-based and differentiated approach to support school leaders and organizational

development through use of various generative processes.

The researcher collected relevant data based on each research question through the use of

interview protocols, observations, and a review of documents. Data were analyzed and

triangulated to identify the practices that were utilized and to identify how system leaders

supported principals in implementing, embedding, and sustaining the CCLS.

The conclusions of the study were the following:

1) District leaders in this study played the following roles when supporting school leaders:

Thought Partner, Leadership Developer, Guide and Evaluator. The district leaders

utilized a balanced approach to provide support, build capacity, and develop leadership

skills in principals as they implemented, embedded, and sustained the CCLS with the

purpose of improving student performance.

2) Principals utilized professional supports, such as professional learning conferences, inter-

visitations, feedback and one-on-one support to implement, embed, and sustain the CCLS

with the purpose of improving teacher practice and student performance.

3) District leaders utilized support systems, such as data based decision making, inter-

visitations, and differentiated professional learning, which fostered leadership growth and

development of principals' practices.

4) The participants affirmed that the CCLS implementation process was precipitous. They

valued the CCLS as a resource to facilitate high quality instruction and assessment that

lead to increased student learning. Finally, the adjustments in the implementation process

does not impede their work with the standards.

Tag words for Search:

Change

Reform

Leadership

System Leadership

Professional Learning

Implementing, embedding and sustaining the Common Core Standards Initiative

System Leadership Support to School Leaders

Administrator

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to Elmore (2000), change within large urban educational systems can be a daunting if not an almost impossible task. Frequently educational change is aborted before it is embedded or sustained long enough to impact school organizations and leadership behaviors. Elmore (2000) states:

> …redesigning institutions and improving educational practice are massively more complex. …they involve changes of the most fundamental kind in the norms and values that shape work in schools, in the way the resources of the system get used, in the skills and knowledge that the people bring to their work and in how people relate to each other around the work of the organization (p. 26).

Elmore makes clear that changing of standards is a complex process which entails systematic and comprehensive approaches that require strong partnerships between district and school leadership.

Writers, practitioners and researchers have questioned and examined the role of district leadership in influencing principals, schools and student achievement (Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano, Walters & McNulty, 2005; Leithwood, 1994; McFarlane, 2010; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Research has shown that within any organization the leader plays a critical and significant role in influencing the outcomes, behaviors of individuals, attitudes and culture (McFarlane, 2010). Marzano and Waters (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of research on district leadership which revealed that superintendents have a "measurable effect on student achievement" (p. 12). Therefore, district leadership is significant, and it does make a difference (Griffith, 1966; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Marzano and Waters, 2009; Marzano, Walters & McNulty, 2005;

Leithwood, 1994 and McFarlane, 2010). Additionally, Marzano and Walters (2009) found that "when districts and schools are high functioning in terms of their leadership behaviors, they can positively influence student achievement" (p. 12).

McFarlane (2010) clarifies that, as the school district leader, the superintendent's role can have either a positive or negative influence on principals, affecting their motivation, leadership, and attitude which will eventually impact the quality of performance of teachers and students. Especially in this complex and challenging time of change (Fullan, 2001), school leaders are sometimes bombarded with the implementation of too many initiatives which can compromise the school's ability to embed and sustain reforms. Sometimes change is compromised because superintendents do not provide the appropriate feedback (Marzano & Waters, 2009), sufficient resources to support school principals and to guide them through the process (Brimley, Verstegen & Garfield, 2016).

Research has focused on the value of the standards (Sloan, 2010) and leadership of teacher professional learning communities (Fullan, 2011). Although there is some research in this area, there is none focused specifically on the superintendent's' influence on school leaders' abilities to sustain and embed the standards within schools to improve student performance.

Background of the Problem

   New York City (NYC) School District Instructional Shifts. The NYC Department of Education went through several structural shifts from 2002-2015. The Ocean hill-Brownville community lead protest in1969 resulted in local community control of the school districts. Parents contributed to what their children were learning and how children were being taught. The high schools remained centralized and were grouped according to the boroughs while 32 K-8

geographically designed districts were responsible for the middle and elementary school education (Taylor, 2015).

Prior to 2002, New York City was decentralized after the 1969 protest lead by the Ocean hill-Brownville community to give the local community a say in what their children were learning and how children were taught. The high schools remained centralized and were grouped according to the boroughs while 32 K-8 geographically designed districts were responsible for the middle and elementary school education (Taylor, 2015; Fruchter et al., 2008).
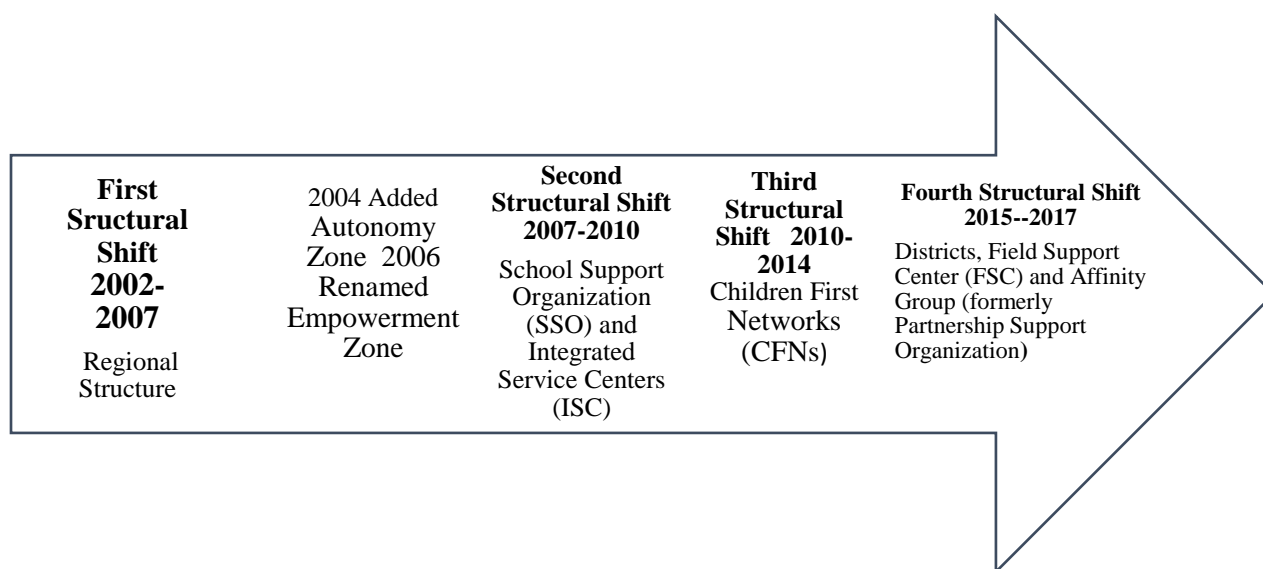
Figure 1. Time Line of Structural Shifts in NYCDOE from 2002–2015

Source: The timeline illustrates the four structural shifts as described in "Strong Schools Strong Communities: A New Approach to Supporting New York City's Public School and All of Our Students" prepared by New York City Department of Education, January 2015.

In 2002 New York State granted mayoral control of the Department of Education. Immediately, the mayor hired a chancellor (Taylor, 2015). As indicated in Figure 1, the first structural shift began in 2002. The chancellor abolished the 32 K-8 community school districts as governance and managerial structures and changed the role of the district superintendents from

heads of district to provide direct supports to the Chancellor (Fruchter & McAlister, 2008; Taylor, 2015).

After that, the Chancellor established ten K-12 Regions within the DOE and assigned a Regional Superintendent to oversee each Region. Each region consisted of three or four geographically aligned districts (Nadelstern, 2012). "Each region included some 100-150 schools grouped into networks, and each network of schools was supervised and supported by a Local Instructional Supervisor (Fruchter et al., 2008).

The position of Local Instructional Superintendent (LIS) was created to provide embedded instructional leadership support to a small group of schools within each region. The Region was responsible for instructional and leadership management. The Chancellor created the Regional Operation Center (ROC) as a separate entity to address budgeting and other managerial concerns. The ROC worked in partnership with the Regions to meet the organizational and instructional needs of the schools within each region. Another division focused on providing student and family support services (Fruchter & McAlister, 2008).

By 2004, the Chancellor created a group of independently operated schools described as the Autonomy Zone that worked outside of the jurisdiction of the Regions. The schools had full control of budgets, professional learning, and accountability for teacher effectiveness and student performance. By 2006, the name Autonomy Zone changed to the Empowerment Zone and the number of schools increased. As a result, an individual was chosen to spearhead this group of schools. (Nadelstern, 2012).

In 2007 New York City disbanded the Regions, the networks within the regions, and the Local Instructional Supervisors. This change marked the second structural shift which began with the implementation of eleven competitive School Support Organization (SSO) and

Integrated Service Centers (ISC). Principals were described as CEO's of their schools. Along with the school community, the principals chose the SSO based on their instructional support needs (Fruchter et al., 2008). The ISC provided service to schools within a geographic area ("Strong Schools Strong Communities: A New Approach to Supporting New York City's Public School and All of Our Students", New York City Department of Education, January 2015).

The third structural shift occurred in 2010 when the "DOE created 60 a-geographic Children First Networks (CFN)" ("Strong Schools Strong Communities: A New Approach to Supporting New York C*ity'*s Public School and All of Our Students", New York City Department of Education, NYC Department of Education, January 2015, p. 15). Each CFN consisted of approximately 15 individuals who provided instructional, operational and student services support to schools.

The District Superintendent was not responsible for supporting schools; the Network Leader was. The Network was not responsible for rating principals; the District Superintendent was. In essence the Networks served as a support system to provide site based embedded professional development to schools, but did not have any authority to rate principals. The administrators selected the Network support plan based on their assessment of whether the Network's vision and plan for support aligned with the school's needs. The school then worked with the Network Team to design the type of professional development support the school needed. If at the end of the year the schools were dissatisfied with the Network services, they could choose another network ("Strong Schools Strong Communities: A New Approach to Supporting New York City's Public School and All of Our Students", New York City Department of Education, January 2015).

By 2009, the superintendent was not able to visit schools without the principal's or Network Leader's invitation. Not being able to visit schools limited the superintendent's influence over school leaders when implementing initiatives geared to school improvement (Nadelstern, 2012). The district superintendent was responsible for conducting the Principal Performance Reviews (PPO) and Quality Reviews, overseeing the district level C-30 process and overseeing the Community Education Council (Strong Schools, Strong Communities: A New Approach to Supporting New York City's Public Schools and All of Our Students, 2015). The superintendent had limited staff and specifically no staff to support schools. The district consisted of two positions, one that supported parent and community engagement and the other served as a supportive staff to the superintendent as indicated in this diagram in Figure 2:
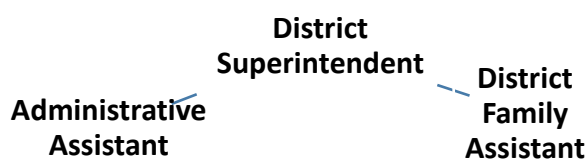
Figure 2. District Structure in 2009

Source: Based on (Nadelstern, 2012; Fruchter et al., 2008)

This limited the superintendent's influence over school leaders when implementing initiatives geared to school improvement (Nadelstern, 2012). The district superintendent responsibility consisted of the following roles: conducting the Principal Performance Reviews (PPO) and Quality Reviews; overseeing the district level C-30 process; and overseeing the Community School Boards. Even though the superintendent was the primary rating officer, the superintendent had limited access to the school (NYCDOE, 2015).

The fourth instructional shift occurred in 2015. The Superintendent's instructional responsibilities were restored and even the district staff support was increased to include a Principal Leadership Facilitator and Field Support Liaison who supported the superintendent in meeting the professional learning needs of school leaders and schools within the district. This change in structure provided additional resources at the district level to support the district superintendent in engaging different stakeholders in implementing, embedding and sustaining the CCLS within district schools. Therefore, the district staff expanded in 2016 to include more support staff as illustrated in Figure 3.
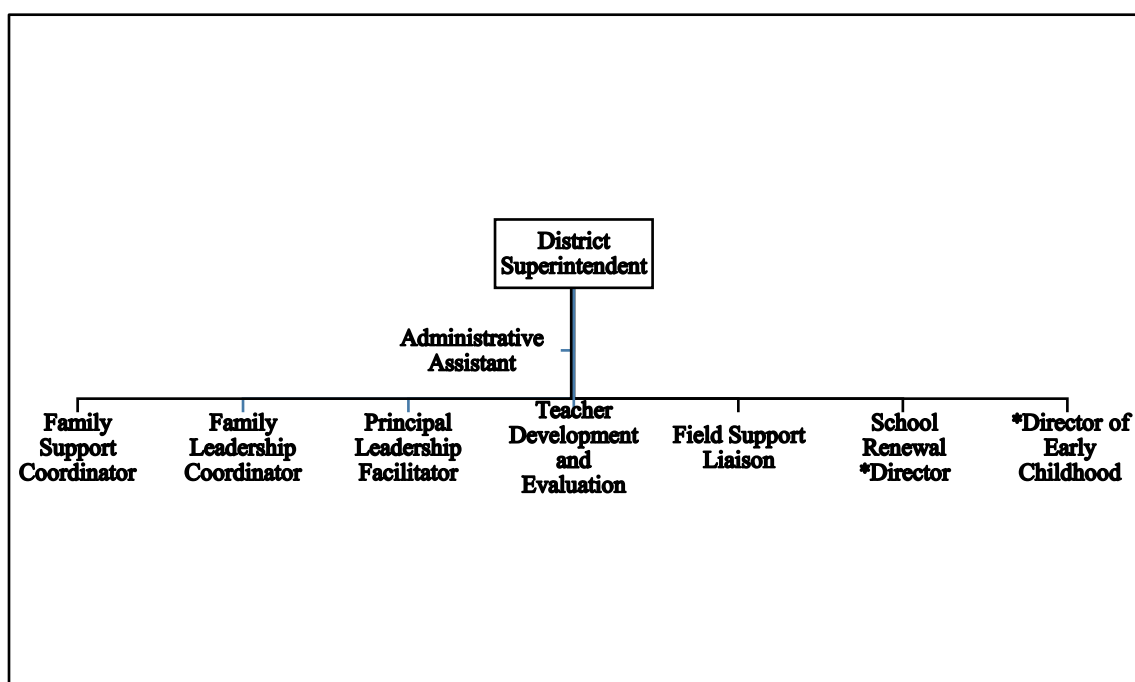
Figure 3. District Support Structure 2015

Source: Describes current School District Support as described in "Strong Schools Strong Communities: A New Approach to Supporting New York City's Public School and All of Our Students" (NYCDOE, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this comparative case study of two school districts with schools in good standing is to investigate the tools and practices used by district leadership to support principals in embedding and sustaining CCLS with the goal of improved student achievement.

Research Questions

The research questions will investigate how superintendents support school leaders and how school leaders' practices are influenced by the system leadership's support given to embed and sustain initiatives in schools. The research will examine the following questions:

1) What role does the district play in helping principals to implement, embed and sustain the Common Core Learning Standards within schools?

2) What types of supports do principals provide to teachers that affect the implementation and sustainability of the Common Core Learning Standards?

3) What leadership behaviors of district leaders are evident in supporting principals in implementing, embedding, and sustaining Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)?

4) In consideration of the recent concerns and issues raised about the Common Core implementation process in New York State, how will the Common Core Task Force Final Report 2015 affect the embedding and sustainment processes in schools and districts?

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Significance of the Study

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The CCLS are a large-scale reform intended to provide equity and access to all students to be able to reach their fullest potential (NYSED P-12 CCLS, 2010). CCLS identifies expectations and articulate 21st Century Skills that are intended to prepare students for college,

career and global citizenship. The study identifies practices and policies that system leaders can utilize as a framework to lead schools in implementing and embedding educational standards reform and developing sustainable systems.

This investigation addresses a gap in the literature on system leadership support to school leaders which supplements the existing body of research on leadership development through providing recommendations to system leaders on possible ways to support school leaders in implementing, embedding and sustaining initiatives with the purpose of improving student performance.

Leadership programs for new and experienced district leaders can point to some leadership practices that can affect student performance. This research can influence system leaders in setting policy that support and sustain change rather than abort or hinder change. These principles can guide large scale reform efforts applicable to educational organizations. Hopefully, system leaders can reference this study to identify best practices to utilize when supporting school leaders in implementing, embedding and sustaining educational change initiatives such as the Common Core Learning Standards. Likewise, they can use this information to set policy, to plan change efforts or inform decisions.

Conceptual Framework

In this study system leaders are district administrators working collaboratively to support school leaders' behaviors and practices. School leaders are the principals and assistant principals of schools who are responsible for improving teaching and learning.

This study also assumes that effective district leaders demonstrate specific behaviors when supporting school leaders with the purpose of influencing leadership behaviors and

improving student performance. The following are eight behaviors that district leaders demonstrate:

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting;

2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction;

3. Monitoring achievement and instructional goals;

4. Assisting principals in allocating resources to support the school's goals for achievement and instruction;

5. Defined autonomy (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 6).

6. Provide differentiated support in implementing the expectations based on the context of the school.

7. Set clear expectations for leadership standards and create professional learning systems to support the leadership development of school leaders.

8. Articulate the belief that principals and other school leaders have the ability to enhance teaching and learning (Leithwood & Seashore Louis, 2012).

The research examined the data to determine whether district leaders utilized any of these eight behaviors to support and guide school leaders in implementing, embedding and sustaining the standards.

Change creates an imbalance in organizations and individuals because individuals are asked to move from the current way of behaving and thinking to a new way (Bridges and Bridges, 2009). Because individuals sometimes are unable to make this transition, this may thwart change. Astute leaders are able to recognize these behaviors and are able to assist individuals to make needed transitions as suggested in Bridges and Bridges (2009).

This research also assumes that effective superintendent and district leaders do demonstrate specific behaviors when implementing, embedding and sustaining initiatives. The primary goal of the Field Support Liaison (FSL) is to facilitate the alignment of targeted supports from the Field Support Center (FSCs) to district schools. Another goal of the FSL is to assist schools in properly analyzing data which might include assessing the effect of professional development. The FSL's role is to ensure that a variety of data sources are utilized to conduct a comprehensive school assessment.

District leaders affect school leaders and school performance. Through the influence of school leaders, they indirectly contribute to improve school performance and the leadership behaviors of school leaders. The quality of that relationship between district leaders and school leaders can indirectly affect the quality of teaching and student learning. There is a relationship between district leaders, superintendents and school leaders. The quality of that relationship can indirectly affect the quality of teaching and student learning.

This study is based on the overarching assumptions that district leaders do matter (Waters & Marzano, 2009; McFarlane, 2010). Since this comparative case study focused on district leaders' support to school leaders, the use of the term *district leaders* referenced in this study includes district administrators who are responsible for helping the superintendent to improve the practices of the school and who have direct influence on school leaders' behaviors.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The limitation of this study is that the superintendent and other district leaders have had a limited time in leading the Common Core Standards Initiative within district schools. Therefore, a limitation of the study is the superintendents have only played an active role in supporting the

schools in implementing the Common Core initiative since 2015 (New York Department of Education, 2015).

Another limitation of this study is that the researcher relied on the interview process, documents and observations to collect data. Thus, this study is limited to the integrity of the information collected during the interview process. The privacy and confidentiality of the interview process encouraged candidates to give honest answers. These procedures provided validity and reliability of the information collected.

A delimitation of this study is that it does not engage purposeful sampling of all districts across New York State because there is limited time available to conduct the study. However, it does include a purposeful sampling of all community school districts within New York City.

In addition, the researcher was not able to obtain an interview directly from the superintendents of both Districts for different reasons. The District X superintendent was unable to interview but recommended a team members who worked closely with the superintendent to assess, plan and provide professional development to school leaders within the district. They worked closely with the superintendent in the capacity of a deputy or assistant superintendent. In essence, they played a significant role in school leadership support. However, the Superintendent of District Y was ill during the interview process and was not able to grant an interview. Therefore, the researcher chose individuals whose roles were parallel to the administrators' roles in District X. All of the individuals agreed to participate. Thus, the researcher was able to select two individuals from District X and Y whose responsibilities mirrored each other.

Definitions of Terms

Listed below are definitions that represent other assumptions important to the study are:

Bridge to practice are protocols utilized within professional learning opportunities which allows a participant to link the work being studied to field work.

Common Core Learning Standards are new national standards in mathematics and English language arts that were developed in 2009 and adopted by 46 states and two territories (Common Core Task Force Report, 2015). These standards are designed to raise the level of expectations for student engagement in rigorous, engaging learning experiences that will prepare children for college and careers.

Differentiated learning is the practice of providing one-on-one or small group support in the form of process, product or resources.

Distributed leadership is an approach that engages teachers in leadership roles based on their expertise, knowledge, and skills.

District leaders are administrators who work at the district level and provide administrative support to school leaders.

Embedded standards are the ingrained expectations of student learning and abilities that are essential characteristics/elements of the curriculum.

Generative processes are those processes and protocols that are flexible and can be utilized in different content to help isolate and sustain practice.

Guide means providing advice or assisting the school leader in acquiring additional resources.

Instructional rounds are a collaborative learning opportunity for leaders and teachers to assess, identify, and examine school needs with a purpose of improving student performance.

Inter-visitations are professional development opportunities in which participants engage in viewing best practices that might be duplicated utilized within other settings.

Lab site is a study site where participants can visit to see best practices implemented and to discuss the process and how it can be implemented in other sites.

Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a collaborative learning opportunity for groups of teachers to enhance their pedagogy with the purpose of improving student performance and achievement.

School leadership is defined as principals and assistant principals.

Sustainable practices/initiatives are long-standing habits or behaviors that become an integral and defining part of organizational culture or individual's practice.

System leadership is an approach to leadership that focuses on "leadership of, for and by the organization" (Tate, 2016, p. 229). It recognizes the vested interest of all stakeholders.

Thought partner is a good listener and astute observer who utilizes reflective protocols to help school leaders isolate high leverage needs of a schools.

Walk through a collaborative experience in which a group of teachers and/or leaders observe instructional and organizational systems to identify best practices.

Summary

Chapter 1 focused on how district leaders support school administrators in implementing, embedding, and sustaining large scale change initiatives in schools. The purpose of the research is to enable system leaders to better support principals and assistant principals during the implementation and sustainment of the Common Core Learning Standards. The research also identifies a conceptual framework and basic assumptions that frame this comparative qualitative case study approach. The chapter ends with identifying strategies and protocols that were utilized to establish the validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter 2 examined literature that helps to define the evolving role of district leadership, the influence of system leadership on principal performance, teacher practice and student performance. Also, it will discuss a theoretical framework that examines historical policy reforms geared to affect educational change and theoretical literature that defines the change process. Finally, it will examine research that supports the implementation and sustainment of systemic change.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design, sampling procedures, methodology for data collection and analysis of the data. In addition, the researcher explores the possible biases that might be evident in the study. Chapter 4 examines different data collected and analyzes the various data to highlight the findings. These findings are reviewed to determine if the research questions were answered. The study concludes with Chapter 5 which is devoted to drawing conclusions and making recommendations to system leaders on practices, processes and protocols that are critical to implementing and sustaining initiatives.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The research in Chapter Two will address five key topics, leadership, the impact of policy reforms, standards-based reform, and systemic change in implementing and sustaining improvement. First, there will be an examination of research that reveals ways in which the role of the superintendent has continually evolved to include different expectations and responsibilities, including how population growth and demographic influx within the United States contributed to the redefinition of the superintendent's leadership role and the shift in responsibilities of the district administrators over time. Additionally, a review of the literature regarding how the superintendent influences principal behavior, teacher practice, and student performance.

Secondly, the literature in this chapter explains how the nexus with federal policy and law and the need for institutional change shaped the educational dialogue will be explored. Furthermore, there will be a literature review of the dynamics of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (1965), Nation at Risk Report (1983) the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Finally, this chapter will explore how these policies spurred the need for large-scale systemic educational reform. The literature in Chapter Two will address five key topics—leadership, impact of policy reforms, standards based reform, and systemic change in implementing and sustaining reform.

Evolving Role of District Leadership

The role, the expectations and demands of the district leader have shifted over time. Petersen and Barnett (2003) purport that county superintendents served, initially, as board clerks.

In the early 1800's, rural and urban schools were frequently one-room schoolhouses (Kowalski, 1999). As school districts grew, particularly in urban areas, school systems became increasingly sophisticated. The rise of large city school systems in the 1830's, spurred the need for school district superintendents to oversee the schools (Kowalski, 1999). The expectations and demands of the superintendent changed from board clerks to large city school-monitors. Thus, the school district superintendency as a permanent, full-time administrative position began in 1837 (Sharp, 1997).

During the mid-1800s urban school systems established normative standards for public elementary and secondary education were in. These standards helped superintendents to supervise instruction and ensure uniformity within the curriculum (Spring, 1994). The superintendent was no longer viewed as a teacher-practitioner; instead, he was regarded as a master teacher (Callahan, 1962).

As a master teacher, the key responsibilities were:

… to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils (Cuban, 1976, p. 16).

After 1865, the role of the superintendent became increasingly important as schools divided students into separate grades and educated them in multiple buildings (Kowalski, 1999). This entire process led to the organization of school districts. By 1900, the position as superintendent was needed to address the following: oversee larger city school districts, consolidate rural school districts, expand state curriculum, pass compulsory attendance laws, demand increased accountability, and develop efficient expectations (Kowalski, 1999).

The superintendents served as Teacher-Scholars. Their primary responsibilities comprised the following: implementing a state curriculum, supervising teachers, overseeing the common school movement to assimilate students into American culture, ensuring that public schools delivered uniform subjects and courses, establishing centralized control, standardizing throughout the district and overseeing the process (Kowalski, 1999). The conceptualization of the district superintendent as teacher-scholar began to wane by 1910 (Kowalski, 1999).

After 1910, the superintendent's role transformed from just being an instructional leader and master teacher to include managerial and political tasks (Andero, 2000). Boards of education began to expect their superintendents to be capable of guiding educators and principals as well as carrying out administrative tasks that were assigned by the board of education regarding the political elements of their work. Superintendents were expected to meet with business people, parents, politicians, and others who might support school district initiatives (Byrd, 2001). This entire process led to the organization of school districts.

According to Sharp (1997) and Andero (2000), in the early 1900's, the superintendents became academic leaders who were expected to take on instructional, managerial and political responsibilities. Moreover, they were required to be involved in the community politically with business people, parents, politicians, and others who might support the school district's goals (Byrd, 2001). The term district superintendents characterized the expansion the responsibility roles above in addition to the day to day operations.

Today, district administrators support teachers and principals. Also, they work in conjunction with boards to garner the support of school boards in promoting district initiatives involving curriculum, instruction, budgeting decisions, setting policy, and articulating non-

negotiable to increase educational outcomes (Bjork, 1993; Kowalski, 2001; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986).

Leadership Influence on Student Performance

District leadership. By the 1980's, the role of superintendents had become increasingly more multifaceted, particularly in major urban areas. The changing demographics and student performance on tests coupled with the rise in business and local communities' complaints raised concerns about the significance of the role of the superintendent and the educational system (Nation at Risk Report, 1983).

By 1983, the United States lost its competitive edge on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The U. S. fell from first place to seventeenth among industrialized nations on the mathematics and English Language Arts National Assessment of Educational Progress exams. Students enrolling in colleges were not able to pass proficiency exams and lacked critical thinking skills. Educators received criticism about the quality of education in the country, especially for the underserved population (Nation at Risk Report, 1983).

The role and expectations of the superintendent became increasingly more complicated. As a result, the perception of the superintendent's ability to effect improvement in schools began to erode (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Marzano and Waters (2009) cited the following:

> In his state of education address in 1987, Secretary of Education William Bennett attached the nickname, "the blob," to administrators and the administrative system in public schools. The blob, he argued, is made up of people in the education system who work outside of classrooms soaking up resources and resisting reform without contributing to student achievement (p. 1).

Bennett wrote the above-referenced citation in response to the 1983 Nation at Risk Report, which characterized the failure of the country's schools as being "an act of war" (Nation at Risk Report, 1983). This excerpt summarizes Bennett's interpretation of the value of administrators and other individuals outside of classrooms. Bennett saw these people as resistors to change who have hampered educational progress, student achievement, and the country's standing in the world (Nation at Risk Report, 1983). Bennett, Finn, and Cribb (1999) reinforced this interpretation when they stated:

The public-school establishment is one of the most stubbornly intransigent forces on the planet. It is full of people and organizations dedicated to protecting established programs and keeping things just the way they are. Administrators talk of reform even as they are circling the wagons to fend off change, or preparing to outflank your innovation (p. 628).

This statement further argues that administrators are resistant because they are comfortable with the way things are and the familiar programs. However, they do talk about change at the same time they make every effort to impede change. (Bennett, et al, 1999).

Contrary to Bennett's perception of district administrators as being "blobs" or individuals who impede educational progress. Marzano and Waters (2009), Leon (2010), and McFarlane (2010) have conducted research that provides varying perspectives on district leadership which focus on the importance of system leader, the way in which they affect school achievement, and the way in which they respond to change.

Marzano and Waters (2009), conducted a meta-analysis to determine the relationship of district leadership to student achievement. This meta-analysis revealed that the "correlation between district leadership and student achievement was .24 and was statistically significant at the .05 level" (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 4). This means that if "district leaders are carrying

out their leadership responsibilities effectively; student achievement across the district is positively affected" (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 5). District leadership does matter. Research shows that effective leadership can have a positive impact on student achievement, professional learning communities, and school improvement. Additionally, the study revealed that the following six superintendent responsibilities affect student achievement.

1. Ensuring collaborative goal setting;

2. Establishing non-negotiable goals for student achievement and instruction;

3. Creating board alignment with and support of district goals;

4. Monitoring achievement and instructional goals;

5. Allocating resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction; and

6. Defined autonomy (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 6).

Highly functioning districts collaboratively set goals with relevant stakeholders. These non-negotiable goals focus on both achievement and instruction. The superintendent collaboratively works with the board to provide support which stakeholders actualize and promote. In addition, stakeholders play an active role in monitoring and assessing progress toward students' achieving these targets (Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Based on their findings, Marzano and Waters (2009) concluded that superintendents have a "measurable effect on student achievement" (p. 12), and district leadership does make a difference in student performance (Griffith, 1966; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Marzano, Walters & McNulty, 2005; Murphy & Hallinger, 1986; Leithwood, 1994). Additionally, "when districts and schools are high functioning in terms of their leadership behaviors, they can positively influence student achievement" (Marzano & Waters, 2009, p. 12).

McFarlane (2010) argues that superintendent leadership is key to the success of school districts. His study of large urban school districts revealed that superintendents' leadership practices influenced principals' behavior, school climate, student achievement and school improvement. McFarlane (2010) further argues that superintendent's leadership can be either a positive or negative force impacting schools. Therefore, engaging in effective leadership practices will enhance school leaders' behavior and impact student learning (Leithwood, 1994).

Leon (2010) agrees that superintendents may not influence student performance. In contrast to Bennett's interpretation that superintendents lack the will and thus block the gateway to reform, Leon (2010) provides a logical reason that might yield this adverse effect. He points out that superintendents will not affect student achievement if district leaders tend to make decisions or set policies that simultaneously serve as a counter to educational innovation.

Whitehurst, Chingos, and Gallaher (2013), conducted research study of higher and lower performance districts in Florida and North Carolina. The researchers examined ten years of data from 2000-2001 to 2009-2010 which focused on grades 4 and 5 math and reading scores to determine the effect of districts on student achievement. Whitehurst, et al (2013) utilized the following research questions:

1) What is the influence of school districts on student achievement relative to the influence of schools, teachers and individual differences among students?

2) Are there differences among districts in their contribution to student achievement that are large enough to be relevant for policy?

3) Can districts be categorized based on patterns of influence on student achievement in ways that would inform efforts to improve districts?

4) What are the distinctive features of exceptional districts? (pp. 5-6).

Whitehurst et al. (2013) found "about 1% of the differences in student achievement" attributed to district leadership (p. 9). The strongest results for the district component occurs for mathematics in North Carolina where the district contribution rises to about 2%" (p. 10). When compared to teachers, schools, and individual differences of students, the district effect is small but significant. Thus, Whitehurst et al. (2013) concluded:

> "a student in a district 0.50 standard deviation above the average of all districts would experience the equivalent of roughly 9 more weeks of learning time by the end of 4th and 5th grade compared to a student in a district 0.50 standard deviation below the average of all districts. This is about a quarter of a school year. We suggest that a variable that can potentially increase education productivity by 25 percent is important" (p. 13).

The researchers further suggest that examining the differences among districts in their performance can inform district policies and practices over time. According to Whitehurst et al. (2013):

> A district targeted for improvement should be one that is chronically underperforming or is in decline. Similarly, a district to be singled out for its excellence and pointed to as a model for others to use for improvement should be one that is either persistently high performing or has shown a clear pattern of improvement (p.14).

The study suggests that lower performing students who are educated in high performing district will perform at a level "equivalent to having attended school for at least a half-year more (p.17), Thus, states and districts should be thoughtful about the policies and practices that are set at the district level. In addition, they should consider what is working in the consistently performing district to inform the work in those districts that are not consistently performing well (Whitehurst et al., 2013).

Chingos, Whitehurst and Lindquist (2014) conducted research on the role of the superintendents in influencing student learning. Data was collected from both North Carolina and Florida that spanned from 2001 to 2010. Approximately 1.3 million students' achievement data were included in this study (600, 000 from North Carolina and 700,000 from Florida). This research focused on examining the impact of the superintendent's influence on student learning. The research found that the superintendent has a .3 effect on student academic success, a small but significant occurrence.

According to Chingos, Whitehurst, and Linquist (2014), this research continues the previous study of Whitehurst et al. (2013), which established that school districts matter. As previously described in the 2013 study, "we found a small but educationally meaningful association between the school district in which a student is educated and learning outcomes have a minimal but significant impact on student achievement" (Chingos et al., 2014, p. 3). More specifically, the researchers wanted to isolate whether the effect on student achievement is directly linked to superintendents' experience or leadership of other stakeholders within the districts (Chingos, et al., 2014). The research raised the following five questions.

1) What are the observable characteristics of superintendents with a focus on their length of service?

2) Does student achievement improve when superintendents serve longer?

3) Do school districts improve when they hire a new superintendent?

4) What is the contribution of superintendents to student achievement relative to districts, schools, and teachers?

5) Are there superintendents whose tenure is associated with exceptional changes in student achievement? (Chingos, et al., 2014, p. 3).

Although they were able to control for some variables, they found it difficult to control for all variables that might impact student achievement. However, they did the following:

They focused on the experience levels of superintendents to categorize them; examined the relationship between student achievement and the limited set of superintendent characteristics that we observe with a focus on the amount of experience the superintendent had within the district in which he/she serves; and examined the impact of change of superintendent within districts, asking whether, on the average, districts get better or worse when they brought on board a new superintendent (Chingos, et al., 2014, p. 3).

This study relied on 10 years of data rather than on one year of data. A multilevel approach was utilized to generate an estimate of impact for each superintendent relative to his or her immediate predecessor (Chingos, et al., 2014). The following were the findings.

1) The typical superintendent has been in the job for three to four years.

3) Student achievement does not improve with longevity of superintendent service within their districts.

4) Hiring a superintendent is not associated with higher student achievement.

5) The percentage of the variance in student achievement (a measure of the differences among individual students in test scores) that is associated with superintendents is smaller than that associated with any and all other major components of the education system.

6) Superintendents who have an exceptional impact on student achievement cannot be reliably identified (Chingos, et al., 2014, pp. 9- 11).

According to Chingos, et al., (2014), superintendents associated with improvement in student performance are more than likely to work in conjunction with the districts that have progressive ideas and methods for improving student achievement because superintendents are "largely indistinguishable creatures of that system" (p. 14).

Marzano and Waters (2005) states "...there is a great deal of variation in the strength of relationship between district leadership and student achievement. Stated differently, behaviors associated with leadership at the district level are not always associated with an increase in average student achievement" (p. 17).

An effective superintendent can focus attention and resources on many goals. However, those goals not associated with student achievement will have little or no influence on student performance. If the superintendent provides resources and attention to specific goals, it has an impact. If a strong superintendent does not focus on specific goals, there might be minimal or negative effect on student performance (Water & Marzano, 2005).

Principal leadership. According to Hallinger (2003), the two dominant principal leadership approaches since the 1980's are instructional and transformational leadership. Hallinger (2003) distinguishes between instructional and transformational leadership. Instructional leadership is viewed as a goal-oriented culture building approach which focuses on raising student academic outcomes. Hallinger (2009) indicated that instructional leadership is essential to supporting school leaders in building capacity and sustaining change within schools. On the other hand, transformational leadership seen as a capacity building approach that supports innovations within organizations. The goal of this leadership approach is to engage the school leaders in setting organizational goals and implementing practices to support organizational changes. Both of these roles contribute to educational change (Hallinger, 2003).

As the school district leader, the superintendent's role can have either a positive or negative influence on principals affecting their motivation, leadership, and attitude, which will eventually impact the quality of performance of teachers and students (McFarlane, 2010). One of their primary foci is supporting principals in the area of instructional leadership. A teacher's capacity, will and prior practice with a new reform initiative intertwined with incentives and learning opportunities affect the level of teacher engagement in implementing a new initiative. Also, policy, professional, public, and private sectors can immobilize or mobilize the implementation process. Teachers' perception of students' responses to instruction can serve as incentives and disincentives for teachers changing their practices as well Brezicha, Bergmark, and Mitra (2015).

The zones of enactment are affected by "teacher beliefs, knowledge and experiences and leadership supporting the implementation" (Brezicha et al., 2015, p. 100). Opportunities that facilitate social and individual sense making are critical to the differentiated leadership process. If teachers are involved in the resolution of policy and design issues through established collaborative and reflective experiences, they are more likely to support the implementation of school improvement. Thus, the way in which restructuring is introduced influences the way that change is practiced (Brezicha et al. 2015).

Brezicha et al. (2015) studied how a school leader provides differentiated support to elementary school teachers while implementing a new initiative. The principal utilized a differentiated leadership approach to support teachers in the implementation of a school initiative. This differentiated approach to support teachers relied on the theoretical "intersection of educational leadership, teacher sense making, and implementation of reform" (p. 98). It

outlines "the intentionality and the supportive role leaders have in the implementation process" (p. 99).

Within this individualized approach, the school leader utilized four ways of connecting to teacher needs and facilitating an individualized support system. The four components are 1) distributive leadership, 2) social sense making, 3) transformational leadership, and 4) individual sense making. Their concept of differentiated leadership blends aspects of transformational leadership which relies on community, followership, and visionary thinking within a supportive environment. These aspects are blended with distributive leadership which does not rely on a sole leader but focuses on a shared leadership approach which empowers teachers to change instructional practices, co-construct practices with leaders and colleagues in which teachers and other staff members share in the decision making and supportive process (Brezicha et al., 2015).

Distributed leadership. Distributed leadership is a collaborative decision making approach that engages teachers in leadership roles based on their expertise, knowledge, and skills. *Distributed leadership* is primarily concerned with the practice of governance rather than specific authoritative roles or responsibilities. Within any school, there are many sources of influence, both official and unofficial. For example, teachers work cooperatively with administration to enhance their practice and improve student performance.

In a fast-paced society, the globalization of the world through technological advances and the frequent shift in demographics due to wars and economic needs have complicated leaders' ability to affect change (Sarason, 1982). Additionally, change is introduced and too often abandoned for a myriad of reasons before it takes root. The educational system has not had historical experience in implementing and sustaining large scale changes (Fullan, 2007; Senge,

Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth & Smith, 1999). These conditions have set the stage for the need for distributed leadership (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

Research shows that it is problematic for leaders to implement systemic reform, especially in large urban districts, without the support of individuals at different levels within the organization (Marzano & Dufour, 2011). Distributed leadership is one approach school leaders use to implement and sustain change within schools. While distributed leadership might be beneficial in that it reduces the principals' role and responsibilities, it is more than that. Distributed leadership is a way of engaging teachers in the implementation and sustainment process. Distributed leadership relies on the varying competencies of individuals. Individuals are given opportunities to participate in the school organization based on their predispositions, specialized roles, interests, abilities and expertise (Elmore, 2000). Since questions, practices and educational improvement are at the core of teaching and learning, distributed leadership is opening classroom doors to collaborations with other teachers to continuously improve teacher practice and student learning (Elmore, 2002). According to Elmore (2002), continuous school improvement is a "body of knowledge about how to increase the quality of instructional practice and boost student learning on a large scale across classrooms, schools and entire school systems" (p. 28).

Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a type of distributed leadership which fosters "interactions with teachers and students around content" (Elmore, 2002, p. 24). PLCs empower teachers to work together to deepen their content knowledge, refine their instructional practices that lead to improved student learning (Elmore, 2000; Harris, 2014). "It is not a program… It is not a meeting… It is not a book club" (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p.22). It is a learning-from-within approach to leadership that is purposeful and makes a strategic effort to capitalize on the

knowledge and skills of all individuals in the organization to create opportunities to build

capacity, implement best practices, and sustain change (Elmore, 2000; Harris, 2014). "It calls for

every teacher, principal, central office staff member and superintendent—to define their roles

and responsibilities and do differently" (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 22). This professional

learning experience focuses on engaging in meaningful and rigorous tasks that promote

enhancement of teacher practices and student learning.

There are two key ideas are at the core of the PLC process. First, "the fundamental

purpose of school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels" (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p.

22). Teachers have to teach at high levels to ensure rigorous and cognitively engaging student

learning. Teachers examine their own practices as well as their colleagues. They determine how

to meet the needs of the underserved and intellectually gifted students. The reciprocity between

district and school is grounded in accountability. Thus, district level leadership ensures that

schools receive essential resources needed to accomplish the work.

Second, "If we are to help all students learn, it will require us to work collaboratively in a

collective effort to meet the needs of each student" (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 23). Everyone

understands what collaboration is and how it looks. They understand the interdependency of their

work as a team. Therefore, they are goal and purpose driven. 3) "…educators must create a

results orientation in order to know if students are learning and to respond appropriately"

(DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 24). They work collaboratively to assess the appropriateness of

policy, programs, procedures and practices (Martin-Kniep, 2008).

Practical support at the district level consists of five principles: Directing and

empowering; creating a common language; developing the capacity of principals to lead the PLC

process; limiting initiatives; and communicating priorities effectively (DuFour & Marzano, 2011)

It is essential that districts form partnerships with schools to help facilitate effective learning and capitalize on the expertise of everyone in the organization to impact student learning, teacher practice and school improvement (Martin-Kniep, 2008).

Impact of Policy Reforms

Elmore (2000) describe the structures of the educational system as silos that intervene with work and seldom come together. Business people expressed concerns about the limited skills that high school graduates possessed, while colleges complained about the number of students having to enroll in remedial classes before actually enrolling in college level courses. High school educators complained of students' absence of readiness skills in reading, writing, and mathematics which made it challenging for children to engage in more rigorous coursework that would prepare them for college (A Nation at Risk Report, 1983).

The different standards and expectations made it difficult for the federal government to determine the effectiveness of state standards and quality of education. Also, this posed a problem because the state or the community created different assessment tools to help them decide whether individuals received a quality education. These conditions challenged the nation's ability to ensure that all citizens are entitled to equitable opportunities and equal access to a quality education or to determine whether all children were receiving a high-quality education. As a result, the policy and laws enacted at the federal level heightened the need for unified state accountability systems. These policies and legislation increased the role of the federal government in educational matters. Alternatively, the system, to a degree, has raised questions about the constitutionality of the federal government shifting toward an increased role in the

education of the populace. In the constitution, education is an implied responsibility of states and local governments (Brimley, Verstegen & Garfield, 2016).

Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 1965. ESEA of 1965 represents President Johnson's signature legislation to address the "war on poverty" (Yell, 2012). However, it is important to note that this law was reauthorized in 1994 as the Improving America's Schools Act before it became the NCLB Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education.

Throughout its more than fifty years, the ESEA has steadily moved toward its purpose to provide quality education for all students in secondary and elementary schools (Jennings, 2015). Today, the federal government provides more support to education than the tangential role outlined in the United States Constitution (Jennings, 2015). For more than fifty years, ESEA has provided tremendous benefits to underserved students, such as, economically disadvantaged, limited English speaking students, special needs students who need early education, the gifted students, and the students of migrant workers. Moreover, it has supported innovative programs, educational research, and professional development in many school districts (Sarason, 1992). Throughout the years, it has provided many billions of dollars in funding to increase the learning and performance of millions of disadvantaged students in both public and private schools (Jennings, 2015; Klein, 2015; Reynolds, Vannest, & Fletcher-Jansen, 2013).

Nation at Risk Report 1983. A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (1983) is a national report that the Commission on Excellence issued. The Secretary of Education, T.H. Bell, directed the commission to examine the quality of education in the United States. They were asked to focus primarily on the concerns of high schools. Also, the commission was directed to selectively look at issues involving the "formative years spent in

elementary schools, higher education, and vocational and technical programs" (A Nation at Risk, 1983).

This document purported that students lacked the language and critical skills needed to work effectively on jobs and complete college without taking prep courses to build student skills so that they may succeed. Students would drop out because they found the courses too challenging. It issued the following findings: Students graduating high school were underprepared for college and the workforce; test performance was declining; and teachers were not adequately prepared to teach or equitably paid (A Nation at Risk, 1983).

In a speech during the first meeting of the National Commission on Education in 1981, President Reagan said that a quality education is fundamental to the survival of nations; therefore, it is essential that everyone is given equal opportunity to attain an education. He inextricably linked a poorly educated United States populace with the nation's inability to thrive and compete commercially with other countries. He saw knowledge, learning, information, and skilled intelligence as global commodities. Of the four commodities, he saw learning as the most vital to the success of America as it entered the information age (A Nation at Risk, 1983).

Thus, individuals deprived of an opportunity to acquire essential knowledge, skill, and training are disenfranchised from enjoying and experiencing the privileges of acquiring a quality education and a job. Finally, he concluded that everyone is entitled to an equal opportunity to achieve his/her fullest potential regardless of race, class, or economic status (A Nation at Risk, 1983).

Goals 2000. President George H. W. Bush in 1989 worked with a coalition of state governors to propose Goals 2000 (Educate America Act, 1994). This proposal represented a further shift in the national involvement in education. This policy shifted to a greater federal involvement in educational conversation along with financial support. These goals gave specific directions to the states outlining the federal government's expectations. For example, the essence of each of the Eight Goals 2000 is listed below:

1) All children will start school ready to learn.

2) The high school graduation rate should increase to 90 percent.

3) All students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 demonstrating competencies in all subjects.

4) The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for improvement of their professional skills.

5) United States students will be the first in the world in mathematics and science.

6) Every adult will be literate and possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

7) Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol.

8) Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation (Educate America Act, 1994).

With Goals 2000, the federal government heightened states' level of accountability to the federal government. The states had to comply with the following requirements.

- o Submitting grant proposals and improvement plans

- Receiving penalties for failure to comply with improvement plans

- Forming partnerships between local schools, businesses and institutions of higher education

- Coordinating their Goals 2000 efforts with school-to-work and other social reform programs (Educate America Act, 1994).

Federal educational funding typically supplemented state funding in high needs areas. The Goals 2000 attached funding to Federal mandates. This policy drew much criticism from the Center for Home Schooling and others. By 1999, Goals 2000 ended because the Center argued the unconstitutionality of this system. The Center believed that this procedure infringed upon state and local governments' constitutional right to make educational decisions and set policies. (National Center for Home Education Report, 2002).

No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB). The NCLB Act 2001 reauthorized the 1965 Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) introducing annual testing in grades 3–8 and high school. The primary purpose of this law was to incorporate increased accountability measures for statewide school districts and schools (Owens & Sunderman, 2006). The law gave parents in low-performing schools a choice regarding the schools and different programs that were available to them. Schools had more flexibility in spending Federal money. Accountability, testing, and quality teaching and high standards were central focuses of the NCLB law.

As a result, the students appeared to be doing well when in essence they were not. In some instances, states, in addition to lowering their standards, preempted differential models and returned to one-size fit all program models while some others spent extensive classroom time preparing students for tests (NCLB Act, 2001). A close examination of the assessments,

teaching/ learning revealed that some students engaged in rote activities rather than rigorous and critical thinking experiences (NCLB Act, 2001; Civil Rights Project, 2006).

The Race to the Top 2009. The Race to the Top 2009 was a federally sponsored program that was funded under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act 2009 (ARRA) which became law under President Obama's administration on February 17, 2009. It provided $4.35 billion to support the program. Unlike NCLB, The Race to the Top was a competitive grant that required applicants to create innovative ideas to better support educators to ensure that students developed college and career readiness skills needed to enter college, become productive citizens, and compete for jobs in a global economy. Also, this program required that plans were devised to meet the needs of the disadvantaged and underserved students—low income, minority students, special needs students and English Language Learners. Embedded in these program proposals/plans were incentives designed to promote innovative ideas to ensure that students met the standards (White House, 2015). The four pillars of this competitive grant were the following.

- Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools (Race to the Top Report, 2015).

On November 4, 2009, President Barack Obama re-emphasized the need for leaders to make a real commitment to education when he stated, "It's time to stop just talking about education reform and start actually doing it. It's time to make education America's national mission" (Race to the Top Report, 2015). Both the nation's high school graduation rate and National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores have increased (Race to the Top Report, 2015).

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) 2015. ESSA is the latest federal government effort to demonstrate its commitment to equity and quality education for all. In contrast to the NCLB failed prescription of a "one-size-fits-all mandate" (White House, 2015), the top priority of ESSA is ensuring that zip codes do not prevent children from having access to and receiving a quality education. This act comes on the heel of the Race to the Top program which served as a catalyst for the creation of innovative educational programs geared to improve teacher quality and to investigate innovative practices that support student learning (White House Report: ESSA, 2015).

President Obama said the following:

The goals of No Child Left Behind were the right goals: Making a promise to educate every child with an excellent teacher—that's the right thing to do, that's the right goal. Higher standards are right. Accountability is right… But what hasn't worked is denying teachers, schools, and states what they need to meet these goals. That's why we need to fix No Child Left Behind (White House Report: ESSA, 2015).

Although the goal of ESSA is the same as the NCLB, what is different about ESSA is the intensive, systematic, and purposeful approach to addressing the goal— "educating every child with an excellent teacher" (White House Report: ESSA, 2015). This act aptly places the onus of

educational decision-making at the state and local levels. ESSA empowers educators to use meaningful data to discern and devise appropriate and targeted strategies to address students' needs (White House Report: ESSA, 2015).

Every Student Succeeds Act is created to continue the educational accomplishments that started with the Race to the Top program 2010 and American Reinvestment Act 2009, an economic stimulus act designed to heal the country's weak economy resulting from 2008 financial crisis. (White House Report: ESSA, 2015) The legislation promises to accomplish the following.

1) Ensure that states set high standards.

2) Maintain accountability.

3) Empower states and local decision-makers to develop improvement systems based on data rather than a prescriptive program.

4) Maintain annual assessments and reduce the often onerous burden of unnecessary and ineffective testing.

5) Provide more children access to high-quality preschool (White House Report: ESSA, 2015).

6) ESSA includes requirements that will help to ensure success for students and schools. The following are some key aspects of the law:

   - Advances equity for America's disadvantaged and high-need students.

   - Requires all students in America be taught high academic standards

   - Uses annual assessments to inform all stakeholders about student progress

   - Encourage research-based innovative practices

   - Sustains and expands access to high-quality preschool.

- Maintains an expectation that there will be accountability and action to effect positive change in our lowest-performing schools (ESSA Act 2015).

ESSA provides broad guidelines that encourages research, rigorous standards and accountability systems geared to support the growth and development of all children. Early education of students during their formative years of learning plays a critical role in the ESSA Act 2015.

Standards based reform. Wars around the world opened the American economy to sheltering refugees of different linguistic and economic backgrounds. In addition, an increasing number of immigrants seek America as the land of opportunity (Bennis, 2006). The ten-year engagement in the Iraq war concurrent with other militaristic and security measures have gradually diminished the U.S. economic power and limited its ability to provide adequate resources to support the education of a society with rapidly changing demographics and values (Brimley et al., 2016).

Elmore (2000) purports that there is evidence of research which points to schools and districts that have been effective with implementing standards' reform. He states the following:

…redesigning institutions and improving educational practice are massively more complex. …they involve changes of the most fundamental kind in the norms and values that shape work in schools, in the way the resources of the system get used, in the skills and knowledge that the people bring to their work and in how people relate to each other around the work of the organization (p. 26).

Elmore (2000) points out that historically a consistent nation-wide effort to initiate standards based reform was evident in the foundation of laws and governance of education within the United States. While these policies may not be specific or logical, "the politics that

surround these policies are very energetic and visible" (Elmore et al. 2000, p. 5). Most states, on some level, have implemented some form of standards and have begun to utilize accountability systems to gauge and report student performance based on the standards. According to Elmore. (2000), it does not matter whether the states create "the version of standards-based reform that advocates envision or … a corrupted and poorly thought out evil twin. But we will almost surely get some version of standards-based reform in virtually every jurisdiction…" (p. 5). In essence, it was most important to keep the reform movement alive rather than having the perfect standards.

Over the years, government leaders have gradually envisioned "higher standards" (Elmore, 2000, p. 5) as a critical component which promises to yield the United States a competitive edge in the national and international community. "High standards" refer to "high levels of student achievement" (p. 5). They are tools educators use to help schools work as systems focused on "coherent, consistent publicly articulated goals…that organize{d} the development of exams and curriculum, inform textbook writing and determine direction of teacher training" (p. 5). Educators see "standards as a vehicle for professional teaching" (Reigeluth, 1997, p. 203) which provides teachers flexibility in meeting student needs. Most importantly, Reigeluth (1997) points out that "Standards, properly conceived, are just one necessary, but not sufficient part of a comprehensive redesign of a very complex education system" (p. 203).

Higher standards are at the center of the discourse regarding educational reform efforts geared to improve student performance. Elmore perceives the massive undertaking of standards reform as a feasible goal that is evidenced in research which points to schools and districts that have been effective in implementing standards. However, he clarifies that implementing standards requires a shift in institutional design, educational practice, norms and values,

interactions of people around the work, utilization the of resources, knowledge, expertise and skills used to engage individuals in the work within the organization (Elmore, 2000).

Common Core State Standards (CCSS) 2010. The Common Core State Standards (2010) initiative is a response to the inconsistent findings across states of what it meant to be proficient in reading and mathematics (Common Core State Standards 2010). The CCSS were designed and to ensure that a zip code did not determine the children's potential. This coordinated effort of the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) sought to provide equal opportunity across states to all student populations to acquire a quality education that would prepare them for college and career (Common Core State Standards, 2010).

The Common Core State Standards (2010) states that college and career readiness is the ability "to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce-training programs" (Common Core State Standards, 2010). These nationally and internationally benchmarked standards paint a vivid picture of student learning progression from PreK-12 and provide stakeholders with a common understanding of what students are expected to know and be able to do. These "…consistent standards across the country provide appropriate benchmarks for all students, regardless of where they live," say the NGA and CCSSO (Common Core State Standards, 2010).

According to NGA and CCSSO, the common core standards are not a curriculum, but they are shared goals and expectations of what students should know and be able to do. Teachers, school leaders, and system leaders are expected to decide how the standards will be met. Teachers would create units of study and lessons to design instruction that meets the individual student needs (Common Core State Standards, 2010).

According to Elmore (2002), the standards movement is an effort to align the organization of schools with the challenging and complex work of the schools. If students are held to high standards, then people working with students should be accountable for ensuring that the underserved and underperforming students are able to meet these rigorous expectations. Accountability is defined as "systems that hold students, schools or districts responsible for academic performance" (Elmore, 2002, p. 3).

Research shows that numerous students entering four year colleges take a large number of zero credit courses and spend additional time earning a 4-year degree in college. According to research, a large percentage of students would drop out because they found the course work too challenging. The Common Core State Standards represents an answer to the nation's expectations of increasing the number of students graduating college and an opportunity to close the achievement gap. Also, these standards serve as an avenue to demonstrate the federal government's commitment to equity and access for all individuals, and to stabilize the national security and economy (Brimley et al., 2016).

In 2010, the Governors' Association released the Common Core State Standards which promised to equalize educational opportunity and provide quality education for all students. These are rigorous expectations that paint a clear picture of what is expected of students at each grade level. These mathematics and English language arts standards are designed to illustrate from Pre-K through 12th Grade progressions of essential knowledge and skills to better prepare students for college and careers (NYSED, 2013).

New York State Common Core initiative implementation process. After adopting the Common Core Standards as Common Core Learning Standards in 2011, The New York State distributed an implementation framework that provided a 5-year time line for districts within the state explaining step by step how the common core standards will be introduced and implemented within schools. By 2014, the standards were to be fully implemented. However, some places, such as NYC had already begun the implementation process and was ahead of the state process (Engage New York, 2010).

By the end of year one, the State organized an intensive five-day summer session that consisted of teams of individuals who worked on the district level, in the classroom and at central. They were called Network Teams. These Network Teams were New York State's vehicle for implementing the reforms associated with Race to the Top and the Regents Reform Agenda. These 3-15-person team's primary functions was to build the capacity in schools of New York around these three school-based initiatives: The Common Core State Standards, Data Driven Instruction, and Teacher–Leader Effectiveness. (Engage NY, 2010)

The five-day session focused on developing a deep understanding of the standards and the process of implementing the Regents Reform Agenda. Establishing inquiry teams was the structure/system that they used to look at student work to inform teacher practice and identify student needs. The third session focused on unpacking the teacher evaluation system, developing a common understanding of criteria for effective teaching, and practicing providing evidence based feedback using low inference observations. Outside experts in each of the focused areas led the professional development session. The planners allocated time for each team representing each district to meet and talk about how this professional development supported the work in the district.

Within each session, there were opportunities to focus on academic language, protocols to encourage reflection, application of the learning and links to previous and current practice. There were mixed teams based on locations and expertise. At the end of the five-day session, network teams set together to devise an action plan to take back to their district.

Within each session, time was allocated for onsite planning to ensure that each team walked away with a plan of action, and these plans were shared with others and were given feedback. To ensure that learning was maximized, members of each team were mixed with others (NYSED, 2015).

The summer session was always followed by Two-day follow-up sessions that continued in the fall and winter. These were basically reflective opportunities to grow and sustain the practices. One of the challenges was consistency in attendance.

To maintain consistency and expand the opportunity for sharing practice, New York State created a website named EngageNY.org to provide materials, tools, and resources to support the implementation process. The network team members were expected to build capacity within their districts and schools on the three school-based initiatives. Participants learned more about the initiatives, ways to drive change at the school-and district-levels, and how to deliver quality professional development experiences locally (NYSED, August 29, 2012).

New York State (NYS) Common Core Task Force 2015. The implementation of the Common Core Standards had been underway since 2009 with a timeline for full implementation by 2014. The growing resistance among parents, teachers and other stakeholders to the New York State CCLS and the Common Core examinations in grades three through eight prompted the development of the NYS Common Core Task Force. The governor established a commission

to investigate the implementation process. The NYS Task Force used interviews, surveys and

other tools to identify the barriers outlined in Table 1.

Table 1.

Task Force Report 2015: Major Barriers to CCLS Implementation Process

Area	Description

Engagement of Stakeholders	● Initial implementation process failed to do the following.
	   ○ Include meaningful input from parents, local educators and other stakeholders on the development of the Common Core-aligned tests
	   ○ Provide transparency, flexibility and adaptability
	   ○ Adapt the standards to meet local school district needs

Adjustments for special populations	● Common Core Standards failed to do the following.
	   ○ Include Age-appropriate curriculum in grades K-2
	   ○ Address English language learners and students with disabilities.

Curriculum	● Common Core Standards implementation failed to provide the following.
	   ○ Time to develop teacher aligned curriculum
	   ○ Sample curriculum resources
	   ○ User friendly and less complicated curriculum
	   ○ Depth, breadth, and inclusion for all within the curriculum
	   ○ Sufficient time for teachers to develop curriculum aligned to the Common Core
	   ○ Sample curriculum resources in a timely manner

Instructional Impact	● Too much time is spent preparing for and taking tests which encourages "teaching to the test"

Source: Adapted from New York State Task Force Final Report, 2015, pp. 9–11.

The NYSED Task Force issued a final report that outlined the major barriers that impeded the

implementation of the CCLS. Additionally, the commission identified Twenty-one

recommendations to the governor. The Task Force suggested that the Common Core State

Standards undergo a revision so that it incorporates the specific needs and priorities of NYS.

Table 2 captures a condensed version of the twenty-one recommendations that address the

barriers outlined in the Task Force Report 2015.

Table 2

Task Force 2015: Condensed Recommendations

Area	Description
Establish high quality New York standards	o Adopt high quality New York education standards with input from all stakeholders o Modify early grade standards to make them age-appropriate. o Establish some transparent, open, ongoing standards review process
Develop better curriculum guidance and resources	o Launch a digital statewide platform to share resources among all teachers. Create ongoing professional development opportunities for all stakeholders
Significantly reduce testing time and preparation and ensure tests fit curriculum and standards	o Reduce the number of days, shorten the duration, provide flexibility for assessment of students with disabilities and explore alternative options to assess the most severely disabled students. o Transition to untimed tests for state standardized tests aligned to the standards. o Eliminate double testing for English Language Learners
Impact	o Until the new system is fully phased in, the results from assessments aligned to the current Common Core Standards, as well as the updated standards, shall only be advisory and not be used to evaluate the performance of individual teachers or students

Source: (Adapted from the New York Task Force Final Report, 2015, pp. 9–11).

In Table 2 the recommendations are intended to refocus the implementation process and garner feedback and support from all stakeholders. The purpose of the review and revision process is to ensure that there are age-appropriate, high-quality state standards that reflect local educators' input. Moreover, this process provides a framework for moving forward with implementing the newly revised standards (Common Core Task Force Report, 2015).

The Common Core Task Force Report 2015 further clarified that the current CCLS and the revised expectations will not be used to evaluate the performance of individual teachers or students until the new system is fully in place (Common Core Task Force Report, 2015). The new revised standards are being reviewed currently by stakeholders.

While this was a part of the intent of the Race-To-The-Top Competitive Grant and the focus of the governor and the state legislature, the speed of the standards implementation did not allow adequate time to digest the standards and the expectations for teaching (Common Core Task Force Report, 2015).

Systemic Change in Implementing and Sustaining Reform

Educational change is "a sociopolitical process" (Fullan, 2007, p.13). Many attempts at change fail because no "distinction is made between theories of change, what causes change and theories of changing how to influence those causes" (pp.13–14).

> Change is a process which requires extensive action sustained over several years to make it possible both physically and attitudinally for teachers to work naturally together in joint planning; observation of one another's practice; and seeking, testing and revising teaching strategies on a continuous basis. Reform is not just putting into place the latest policy. It means changing the cultures of classrooms, schools, districts, universities and so on (Fullan, 2007, p. 7).

Kotter (2002) argues that it was hard to implement large-scale change, but it is not impossible. While the change in a large system is a challenging and daunting task, the leaders must understand the change process. The "central issue is never strategy, structure, culture, or systems. All those elements and others are important" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. xii). They

suggest that there are eight steps that leaders might take to actualize the process of large-scale change.

Kotter and Cohen (2002) acknowledge that the difficult challenge is changing behavior. People resist change in many ways and for different reasons. Kotter and Cohen (2002) suggest that a three-part method—See, Feel and Change—is utilized to address the resistant behavior. They ask questions and give resistance, but having an opportunity for the participants to articulate differences will begin to bring them to feeling. As they talk through concerns and issues raised by the change, the team moves to changing and seeing it.

Bridges and Bridges (2009) offer another perspective on understanding why people resist or fail to change. Change efforts fail because little attention is paid to helping people make transitions and managing that process. For individuals to switch to a new way of thinking or behaving, they must engage in a transitional process that encompasses three phases of transition. It is essential that leaders become aware of these steps and how they manifest within each in an organization experiencing change. The individual's experience through each stage will be different. Understanding, observing, and responding to each person as he or she progresses through each phase is critical to the change process. The change will not happen unless individuals' attitudes change as indicated by Figure 4. Bridges and Bridges (2009) offer another perspective on understanding why people resist or fail to change. Change efforts fail because little attention is paid to helping people make transitions and managing that process. For individuals to switch to a new way of thinking or behaving, they must engage in a transitional process that encompasses three phases of transition. It is essential that leaders become aware of these steps and how they manifest within each individual in an organization experiencing change. The individual's experience through each stage will be different. Understanding,

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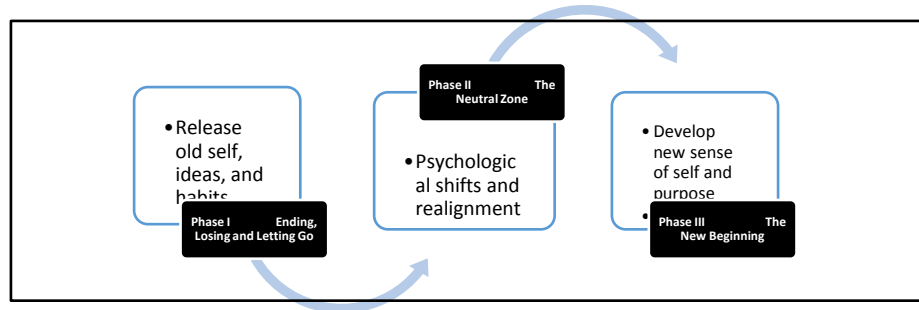
Figure 4. *Bridges and Bridges: Three phases of transition process.*
　　　　Source: Bridges and Bridges, (2009, p. 4–5).

 Making a transition requires a psychological shift that relies on "letting go of the old reality and old identity" (Bridges, 2009, p. 7) before the change takes place. Organizations overlook that "letting-go process" completely, and do nothing about the "feelings of loss that it generates" (Bridges, 2009, p. 7). In overlooking these effects, they nearly guarantee that the transition will be mismanaged and that, as a result, the change will go badly. Unmanaged transition makes change unmanageable.

Bridges (2009) sees this resistant behavior as a natural part of the change process. He frames it as individuals responding to the loss. Since the change is leaving the old and replacing it with something new, that which is replaced is a loss. The intensity of the response is determined by the significance of the loss to the individual. As people are supported through each phase of transition, it will better prepare him or her to achieve, accept, and improve with the new change.

Mauer (2006) gives a roadmap on how to introduce, engage, support and sustain change.

1. Identify and clarify the role of the stakeholders

2. Make a case for change.

3. Determine strategies to continue to make the case throughout the life of the project.

4. Determine who will lead and who will take part in planning this change.

5. Look for potential resistance.

6. Undertake all subsequent actions in a way that allows you to mitigate problems.

7. Create a vision that lets people know where you are headed.

8. Develop a plan for reaching the vision.

9. Create measures of success and timelines.

10. Keep the change alive.

11. Develop contingency plans.

12. Celebrate and learn from this change (p. 16).

Mauer (2006) argues that "…people need to get the need for change both intellectually and in their gut" (p. 21). Ensuring that people understand the reason for the change and how it will make a difference within the organization is critical to the change process. Unless people understand the personal need for change before it is supported with data, it will be difficult for them to engage in the process (Maurer, 2006). Both rational and emotional understanding should be intertwined and presented simultaneously to effect behavioral change (Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Aguirre & Alpern, 2013). If the change is not meaningful to them, the lack of clarity and confusion will thwart and hinder the process.

These become formal solutions to reward behavioral changes either financially or publicly (Aguirre & Alpern, 2014). Kotter and Cohen (2002) describe these milestones as "short-term wins" (p. 140). These wins are designed "to energize the change helpers, enlighten the pessimists, defuse the cynics, and build momentum for the effort" (p. 140).

Designing opportunities for celebrations will prevent overwhelming the participants. What sometimes happens in schools or organizations is that initiative after initiative is added without giving the first initiative time to take root. This piling up of projects is called "Scope Creep" (Mauer, 2006, p. 21). This practice produces a decrease in enthusiasm and impedes administering recognitions for successes. Aguirre and Alpern (2014) describe this loss of interest as "Change Fatigue" (p. 75). Time needs to be provided to make links with the new initiative.

According to Bridges and Bridges (2009), "the single biggest reason organizational changes fail is that no one has thought about endings or planned to manage their impact on people" (p. 37). Therefore, it is essential for leaders, during this transitional period, to be aware of those who are grieving loss in their organization. Bridges and Bridges (2009) offer some strategies for leaders to utilize to manage an individual's transition to a new beginning. "People need the Four Ps—the purpose, a picture, the plan and a part to play" (p. 60). If people clearly understand the purpose for the change and are a part of the solution, they are more likely to support the decision.

Fullan (2007) stated, "Another reason that change fails to occur in the first place on any scale, and is not sustained when it does is that the infrastructure is weak, unhelpful or working at a cross purpose" (p. 18). Fullan sees infrastructure as support that comes from the "next layer above whatever unit we are focusing on" (p. 18). He further points out that if there is a negative culture in a school, teachers "cannot sustain change" (p. 18). If a district is not supportive of the school and has a negative culture, "a school can initiate and implement successful change, but cannot sustain it" (p. 18). He further points out that if there is a negative culture within a school, teachers "cannot sustain change" (p. 18). If a district is not supportive of the school and has a negative culture, "a school can initiate and implement successful change, but cannot sustain it"

(p. 18). Thus, the district cannot survive in a culture of confusion, disorganization and competing purposes. As a result, he emphasizes the need to implement "tri-level reform" which focuses on the local school and community, district, and state or the national level. This comprehensive tri-level approach poses greater possibility of affecting change in every classroom across the system.

Fullan (2007) further points out that more work can be done to support a turnaround in schools because the work at present is "at best, superficial, non-sustainable results" (p. 19). While the research is closer to understanding, what must be done to achieve sustainable continuous reform, the challenge and need is getting the work done. Hence, sustainability in large-scale reform requires "purposeful actions on many fronts" (p. 19).

Another explanation for differential impact of leadership involves the "order of magnitude of change" (Marzano & Waters, 2006, p. 17*).*

> Theoretical literature on leadership and change asserts that not all change is of the same order of magnitude. Some changes represent more significant implications for staff members, students, parents, and community members than others. First order and second order change is routine and dramatic. Leading change theorist use terms such as, technical vs. adaptive, incremental vs. fundamental, continuous vs. discontinuous to make this same distinction (p. 17).

First-order change is "perceived as an extension of the past, fits within existing paradigms, is consistent with prevailing values and norms, can be implemented with existing knowledge and skills, and requires resources currently available to those responsible for implementing the innovations and maybe accepted because of common agreement that the innovation is necessary" (p. 105).

The following is said about second order change:

… is perceived as a break with the past, lies outside of existing paradigms, conflicts with prevailing values and norms, requires the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, requires resources currently not available to those responsible for implementing the innovations, maybe resisted because only those who have a broad perspective of the school see the innovation as necessary (p. 105).

Thus, what is first order for one group or individual can be second order to another group or individual (Marzano & Waters, 2006).

According to Fullan (2001), "Deep and sustained reform depends on many of us, not just on the very few who are destined to be extraordinary" (p. 2). Fullan further states that today's leaders are required to do more than focus only on mobilizing people to solve problems, but act as 21st century leaders who are prepared to energize people to confront challenging problems with no easy answers (Fullan, 2001).

He argues that there is a convergence theory that supports complex change. This theory consists of five components that work in tandem with each other to create the opportunity or space to actualize complex change. These forces are harmoniously interconnected. They are moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge, creation and sharing, and coherence making (Fullan, 2001).

The change should germinate from an effort to make a positive difference. Thus, the change will have a moral purpose. In addition to having a meaningful reason to change, everyone involved in the change should understand it. In order to accomplish change, the leader works toward building collaborative relationships amongst diverse people because people bring their culture with them which might interfere with the work. System leaders create a new way of

interacting based on the group that welcomes intellectual debate and exchange of ideas that is geared toward addressing the challenge. This extensive exchange of rich ideas encompasses the fourth component "knowledge creation and sharing ideas" (Fullan, 2001, p. 5). Change will be hindered if the relationships among individuals do not improve. While the focus is on "Coherence making," one must understand that it is difficult to fully achieve and maintain, because in the change process, things are constantly in "disequilibrium" (p. 6). Thus, there should be a continual focus on coherence, creating harmony, consistency, and unity.

Fullan (2001) suggests that the leader in complex times should be tortoise-like in approaching problems. Chaotic times require a leader who is more tortoise-like or slow knowing in response to complex challenging situations. Taking time to think, analyze, and reflect is critical to discovering the pathway to resolve the issue.

Sometimes the change within the organization is forgotten or no longer practiced. This happens because a lot of attention is given to the implementation process, but too little attention is paid to sustaining the practice. Johnson (2005) acknowledges this supposition when he stated, "I discovered that implementation was the easy part—sustaining meaningful change across groups and communities was the difficulty" (p. 6). However, Johnson recommends as a possible solution the use of a balanced leadership approach coupled with the adoption of three basic principles:

- All individuals have inherent value as contributing members of the organization;
- The fundamental purpose of change is to create an organizational structure that makes the most of everyone's talents; and
- Organizational success depends on individual success (Johnson, 2005, 116).

Combining the balanced leadership approach and the three principles will facilitate the creation of sustainable "deep change" (p. 116).

Fullan (2001) further argues that "[w]hat is needed for sustainable performance, then, is leadership at many levels of the organization" (p. 137). This is essential to building capacity within a school organization. Engaging leaders throughout all organizational levels will create a greater possibility to implement and sustain the change (Fullan, 2001).

Summary

Chapter 2 examined relevant literature that explored four major topics, the evolving role of district leadership, leadership influence on student performance, impact of policy reforms, and systemic change in implementing and sustaining initiatives.

Also, this chapter explains how the six responsibilities of a superintendent play a critical role in facilitating reform efforts geared toward increasing student performance. It illustrates how and why the system leader's role has evolved from being a monitor to teacher scholar, instructional leader, and in recent years, a partner with the school leader. The district leaders, principals, and assistant principals create aligned goals that focus on quality instruction and student performance. They provide support in four domains, namely instruction, data resources, professional learning, and curriculum.

Fullan (2001) makes a case for the engagement of tri-level educational reform. This multilevel change is coordinated, implemented and sustained at the local, state, and federal government levels. "Change cannot be accomplished overnight, but it also cannot be open ended" (p. 40). The need to establish a timeline or action plan for implementation and structures, systems and processes for sustainment—continuing the work—are keys to ensuring that change is actualized in a comprehensive and coherent manner (Fullan, 2007).

The literature makes a strong argument for the need to conduct research on how system leaders support school leaders in embedding and sustaining change. Chapter 3 discusses a research design that provides the methodology for the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and comparative case study design that were used to explore how superintendents support principals in embedding and sustaining initiatives such as the CCLS. This chapter describes the design methods, data collection, case study tools utilized, and purposeful sampling, triangulation, validity, and reliability procedures employed to support the comparative qualitative case study approach.

The purpose of this comparative qualitative case study of two school districts in New York State is to discover how district leader support principals in embedding and sustaining the CCLS with the goal of improved student achievement. The research focused on both middle and elementary school leaders. The researcher examined the ways in which district leaders' behaviors influenced principals and assistant principals in sustaining changes in practices with the purpose of improving student performance. The research questions for this study are as follows.

1) What role does the district play in helping principals to implement and embed the CCLS within schools?

2) What types of supports do principals provide to teachers that affect the implementation of common core standards?

3) What are leadership behaviors of district leaders and assistant superintendents evident in supporting principals in embedding practices?

4) In consideration of the recent concerns and issues raised about the Common Core implementation process in New York State, how will the Common Core Task Force Final Report 2015 affect the embedding and sustainment processes in schools and districts?

Research Design

A comparative qualitative case study is a research design that utilizes two or more samples to examine a common phenomenon to identify similarities and differences. This comparative qualitative case study approach (Creswell, 2012) employed two NYC school districts and four schools in the following state accountability category of good standing (NYSED Website, 2015). This approach allowed the researcher the opportunity to delve into the central phenomenon to investigate how system leaders support school leaders in implementing, embedding, and sustaining the common core standards for the purpose of improving student performance.

Creswell (2012) suggests that comparative qualitative studies incorporate various tools to collect and analyze data. Both the sites and participants helped the researcher to understand the phenomenon better, to provide multiple perspectives, and to present the broadest diversity (McMillan, 2012; Creswell, 2012). Through the use of interviews, document reviews, and observations of professional learning opportunities, the researcher gathered a deeper and clearer understanding of tools that the researcher utilized in this study (Creswell, 2012; McMillan, 2012; Yin, 2012).

This data gave the investigator a clearer sense of the resources system that the leaders used and provided the researcher opportunities to gather data to facilitate triangulation of information from various sources. Interviewing the principals from each district afforded ample opportunity to compare findings or corroborate different perspectives and investigate how school districts in good standing are supporting their school leaders with the essential resources needed to improve professional practices that lead to improved student performance.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

The purpose of this comparative qualitative case study was to understand the way in which system leaders supported school leaders. This comparative qualitative case study design utilized a purposeful sampling method because it allowed the researcher to select sites based on state accountability rating of good standing. The researcher selected participants who could "provide the richest information" (Creswell, 2012, p. 115).

A purposeful sampling approach was utilized to select two districts and four schools. Twelve leaders of the district and school levels participated in this study—four leaders in the school districts and eight at the school level. The reviewer divided the participants further according to middle and elementary schools—four middle school leaders and four elementary school leaders were selected. The district level leaders provided the system leadership perspective of support provided to school leaders. The eight school leaders were chosen to provide their perception of the administrative support received from district leaders and the influence of system leaders' behaviors on school leaders' practices. This structure allowed the researcher the opportunity to compare the strategies and resources the two districts used to support school leaders and to affect principals' practices.

As part of the New York State accountability system, schools are rated annually based on the school's performance on both the math and English language arts examinations. If the school met the annual yearly progress target (AYP), the school is deemed to be in "good standing" (NYSED Website 2015).

The researcher conducted this study in NYC. The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling procedure to select participants who could provide the richest information. The researcher selected four schools that had met their Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets as

potential members of the study. Utilizing the NYSED website, the researcher compiled a list of ten school districts within NYC with schools having a New York State Accountability Rating of "in good standing" (NYSED, 2015). The review identified potential participants on the list. These districts were engaged in implementing the CCLS. The plan was to select two leaders of each community school district to receive an invitation to participate in the study. When a district did not agree to participate, or did not respond, the next site on the list was selected.

The first district level leaders selected agreed to participate, but the schools contacted were unresponsive or unwilling. The study required that the school and district leaders were from the same community school district. Considering the limitation of time to conduct the study, the researcher decided to send the request to the district leaders and school leaders at the same time. The researcher repeated the process with two other districts. The four schools responded and volunteered to participate in the study. District X required at least two follow-up calls before connecting with the potential participants. The researcher contacted them by follow-up emails and telephone communications. This process took a month. Sending the invitation at the same time to two potential districts and selected schools within the district shortened the wait time, and it made the follow-up easier. The schools in both districts responded right away with a confirmation.

On the district level, the two individuals who were targeted initially as the best possible participants for this study were the Superintendent and the PLF. The reviewer chose them because the PLF served as the superintendent's primary designee for evaluative visits and critical instructional support. This person is responsible for improving the effectiveness of district principals through on-site visits and embedded coaching. Additionally, the PLF served as a resource to assist school leaders in developing curricular, instructional and organizational plans.

While there was no position of a Deputy Superintendent, this position is similar to the role of a Deputy Superintendent (NYCDOE Website, 2016).

The two schools agreed to participate. The superintendent volunteered the district and thought it was best to talk with two other team members, the PLF and FSL. The researcher assessed the role of the other suggested team member and agreed to interview the FSL. The FSL served as a liaison and data specialist who worked alongside the Superintendent and PLF in providing district-wide professional development. The FSL ensured that a variety of data sources were utilized to inform school needs and that the appropriate professional development aligned to specific school needs (NYCDOE Website, 2016). District leaders provided meeting agendas, professional learning plans, district comprehensive education plans (DCEP), teacher observations, and school visits which illustrated support given principals to implement, embed and sustain the common core initiative. They were viable choices to provide the district perspectives on the support given to school leaders.

Interviewing the PLF, the FSL, principal, and assistant principals afforded abundant opportunities to compare findings or corroborate different perspectives. It also allowed the researcher ample opportunities to compare district and school leadership practices and to determine different or similar approaches used. The researcher ascertained a deeper and clearer understanding of tools and resources that were utilized to influence principals' practices from the interviews, observations, and document reviews (Creswell, 2012; McMillan, 2012 & Yin, 2012). Moreover, the researcher was able to investigate how district leaders supported school leaders in implementing, embedding and sustaining initiatives, such as the CCLS.

Selecting districts with schools in the same accountability categories enabled the researcher to compare the strategies superintendents in different districts were using to support

school leaders and the impact of these approaches on principals' behaviors. The researcher gathered the data from each team which provided an opportunity to compare the practices each district employed.

Instrumentation

Participants received a cover letter explaining the title and purpose of the study as well as a letter of informed consent which detailed the design, nature of the study and the participants. After agreeing, each person signed the informed consent form. The inform consent form acknowledged the focus, risk and the confidentiality aspect of the research. It also let the participants know that at any time they could rescind their consent or opt out with no penalty. This provision included dropping out in the case of the occurrence of an adverse event. The researcher will keep these forms in a locked file for three years. The researcher is the only person who has access to this data. The researcher followed the confidentiality guidelines of providing pseudonyms for each participant and extracting all identifiable information that might reveal to readers the identity of the participants.

Ten interview questions were created to collect information from the participants that helped to answer the four research questions. School leaders and district leaders tested the interview questions for validity and reliability. Team members within the cohort working in the capacity of school and district administrators provided feedback on the accuracy of the questions. The interview questions were field tested by different individuals within the school cohort. Two individuals—one superintendent and one principal provided feedback to ensure reliability and validity of the interview questions. None of these people participated in the case study.

The researcher used a narrative form (see Appendix J) to capture notes during the direct observation of a meeting. The document consisted of four sections. The first section identified

the goal and date of the meeting. The second section summarized or described each learning experience. The third space was allocated to note the alignment of the document to a research question and an interview response. The fourth area provided an opportunity for additional comments and observations. The observation review tool consisted of three parts which focused on three components. The first part identified the type of document, the second part requested a brief description of the event or document, and the third part asked the researcher to align the event or documents to research questions, interviews, and other material, if applicable.

Data Collection

This study utilized multiple sources of data. The sources of data included individual interviews, direct observations, and documents. An informed consent form was created to obtain the approval of the participants in the study. The informed consent identified the title of the research, the name of the researcher, the length and subject of the investigation, and the college the researcher was attending. It informed participants that researcher would maintain the confidentiality of the process according to the Institutional Review Boards (IRB) of Sage standards. It explained the benefit of participating in the study and how it would benefit the educational field, and that the process was confidential. It described the methods used and advised that there were no potential risks associated with participating in the study. Each participant received a consent form, an introductory letter which articulated that the right to decide to rescind, at any time, the initial agreement to be included in this qualitative case study. Each participant was also given contact information of the person at the college to contact regarding any possible concerns about the study.

An email script was created to send to the participants, affording them an opportunity to review the transcripts of interviews to ensure accuracy. The email included a time frame for the

interviewees to read transcripts and provide feedback. The email made clear that no response would indicate that the transcripts needed no revisions. The researcher created a script for an initial phone call which included an introduction of the candidate, research title, the college program, and the reason for the call.

Both the PLF and the FSL received invitations via email. A meeting was arranged to discuss the research, the expectations, the IRB approval, and an interview date. During the meeting with interviewees, the participants signed the agreement and retained a personal copy. This process was repeated to obtain the second district leaders' approvals. Both the district leaders and the school leaders agreed.

While waiting for the interview in the first site chosen, the superintendent in the second district became ill. The system leader was expected to be out for an unknown period. The researcher extended an invitation to the FSL in the second district because the FSL in the first district had already scheduled an interview. The individual agreed. Interviewing the FSL in both allowed the researcher to collect data from the same sources in both school districts.

Each participant engaged in individual interviews that consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to answer the four research questions. Each meeting lasted for a minimum of sixty to seventy- five minutes. The researcher recorded the interviews and took notes of salient points during the interview. The researcher allocated thirty minutes to review further documents discussed during the interview, especially, those that had not been copied.

The district leaders were interviewed to determine the way in which school leaders were supported and to identify the strategies used while the school leaders provided their perspectives of superintendents' support. The principals' interview questions were designed to reveal how the supervisors' support shaped principal's practices in helping teachers as professionals.

The researcher identified the two school sites within each district and obtained the support of the community school district leaders before conducting interviews. The researcher visited the school and community district sites to share IRB approval with the district and school leaders, briefly discuss the significance of the study, obtain a commitment, establish interview dates, discuss expectations, and request documents that the leaders shared during the meeting.

Each site provided copies of agendas, goals and professional learning plans. Because the districts did not meet with the schools during the summer, the researcher conducted the observation of District leaders' interaction during the fall. As a result, the researcher did both reviews of professional learning sessions for Districts X and Y in November 2016.

The district leaders shared agenda and activities of sample professional development sessions during the observations were requested from all participants except one school, provided a professional development plan. Both districts provided resources to examine such as agendas, professional learning plans, and retreats. These items were reviewed and compared with other community school district interviews. In 2014–2015, the educational support structure in the city was changed from networks and clusters to school districts. The roles and responsibilities within school districts expanded; that is why there is no data before 2014.

The researcher conducted principals' interviews to identify the strategies principals used to embed and sustain the common core within their schools. Additionally, the school administrators identified ways in which the superintendent supported and guided their work.

The interviews were tape recorded, and a transcription company transcribed them. The researcher reviewed the transcripts before sending them to the participants for member checking (Creswell, 2012). Each interviewee was allowed the opportunity to read the transcripts to check for accuracy of information and adequate description of events. An email accompanied the

transcript which informed them that if they did not respond with corrections within fifteen days, the transcript would be assumed to be accurate and accepted as transcribed. After the fifteen days, the researcher followed up with a phone call as a gentle reminder to the participant to review the transcript, adjust as needed and to return the revised transcript. Two out of the twelve members returned the transcripts with revisions to ensure authenticity, validity, and reliability of the information collected from these two participants.

After the participants had signed the Informed Consent Letter, they engaged in a one-hour interview session responding to interview questions aligned with the research questions as outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Alignment of research and interview questions

Research Questions(RQ)	District Leaders Interview Questions (IQ) 1-10	School Leaders Interview Questions (IQ) 1-10
RQ1: What role does the district play in helping principals to implement and embed the CCLS within schools?	IQ # 1, 2, 3, 7-10	IQ# 3, 4, 5
RQ2: What types of supports do principals provide to teachers that affect the implementation of common core standards?	IQ # 3, 4, 5	IQ# 1,2, 6
RQ3: What leadership behaviors of district leaders and assistant superintendents are evident in supporting principals with embedding practices?	IQ # 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10	IQ 1, 3, 5, 6-10
RQ4: In consideration of the recent concerns and issues raised about the Common Core implementation process in New York State, how will the Common Core Task Force Final Report 2015 affect the embedding and sustainment processes in schools and districts?	IQ# 4-10	IQ# 3, 4-10

The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews utilizing open-ended interview questions that prompted the participants to expound on how they structured, embedded and

sustained the support processes, protocols, and professional learning opportunities (Yin, 2012).

Also, participants were able to explain how principals' behaviors were affected by district

leader's support.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

The researcher used an inductive process to analyze the interview data. This process is

the "Steps in inductive data analysis" outlined in Educational Research: Fundamentals for the

Consumer (McMillan, 2012). These steps are 1) "Gather Extensive Detailed Data, 2) Close

Reading of Text or Notes, 3) Code and Verify Data, 4) Create Categories from Codes, 5) Reduce

Categories to Reduce Redundancy, and 6) Conclusion, Model, Framework, or Structures" (p.

276).

The researcher triangulated evidence from varying data sources. The focus was geared to

find consistency across interviews, observations, and documents. The researcher triangulated the

different perspectives and rich data where possible to discover the various approaches and

strategies that leaders used to influence principal behavior and student achievement.

According to Yin (2012), a "convergence occurs when three (or more) independent

sources all point to the same set of events, facts or interpretations" (p. 13). This convergence

tests helped to determine whether to include the data as a finding.

The researcher examined 2015–2016 samples of professional learning agendas on the

school and district levels. After verified the interviews they were uploaded to NVivo according

to each participant.to electronically store the data collected. Each participant's responses were

grouped according to the interview questions. The researcher then coded the responses to each

interview question to begin the coding process. This made it easier to collect information from

data bank in NVivo to support each research question. Since the numbers of interviews were

small, the researcher designed a coding protocol to identify themes evident in the data and to

align the topics with research questions to draw conclusions and make recommendations. Within

each district, the interview responses of participants at the school and district levels were

compared based on each research question. Then the researcher conducted a cross-district

analysis of the data collected from the interviews.

The investigator observed and documented two professional learning conferences (one

from each district), using low-inference notes, summaries, as well as graphs and diagrams. This

evidence was transformed into "field notes" (McMillan, 2012, p. 290) that included a detailed

written description of what was observed. Also, field notes comprised of reflective information

which revealed the researcher's interpretations, ideas, and thoughts that were a direct outgrowth

of the data collected. These analyses were used to inform the research. The field notes were

analyzed, coded, and categorized according to research questions.

The researcher thoroughly read all data collected to develop a deeper understanding

before coding the data. The data, once coded, were divided into categories. The coding was

revised as necessary to reduce redundancy. In the final step, the researcher identified the key

findings linked to embedding and sustaining protocols and processes employed.

<div align="center">**Researcher Bias**</div>

To prevent bias, the researcher collected sufficient data and relied solely on that data

gathered to interpret the results and draw conclusions. Also, the researcher designed a protocol to

capture the data from the interviews and information documents.

A possible bias of the study is that the researcher has served in the capacity of helping

principals and teachers in embedding and sustaining the implementation of the CCLS within

schools. The researcher could put her biases aside and examine the study based on the evidence presented by utilizing member checking and triangulation.

Validity and Reliability

The researcher used reliability and validity check to ensure that the interview questions answered the research questions. Three people (one superintendent and two principals) who were not participating in the study read and responded to the interview questions to determine their applicability to the case study and the research questions. They also reviewed the questions for accuracy to ensure that it is eliciting the right information. After the adjustments had been made based on the questions, the researcher gave the reader another chance to provide feedback on the interview questions. The reviewer replicated the process until the problems demonstrated both validity and reliability.

To check for accuracy of the transcripts, the participants reviewed the interview transcripts and made adjustments as needed. The interview questions were tested for alignment to the research question. An alignment table was created to demonstrate how the interview questions, agenda, and professional development plans and observation were aligned. These different data sources were utilized to illustrate the convergence of ideas within the data sources to demonstrate the validity of information or inferences.

Summary

The research, design, and methodology described in this chapter articulate the steps that the researcher used to collect and analyze the data revealed in Chapter 4. The district level and school level system leaders provided extensive conversations and a wealth of information that supported the qualitative instrument, the research design, and the inductive process.

Chapter Three has a well-organized research design that intended to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. In using this inductive approach that the researcher described in Chapter Three, the researcher could analyze, target, and collect relevant information related to the research questions.

The purpose of Chapter Four is to examine all the data to identify common themes and characterize the data according to the topics found. Then using that data collected, the researcher drew inferences to determine the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

In Chapter Four the researcher focused on analyzing the data collected from the interviews conducted, documents reviewed, and observations conducted. The research questions were used as a guide to report the findings. The chapter begins with a reiteration of the purpose and the research questions before highlighting the data of the districts and a description of the two districts and four schools that participated in the study. This information helped to frame the context of the study.

This comparative case study examined how system leaders supported school leaders in implementing and sustaining the Common Core Standards with the goal of improving student achievement. This research centered on two districts with schools in good standing to identify the best practices used to implement, embed, and sustain the Common Core Standards within schools.

The research questions outlined in Table 4 are designed to help the researcher explore the superintendent's perception of their role in supporting change in schools and the principal's perception of how superintendents support school leaders in implementing and sustaining school reforms, such as the Common Core Learning Standards, and to identify structures, processes, and protocols that they used to effect change.

Descriptive Information

This comparative qualitative case study consisted of twelve participants who were located in two districts, two middle schools, and two elementary schools. One PLF and one FSL were interviewed from each district, one principal, and one assistant principal were interviewed

from each middle and elementary school. The researcher purposefully sampled two districts and schools in "good standing" within NYC.

 To maintain confidentiality, participants were identified according to coded titles, roles, schools, and districts. For example, the districts were coded as X and Y. The middle school was coded as "M" and the elementary schools were referenced as "E" 1 and 2. The principal was coded as "PR" and assistant principal was coded as "AP." Therefore, a middle school principal in District X was coded as DXMPR1, which represents District X Middle School Principal 1. The titles, schools, and districts are embedded in the acronym.

 Table 4 is a list of twelve participants who volunteered to participate in this comparative case study—six within each district, two at the district level, and four at the school level. The table includes the title, coding, the total years of service within the NYCDOE, years of experience in the current position, gender, race, date, and length of interviews. A review of the data indicated that the study consisted of participants who have worked within the NYCDOE between 10–35 years. Due to the most recent changes in district level administrators and superintendents within NYCDOE, individuals working at the district level tended to have the least amount of experience within their current roles.

Table 4. *Participants' background data*

DISTRICT	Title	Designation	Service Years	Experience Years	Gender/ Race	Interview Date/Length
	Principal Leadership Facilitator	DXPLF1	10	2	Male White	1 h, 15 min June 21, 2016
	District Field Support Liaison	DXFSL1	32	1	Female White	1 h, 10 min June 21, 2016
	Principal	DXMPR1	35	15	Female Hispanic	1 h, 20 min May 5, 2016
	Principal	DXEPR2	33	13	Female Black	1 h, 9 min April 22, 2016
DISTRICT X	Assistant Principal	DXMAP1	30	1	Female Hispanic	1 h 6 min April 4, 2016
	Assistant Principal	DXEAP2	30	13	Female White	1 h June 18, 2016
	Principal Leadership Facilitator	DYPLF2	17	2	Female Black	1 h, 5 min. May 6, 2016
	District Field Support Liaison	DYFSL2	20	1	Female Black	1 h May 6, 2016
	Principal	DYMPR3	33	3	Female Black	1hr, 5 min April 26, 2016
DISTRICT Y	Principal	DYEPR4	31	11	Female Black	55 min April 26, 2016
	Assistant Principal	DYMAP3	15	1	Female Black	45 min June 19, 2016
	Assistant Principal	DYEAP4	29	19	Female Black	45 min June 19, 2016

District X Case Study Analysis

 Description of District X. In 2014, as part of the reorganization process within the NYC public school system, the role of the district and the district superintendent was expanded to include instructional responsibilities. Therefore, the district staff expanded to include more support staff as illustrated in Figure 3.

 One additional role added was that of the PLF. During the interview, DXPLF1 indicated that the PLF is the superintendent's designee and has a wide range of responsibilities which somewhat resemble that of a deputy superintendent. The inclusion of the PLF's name on the district's letterhead and the lead role played in facilitating the meeting observed, suggests that the district's perception is that the PLF played a crucial role in preparing principal district conferences. A NYCDOE PowerPoint presentation published in 2016 described the role as being the superintendent's principal designee. It seemed from the facilitation of the meeting that the district team worked collaboratively with the PLF to design and implement the principal conference.

 Based on the data in Table 5, the PLF position was established in 2014 to provide key instructional support to district school leaders with the purpose of building the leadership capacities of school leaders through use of monthly leadership conferences. The school leaders' leadership abilities were developed in the areas of school leadership performance, strategic plans for curriculum, instruction, and organizational management.

 Another role that was added to the district staff was that of the FSL. The FSL is the other participant in District X who was interviewed. Since the district works in conjunction with the field support center to provide support to school, the FSL serves as a liaison between the superintendent's office and the Field Support Center (FSC). Finally, the DXFSL provides advice

to the superintendent and works in conjunction with the DXPLF1 to provide on-site coaching and professional development.

The superintendent leadership within District X has been consistent. The superintendent has served as the district superintendent within the same district for more than 17 years. Therefore, the superintendent remained throughout the four structural shifts within the NYCDOE between 2002 and 2015 as described in Figure 2. The two schools in District X (one elementary and one middle) participated in the study. The data in Table 5 illustrate the demographic composition of each school.

Table 5.

District X Comparative Demographic

Data	District X Middle School 1	District X Elementary School 2
Total School Population	1500	500
Asian	12%	3%
Black	10%	5%
Hispanic	38%	22%
White	40%	70%
ENL	70%	30%
Students with Disabilities	22%	10%
Attendance	95%	98%

Source: NYSED Data, 2015

RQ1. What role does the district play in helping principals to implement and embed the CCLS within schools? To understand the role the district played in helping principals implement and embed the CCLS, the researcher utilized interview questions one through three and seven through nine of the PLF and FSL. As shown in Table 6 the researcher examined both principal and assistant principals' responses to interview questions three to five along with the analysis of the agendas and observation field notes to clarify the role the district played in supporting principals. There were four findings for Research Question 1.

Table 6. *Research question one data alignment*

Relevant Interview Questions	Meetings	Documents
PLF1/FSL1	Professional learning conference	Learning conference agenda
IQ# 1–3 & 7–9	November 2016	
		9/16, 10/16, 11/16
School Leaders		
IQ# 3, 4 & 5		Professional Learning Plan 2016–17

These interview questions were designed to capture the perceptions of the Principal Lead Facilitator, District FSL, principal and assistant principal of the district's role in implementing, embedding, and sustaining the CCLS. The data collected from district interviews were coded. Then, the information was compared to find commonalities of practices within each district before making inter-district comparisons. After analyzing the district responses, the researcher compared the responses of the principal and assistant principal from the same school before comparing the responses of the different schools. The researcher also compared intra-district responses of the two leaders interviewed and compared the intra-school responses of the principal and assistant principal. Afterwards, the inter-district responses to interviews were analyzed to determine consistencies and inconsistencies. The triangulation of interview responses with varied data sources was used to formulate the findings.

RQ1: Finding 1. The collected data sources revealed that the two district leaders served as a thought partner in implementing, embedding and sustaining the CCLS within schools. The two district leaders interviewed defined a thought partner as a system leader working closely with a school leader to help them reflect on data collected to discern school's academic strengths and needs.

The researcher, through interviews with principals and district leaders, discovered that district leaders provided one-on-one sessions which afforded the opportunity for district and school leaders to reflect on the school's academic data, QRs of schools, comprehension education plans, in-classroom observations of student learning and teacher practices, and principals' feedback to teachers based on Danielson's Teacher Effectiveness Framework. Based on the data, the researcher found that the district leaders do function as thought partners as defined by the district. As an example, two of the district leaders, identified as DXFSL1 and DXPLF1, during interviews made several statements supporting the role of a thought partner. DXFSLl stated that as a thought partner, the district provides feedback to leaders about their ideas. For example, the district leader talks with the school leader about the systems and structures that are in place to support students as well as the principal's ability to provide for differentiated professional development among teachers. In addition, district leaders talked with school leaders about best practices in alignment with the standards. So, these are some ways district leaders served as a thought partner to school leaders.

As a thought partner, the district worked in partnership with school principals to critically examine a variety of data sources to triangulate the information to isolate the root cause or need. An example of district leaders serving as a thought partner is evident in DXPLF1's account of the following instance.

Last year, a review of one school's data indicated that most teachers received effective ratings. However, a review of the students' performance data indicated that most students in a particular teacher's class were not meeting the standards. This inconsistency served as a catalyst for a principal inquiry focused on an investigation of the impact of the teacher's practices on student learners. This inquiry into the source of the challenge created an opportunity for the district and school to engage in an ongoing dialogue that focused on effective teaching practices to improve student performance. This helped the school to identify gaps, and set specific goals aligned to needs, create plans and obtain resources based on the identified needs and goals of the school.

The researchers' interviews with DXMPR1 and DXEPR2, two principals interviewed in District X, and one assistant principal DXEAP2, also from district X, revealed corroborating evidence of the district leaders serving as thought partners. DXMPR1 stated that "the District and school leaders work closely together to isolate concerns and ensure student progress. This partnership is characterized as mutually respectful."

According to DXMPR1, during the Principal Performance Observation (PPO) process, the district leaders, specifically the superintendent and the PLF1, engaged in a conversation with school leaders about the school data. DXMPR1 described the relationship between a principal and district leader in the following interaction as detailed in the following example.

How are you aligning your budget? Are you making wise decisions to support all of the students? Do you know all of your students? What are the subgroups that you have? What are the scores of those subgroups? What are the neediest kids? How are you giving them support? Are you giving support services after school, before school, during school? Are you putting additional teachers in the classroom?

These are some of the questions that district leaders working closely with principals addressed. They use this data to determine the progress of the school. DXMPR1 further described the nature of the district leader or superintendent in discussions, "We have to explain how CCLS are embedded in the school. We have to show proof of different activities and linkages to bring in community resources."

DXEAP2 also gave a similar description, as follows:

As a team the district and the principal work together in partnership to identify the school's issues and moves towards the success … of the schools within a district. The superintendent provides the principal with support and points us in the direction for resources that will help our schools to become successful. This partnership is key to the success of the school and the progress of the teachers. It's a collaborative effort.

DXEPR2 further characterized the collaboration as a "respectful partnership that works towards the success of the school." The data gleaned from the observations and documents suggest that this partnership demonstrated that the district leaders were vested in ensuring student success.

RQ1: Finding 2. Two district leaders and three school leaders identified the role of the district as that of a leadership developer in helping principals to implement, embed, and sustain the CCLS within schools. Data collected from interviews at the district and school levels, the observation of their interactions at the November 2016 Principal Leadership Conferences, and the analysis of professional develop plans indicated that district leaders served as a leadership developer. The data collected and analyzed revealed that a leadership developer is a leader who provides learning opportunities to enhance school leaders' knowledge, skills, and competencies and to hone leadership practices based on school context. The following statement

of DXMPR1 supports the school leaders' description of the role of a leadership developer. "Unlike before, the superintendent is bringing everybody together and cementing the team. He is also re-teaching concepts about the Common Core because we were splintered. Now we will have the same vocabulary." This statement indicated that one role of the leadership developer is facilitating learning opportunities for a group of leaders. Together, they focus on common concepts to develop a shared understanding among the group.

DXMAP1 further characterized the role of a leadership developer as the following:

A "strong instructional leader" whose key focus is helping the school leaders to grow in best instructional leadership practices that will lead to increased student performance. The district leader visits different schools and gathers ideas that should be evident in all effective schools.

DXMAP1 also pointed out that the professional development was grounded in the "core leadership standards and competencies." In a leadership developer role, DXFSL1 further clarified that the district utilizes the leadership competencies to help school leaders craft, refine and coherently align instructional and organizational programs to best serve the needs of the student population in helping them meet the rigorous expectations of the CCLS.

As an instructional leader, DXEPR2 added, "the district leaders provided monthly professional development and on-site support that was differentiated." These descriptions further clarified the function of a leadership developer as one who is knowledgeable about how to grow instructional practices of leaders through establishing group dynamics to facilitate the development of best leadership practices. As leadership developers, district leaders utilized the expertise of the principals and assistant principals within the district community to develop leadership practices. This guarded against a one-size-fit-all approach. Instead, principals were

provided opportunities to receive embedded support tailored to the needs of their specific school communities. As evidenced from the professional development agendas and the district summer planning meeting, the focus covered the topics of coherence, data driven instruction, effective feedback, and building capacity.

Both the PLF and the FSL further clarified the role of district leaders. They saw district leaders' roles as working collaboratively with the superintendent in providing support to school leaders in implementing, embedding, and sustaining the CCLS. For example, DXPLF1, explained that he viewed the role of the district as a leadership developer because they provided learning experiences that strengthened leaders' understanding of how to utilize data to isolate challenges and align appropriate resources to support student improvement in the schools. In addition, district leaders exposed principals and assistant principals to reflective protocols that helped leaders to continually engage in conversations focused on identifying gaps in student learning and helping teachers to plan for addressing those gaps.

DXFSL1 pointed out another example of how district leaders serve as leadership developers when she explained how school leaders engaged in district led monthly professional learning experiences based on their specific needs. She expounded on how sharing of best practices is one process district leaders used to embed and sustain practices. The researcher observed this practice during the November 2016 Principal Learning Conference. This process allowed leaders to share with others a best practice utilized to implement, embed, and sustain an initiative. The process consisted of a description of the background of the initiative, explanation of steps taken to implement the initiative, highlight of key challenges and how they were resolved, and identification of the successes or impact. At the end, the leaders were given an opportunity to ask the presenter clarifying and probing questions before they were given an

opportunity to reflect in their groups on how this practice might be applicable and adaptable to their individual schools.

Inter-visitation sessions for school leaders (principals, assistant principals, and teacher leaders) provided an opportunity for a bridge-to-practice or lab site session among all participants. The visits and conversations afforded leaders the opportunity to engage in analysis of best practices and to reflect on work in their schools. A review of the district's professional learning plan and the observation of the principal conference served as further evidence of how the district leaders focused on various topics during inter-visitations to build capacity within schools and among district schools.

The data collected from the district and school leaders revealed that district leaders acted as leadership developers for the purpose of developing the knowledge base of each school leader and strengthening the school leaders' abilities to lead the implementation and sustainment of the CCLS within their schools to best serve the needs of the student population in helping them meet the rigorous expectations.

RQ1: Finding 3. Three out of four school leaders and one district leader identified the role of the district leaders as that of a guide in helping principals to implement, embed, and sustain the Common Core Standards within schools. The researcher collected data that illustrated how district leaders served as a "Guide." The data revealed that a "Guide" is an individual who advises or gives guidance to others without creating dependency or stifling creativity. Included is the evidence of the data collected from three school leaders and one district leader who saw the role of a district leader as a guide.

Sometimes, according to DXMAP1 and DXEPR2, the district leader acted as a guide. For example, DXMAP1 explained how the superintendent recommended principals to special

leadership programs to enhance a principal's practices and increase the principal's ability to embed and sustain the standards with the purpose of improving student performance. DXEPR2 purported that "the superintendent directed a school toward key resources such as books. Another example is the superintendent encouraged a principal to share best practices with others." These examples demonstrated how the district leader pointed principals in the direction to obtain the resources needed. Finally, DXEPR2 stated that "the superintendent pointed schools in the direction for Common Core aligned resources that helped schools to become successful" in implementing, embedding, and sustaining the CCLS with the purpose of improving school performance.

The data showed that sometimes the district leader provides personal support to school leaders. As evidenced in DXMPR1's statement, the district leader gave "personal guidance like a brother or father." This evidence showed how school leaders were supported personally by the superintendent. This happened as a result of the way in which the district leaders worked with schools.

If the district sees that the school or the school leader is facing some challenges, unaware of some unforeseen circumstances, unknowledgeable about a specific topic, or unclear about the appropriate next step, the district leaders lead principals to possible resolutions. DXFSL1 states that "The district does not work in a way that creates co-dependency on the district to resolve school based challenges."

RQ1: Finding 4. Three out of four school leaders and both district leaders referenced the PPR as an evaluative tool that also serves as a professional development resource that provides one-on-one feedback to schools to support the implementation of the CCLS. DXMPR1 stated that "Just like the teachers, every year the principal is assessed using the PPR

process. The superintendent and/or PLF looked at data, compliance reports and asked the

principal various questions to determine the school's goals and progress." The district leader was

seen as an evaluator primarily because the PPR is an evaluative process utilized to gauge the

principal's effectiveness in leading instructional and organizational change. DXPLF1 states that

"This process focuses on the following key school leadership competencies: Personal

Leadership, Data, Curriculum and Instruction, Staff and Community, and Resources and

Operations."

Although the PPR is an evaluative process, DXPLF1 perceived the process as a one-on-

one professional learning opportunity for school leaders. According to DXPLF1:

The district staff engaged in initial visits to schools to calibrate our thinking using the

Performance Review Observation Tool. The team conducted the initial walkthroughs

together. We engaged in a deep dive into the school level data with the principal, a

walkthrough of the school using the Principal Performance Observation Tool and an

extensive conversation to triangulate the different evidence collected in order to isolate

and/or refine the specific goals of the school.

The Principal Performance Observation (PPO) served as a reflective tool that helped the

principal think about whether standards based instruction is embedded in the school and how

effective feedback to teachers continuously improved instructional practices and teacher

effectiveness. These effective practices should lead to increased student performance. In essence,

this is an evaluative process that is also called a reflective tool that increases the principal's

ability to refine leadership practices that support instruction, assessment, and teacher

effectiveness.

In summary, the data collected based on Research Question One from both district and school leaders revealed that the district leaders served as thought partners, leadership developers, guides, and evaluators.

RQ2. What types of supports do principals provide to teachers that affect the implementation and sustainability of the CCLS? Table 7 below indicates the interview questions that are aligned with research question two. There were four findings for Research Question 2.

Table 7. *Research question two data alignment*

Interview Questions	School 1 Documents	School 2 Documents
School Leaders IQ# 1- 2 & 5-10	Teacher Team Agenda May, June, Oct 2016 Professional Learning Plan 2015-2016	Teacher Team Agenda Feb, Mar, May, Oct, Nov 2016 Professional Learning Plans 2015-2016, 2016-2017

To understand how principals support teachers in implementing and sustaining the CCLS, the researcher carefully analyzed the data collected from the principals and assistant principals' interview questions numbers one, two, and five through ten as indicated in Table 7. These data were compared with the documents collected and the observations in Principals Learning Conference.

RQ2: Finding 1. Two out of two principals and two out of two assistant principals indicated that Professional Learning Communities are a resource to improve teacher instructional practices, leadership skills, and build capacity within schools. The Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) emerged from the data as a tool that District X utilized as a resource to enhance teachers' instructional practices and build their leadership skills. In District

X, PLCs are learning opportunities provided for teachers to work together as a team to improve their practices with the purpose of improving student performance.

DXEPR2 explained that PLCs are valued because the teachers have a direct say in what the children are learning. DXEAP2 also stated that "The instructional cabinet and teacher teams work together to improve instructional practices, revise curriculum and improve student performance." She continued to explain that they "work together very closely within grade level teacher teams examining teacher practice, the standards, student and teacher work, and assessment data." DXEPR2 described how during the PLC teachers utilized a teacher meet program that recorded the meetings. They posted their work and revisions in this shared online space. The program is similar to Google Docs, an online document sharing program which allows real time revisions. Administrators have access to the program which allows them an opportunity to monitor and give feedback. DXEPR2 stated:

At least twice a month, we give feedback across grade team meeting time, too. As the semester progresses, more time is spent on looking at student work and teacher practice to plan units or lessons or adjust lessons to meet the needs of all students. The grade teams and focus groups of new teachers and sometimes veterans met together to learn strategies to meet the needs of small groups of students. So, we've done quite a bit.

DXEPR2 and DXMPR1 expressed a commonality about their PLCs. Teachers were willing to share their practice and responsibility and commit to the process. Schools participating in the study could share evidence of their meeting structure and process. Both the principal and assistant principal spoke about the same strategies that were used. While the teachers were not available for observation, the team leaders shared results of assessments used to determine student needs. They shared samples of their meeting agenda. The researcher participated in an

unplanned walk through classrooms to see evidence of teacher-developed common charts, collaborative protocols, and agenda of meetings on each grade. Teachers were more open and willing to talk about their teaching and share their successes as well as their challenges, as they worked very closely together in grade level teacher team meetings examining teacher practice, student work, and assessment data with the purpose of improving teacher practice and student learning.

According to both school leaders, teachers have taken full ownership of the process and hold each other accountable. Teachers are improving their practices, coaching others, and sharing ideas through the collaborative process. DXMAP1 described in the following example how PLCs are used in her school when she stated:

> These meetings begin each year with a team closely examining the item skill analysis in [English Language Arts] ELA and Math to determine student needs and to adjust the curriculum. To support this process, we built into the instructional program a common planning time across the grades. This gives teachers a chance to reflect on their practice, read research strategies, utilize analysis protocols and provide feedback to each other.

DXMAP1 stated:

> After participating in the process, most teachers wanted an opportunity to share their expertise with others. Teachers who were fearful or uncomfortable talking to adults or uncomfortable talking to children were now excited, saying, "May I do a workshop on…? They may not want to do the whole school, but they're willing to do a group." DXPR2 said, "Most importantly, teachers are able to successfully achieve more within a highly functioning team than they can individually.

This type of support and working together in a PLC contributes to improving teacher practice and leadership in implementing, embedding, and sustaining change. It relies on the expertise of those within the school.

RQ2: Finding 2. Two out of two principals provide opportunities for teachers to improve their practice through engagement in inter-visitations in the form of walkthroughs and instructional rounds within their school and other district schools to implement and sustain the CCLS. Both school leaders shared how inter-visitations within schools and outside are used as a resource to build capacity and to embed and sustain practices throughout the school. DXMAP1conducted an inter-visitation with her department in which she modeled how teachers could provide effective feedback to students in a timely manner. She described the following:

> I created a template on labels, shipping labels, with just simple lines, name of the child, date, Glows and Grows [a feedback strategy that identifies what students do well and what students need to enhance]. And I said, "I will show you how simple and quick it is." Together we crafted criteria for giving effective feedback that was aligned to the CCLS and based on a specific task and then modeled it in a classroom. It was shared with the department. So, as they're teaching, they would send the children off to do independent work, and I conducted the feedback as the children returned to their seats. I would complement the students on what they're doing well. Then the "Grow" would be my recommendation for what they can do to enhance their work. And you could do four or five children per period.

This was an example of targeted and timely feedback. The teachers were taking a targeted need based approach. DXMAP1 continued by concluding the following:

So, how it helps students' performance is it's shared; the practice is shared amongst the whole social studies department. All of the children in the school are exposed to it through the social studies department. And then when you have the ELA teacher that sees, oh, I really like what's going on there, now the ELA teachers will pick up that strategy. Sharing of best practices is rewarding to see. The trust and openness about their work is probably what is sustaining student performance.

To celebrate and share the work district wide, DXFSL1 said, "We also have a website where we put up anything having to do with our schools and instruction, and the best practices go up there."

RQ2: Finding 3. Two out of two principals and one out of two assistant principals referenced the teacher observation process as a one-on-one professional learning resource.

While teacher observation is part of the teacher rating process, the data revealed that leaders in District X seemed to view the teacher observation process as a professional learning tool. During their interviews, the school based leaders tended to reference the teacher observation process as a one-on-one professional learning resource to support teacher growth and development.

All school leaders indicated that the development of teacher practices was monitored through observations utilizing Danielson's Teacher Effectiveness Framework. DXEAP2 stated the following:

So, we're obligated to follow the Danielson's Teacher Effectiveness Framework, the observation tool that we have. It is a good one because it actually helped school leaders and teachers to break teaching into small components. Isolating teaching into small components allowed teachers to receive specific feedback. They received quality feedback based on each component that teachers could readily act on.

DXEAP2 further clarifies the importance of the feedback. DXEAP2 pointed out the following:

>Quality teacher feedback is an important component of the observation. And if one works on this one little component, the high-leverage one or the area that's going to make the biggest impact on a teacher's instruction, the principal will be able to provide quality feedback rather than writing about bulletin boards that didn't have the same color paper or some other generic noticing that is irrelevant.

In giving teacher feedback, DXMAP1 said the following:

>Oh, I actually go in the room and "Based on your observations, I see you need some assistance. I'd like come in and help. Let me demonstrate, let me show you. I think they're good. There's not a lot of demonstration I have to do, I must say. It's just more tweaking than actually going in. They're there, they're good teachers. They are open to the process and trust the assistant principal in giving meaningful feedback to help them grow professionally. I think the teachers see the observation process as a source of professional development.

>*RQ2: Finding 4. Four out of four principals and assistant principals provide differentiated professional learning to improve teacher practice.* Another finding that emerged from the data is that differentiated professional learning is a process that helps to meet the individual needs of the teachers. Both principals provided differentiated learning opportunities for their teachers to improve teacher practice. DXEAP4 stated that an assistant principal can be seen as a "facilitator supporting teachers, working together, learning together, and going to professional development in order to be able to support the school, the children, the teachers, in implementing and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standards." As DXMAP1 pointed out, cabinet and department meeting are structures that were also used to support school progress. "I

am able to support teachers in research. I have been working with teachers on conferencing with students and using videos and webinars to build individual practice."

DXMPR1 indicated that the school had grade teams and new teacher focus groups, and sometimes veterans meet together to learn strategies to meet the needs of small groups of students. According to DXMAP1, using research articles are essential for supporting professional learning and promoting change of practice as well as providing ongoing feedback using Danielson Framework. Sometimes, they do inter-visitations within the school and in other schools. These visitations are monitored through observations.

Evident in both schools are different structures that the school leaders used to support the implementation and sustainment of the CCLS. As revealed through the interviews, observation, and documents, the structures used in the schools are PLCs, inter-visitations, teacher observation process, and differentiated professional development to facilitate teacher growth in implementing, embedding, and sustaining the CCLS.

RQ3. What leadership behaviors of superintendents and district leaders are evident in supporting principals in embedding and sustaining the leadership practices? Research Question Three is intentionally structured to inquire about the superintendent and assistant superintendent's behaviors that support principals in embedding and sustaining leadership practices with the purpose of improving teacher practice and student achievement. A complete review of documents and data collected from observation of professional learning are outlined in Table 8 below. There were four findings for Research Question 3.

Table 8. Research Question Three Data Alignment

Interview Questions	Observation	Documents
District PLF1/ DFSL1 IQ# 2 - 9	Nov 2016	Principal Learning Conference Agendas 9/16, 10/16, 11/16
		AP Learning Conference
School Leaders IQ# 3-4 & 7		

RQ3: Finding 1. District X used data driven decision making to determine the needs of schools and design supports for them and model best practices and provide structures that can foster continued leadership development in principals that result in student achievement.

In District X, leaders interviewed talked about how they used data from PPO visits to school, walk-throughs, and online data served as an entry point to discuss effective teaching and the consistency of administrative teacher ratings. Each district personnel conducted walkthroughs in the form of inter-visitations and/or PPO visits. The visits were conducted for two reasons—one to give feedback to the school, and the other reason is to establish inter-rater reliability among the district team and across school level administrative teams. In addition, they used the state reports and school leaders' observations of teaching and evidence of student work to guide their conversations on teacher practice and student learning within schools.

For example, in District X, PLF checked the teacher rating by the state which is based on the student performance scores. They compared it with the principal's rating of the teacher to determine consistency. If there were a difference, they engaged the principal in a discussion to determine a possible source of the inconsistency and to establish a plan of action to remedy the challenge. DXPLF1 indicated that they operated on the premise that "effective teaching yields

high student performance." This process helped them to be consistent in ratings and helped principals to be cognizant of the ratings that they were giving to teachers. This is one way in which superintendents affected principal practices.

RQ3: Finding 2. The second finding that the data revealed is that all leaders in District X indicated that school leaders engaged in opportunities to share best practices. The data showed that sharing best practices is another way in which districts influence principal behaviors through engaging them in processes. District X provided a Bridge-to-Practice opportunity during the principal conference. They use their time to delve deeply into topics that they gleaned from their school visits as well as what principals within the district say is needed.

Another formal process that is utilized by District X to embed practices is inter-visitation. During a bi-monthly meeting, the principals in District X participate in a visit to a host school to see model practices. During this session, the hosting school shared a best practice and discussed a problem of practice associated with it.

District X does not allow principals time to present during the regular bi-monthly principal conferences. However, they do host inter-visitations for principals. These are half day sessions. District X focuses on helping principals with the advance system and giving feedback to teachers.

RQ3: Finding 3. Every leader interviewed at the school and district levels indicated that district leaders provided differentiated learning opportunities that led to principal growth and development. The inter-visitations are held every other month. The school leaders expressed the value of these focused sessions. DXMAP1 maintains that sharing of best practices and providing feedback contributes to building capacity within schools and districts.

District DXPLF 1 shared that informal inter-visitation is encouraged. These informal visitations happen when two or more principals agree to work together to improve their practices. The district leaders shared that on occasions, they may informally arrange visits between two principals to support each other's development.

Most principals indicated that these visits whether formal or informal were beneficial because everyone learned, the facilitator, host principal, and visiting principals. The participants' knowledge was evident by expanding the understanding of their practice, benefiting the host from the targeted feedback, and benefiting the school from the reflection shared to identify the gaps and create a plan for implementation.

District X and school level leaders indicated that superintendents provided differentiated learning opportunities that led to principal growth and development. To meet the specific needs of schools, opportunities were provided for schools to continue honing their craft and building capacity with the school through mentoring, differentiated meetings, and professional development. For new principals, they were paired with an experienced principal who was strong in the area of need of the new principal. The two principals worked together weekly or bi-weekly to strengthen the new principal's areas of need. They visited each other's schools weekly, and they discussed effective practices and created a plan together on how to implement them. To build capacity, the new principal brought a teacher team to observe best practices in developing a PLC and creating rigorous tasks.

Although the PPO is an evaluative tool, it is also perceived as a source of one-on-one professional development support given to help schools and school leaders improve. DXEPR2 affirms how District X provides monthly differentiated support through the use of the School Leader Network (SLN), an onsite one-on-one support program.

These are some examples of how the needs of a veteran principal and a new principal are met. For example, in District X, schools are grouped according to their specific needs. DXMAP1 states that the inter-visitations are held every other month. For example, DXMAP1 explains the following:

A principal of 10 years is not the same as a principal who is new to the job. A one year principal … [does not] know what they don't know. And so, a principal of 12 years might need to use additional resources, or to rethink how they work or be pointed in the direction of ... being the mentor of another principal, or … participating in a study group or just a group of principals sharing best practices.

Another example of the way leaders in District X provided differentiation is noted in the following comment of DXEPR2:

I am getting additional support through School Leadership Network (SLN), a monthly meeting where we bring to the table our concerns about moving students. We focus on best practices for improving student performance as well as the leadership standards to determine where we are on the trajectory in serving as an instructional leader … So, we're looking at all of the components of the leadership standards and trying to meet them the best that we can.

According to DXMPR1 and DXMPR2, senior principals are given a sense of autonomy to utilize outside resources that will better meet their special needs. Another example of differentiated learning opportunities is evidenced in DXMPR1's statement below:

My school was selected as one of the pilot schools to implement the standards. He gave us support and resources to attend the professional development opportunities. Resources were provided to ensure that we could have planning time after school, along with my

teachers. And the superintendent has also suggested books about moving the Common Core forward. He pointed us in the direction of Engage New York and additional resources.

In District X, leaders interviewed talked about how they used data from PPO visits to school, walk-throughs, and online data served as an entry point to discuss effective teaching and the consistency of administrative teacher ratings. Each district personnel conducted walkthroughs in the form of inter-visitations and/or PPO visits. The visits were conducted for two reasons—one to give feedback to the school, and the other reason is to establish inter-rater reliability among the district team and across school level administrative teams. In addition, they used the state reports and school leaders' observations of teaching and evidence of student work to guide their conversations on teacher practice and student learning within schools.

For example, in District X, PLF checked the teacher rating by the state which is based on the student performance scores. They compared it with the principal's rating of the teacher to determine consistency. If there were a difference, they engaged the principal in a discussion to determine a possible source of the inconsistency and to establish a plan of action to remedy the challenge. DXPLF1 indicated that they operated on the premise that "effective teaching yields high student performance." This process helped them to be consistent in ratings and helped principals to be cognizant of the ratings that they were giving to teachers. This is one way in which superintendents affected principal practices.

RQ3: Finding 4. The fourth finding that the data revealed is that all leaders in District X indicated that school leaders engaged in opportunities to share best practices. The data showed that sharing best practices is another way in which districts influence principal behaviors through engaging them in processes. District X provided a Bridge-to-Practice opportunity during

the principal conference. They use their time to delve deeply into topics that they gleaned from their school visits as well as what principals within the district say is needed.

Another formal process that is utilized by District X to embed practices is inter-visitation. During a bi-monthly meeting, the principals in District X participate in a visit to a host school to see model practices. During this session, the hosting school shared a best practice and discussed a problem of practice associated with it.

District X does not allow principals time to present during the regular bi-monthly principal conferences. However, they do host inter-visitations for principals. These are half day sessions. District X focuses on helping principals with the advance system and giving feedback to teachers.

RQ4. In consideration of concerns and issues raised about the Common Core implementation process in New York State, how will the Common Core Task Force Report 2015 affect the embedding and sustainment processes in schools and districts? A thorough examination of the interview data was conducted to answer Research Question Four regarding the Common Core Task Force Report 2015. As shown in Table 9, the researcher carefully scrutinized the data utilizing the interview questions seven through ten of all the participants in the study. The following are the four findings and one incidental finding that emerged from the data.

Table 9 is a list of the participants' interview questions that were used to answer research question four.

Table 9. *Research question four data alignment*

Interview Questions	Meeting	Documents
DPLF/FSL	Professional Learning Conference Nov 2016	Agendas
IQ# 10		3/15, 5/16
School Leaders		Professional Development Plan 2015-2016, 2016-2017
IQ# 10		

RQ4: Finding 1. In response to the implementation of the Race to the Top reforms, all of the participants in District X and at the school level indicated that they valued the CCLS despite the way in which the standards were implemented. For example, DXMPR1 stated the following:

> The Common Core is a good thing. At the beginning, it seemed for me and the teachers that this was another thing added. But it has equalized a bit. It has taken the pressure off. So, it will not affect my work negatively. I really would like our country to be as competitive as we were in the past. I do see when I go to different countries how our jobs have been replaced—and even when I call the operator, our jobs are being outsourced. And our kids need work. They need professions. So, we do have to teach them. We want our children to succeed, so they can't get regular jobs like they did in the past. The university or the college route or the higher education route has to be an option for them so that they can succeed and common core is that bridge.

DXMPR1 valued the standards because they were the "bridge" to success, getting a job, and a quality education. It meant that students in this country will be able to compete in the global market as they had done in the past.

These data were triangulated with the data collected from the professional learning plan of district X, and the informal conversation that the principals engaged in during the Principals Learning Conference. This data showed that the district leaders were going forward with the implementation of the CCLS and the supportive initiative, such as the use of Danielson's (2013) Framework for Teacher Effectiveness.

RQ4: Finding 2. Six out of six leaders did not report an impact of the Task Force Report 2016 on the work of their district or school. They were only aware of the main elements of the report and had not read it in depth. All the leaders felt that the standards were good because they helped leaders and teachers to plan for individualized student instruction. All the participants on some level expressed a commitment to continue to use the standards because they were valuable. However, DXPLF1 had mixed opinions about one of the recommendations: suspending the use of student scores for teacher evaluations. DXPLF1 wondered whether "New York State Task Report 2015 was sending a mixed message by rescinding the use of the exam results to evaluate teachers' effectiveness, [This] will make it more difficult for us in the field." This evidence supports the finding that leaders did value the standards.

RQ4: Finding 3. Both district leaders and all school leaders expressed that they valued the CCLS and would continue to implement instructional practices that maintain the standards. DXPLF1 concluded that regardless of what the report says, District X would continue to push the CCLS. This reaction was also consistent with DXMPR1's response who also confirmed a commitment to and value of the standards when stating the following:

> The common core at this point in my life is a good thing. At the beginning, it seemed for me and the teachers that this was another thing added. Another additional piece to the job. Now that we understand them, it has equalized … the pressure is off. So, it will not

affect my work negatively. Our kids need work. So, we do have to teach them. The university or the college route or the career education route has to be an option for them … so that they can succeed. And common core is that bridge. I embrace the common core now, and will continue to use them in my school.

Responses spanned from the standards are "stair steps that help teachers meet the needs of students on or below grade-level" (DXMAP1), to a framework that "helps teachers in mathematics look at standards across grades ... showing how it builds, like a trajectory" (DXMPR4), and to "we do not need to develop anything else but the Common Core" (DXFSL1). In summary, it seems that the New York State Task Force 2015 report did not have an adverse effect on the use of standards within schools and districts. Leaders of the district and schools continued to implement the standards and articulated the importance of the standards to helping to improve student performance and prepare them for College and Careers.

RQ4: Incidental Finding. **One district leader expressed that he valued the CCLS and will continue to use them, but wondered about the effect the Task Force Report 2015 suspension of using Common Core assessments to help determine teacher effectiveness might have on district and school leaders' work with teachers.** While one district leader expressed concerns about the teachers continuing to take the standards seriously, the district leader indicated that he valued the standards and will continue to use them to support the work within the district. The district has been utilizing the standards

Summary: District X's findings. Based on the study of District X, the district supports schools and school leaders in four different ways. Depending upon the needs of the school leader or the school, district leaders serve as a thought partner, leadership developer, guide, and

evaluator when supporting schools in embedding and sustaining the CCLS. School leaders in District X used PLC's, inter-visitations, instructional rounds, one-on-one support to teachers, and differentiated professional learning to enhance and sustain teacher practices and build leadership capacity within schools. The district leaders used data driven decision making, sharing of best practices, and differentiated learning to support principals' growth and development. Finally, the district and school leaders indicated that they valued the CCLS and would continue to use them for enhancing teacher performance and student learning. Common Core Task Force Report 2015 showed no significant impact on the implementation and sustainment processes in schools within District X.

District Y Case Study Analysis

Description of District Y. District Y consists of approximately 24,500 students, and 80% of the student population receives free and reduced lunch. Black students make up 52% of the student population and White students make up 26% of the student population within District Y. Hispanic students comprise 17% of the student population and Asian students comprise the remaining 5%. The students within the district are given the choice of attending other schools across the district (New York State Data, 2017).

The superintendent leadership within District Y changed three times within the last ten years. The current superintendent has served in District Y since 2014. As indicated in Table 4, District Y team members are new to the district but have each worked for a minimum of 15 years within the NYCDOE in various leadership capacities. The schools within the district offer a variety of programs to students which span from the gifted and talented to schools with special interest, such as green schools and accelerated science and dual language programs.

The researcher used two schools within District Y—one to represent grades 6–8 and the other to represent grades K–5—to give an understanding of how the district supported school leaders in implementing the CCLS. Table 10 illustrates a demographic comparison between the schools in District Y:

Table 10. *District Y comparative demographics*

Data	District Y Middle School 3	District Y Elementary School 4
Total School Population	550	400
Asian	6%	0%
Black	78%	86%
Hispanic	15%	11%
White	1%	2%
ENL	5%	7%
Students with Disabilities		20%
Attendance	92%	91%

Source: Based on information taken from New York State Data, 2017.

RQ1. What role does the district play in helping principals to implement and embed the Common Core Learning Standards within schools? A review of documents, interviews, observations, and agendas revealed that District Y played four different roles in helping principals to embed and sustain the CCLS. As shown in Table 11, the data was aligned to the research and interview questions.

Table 11. District Y: *Research question one data alignment*

Relevant Interview Questions	Meetings	Documents
PLF1/FSL1	Professional Learning Conference	Learning Conference
IQ# 1 – 3 & 7 - 9	November 2016	Agenda10/15
School Leaders		9/16, 10/16, 11/16
IQ# 3, 4 & 5		Professional Learning
		Plan 2016–17

Both DYPLF2 and DYFSL2 indicated during their interviews that the current year was spent analyzing each school to first determine the need of individual schools and to identify the overarching needs of the district. All the schools in the district had been exposed to the CCLS and had implemented them in both ELA and Mathematics curricula. However, the district team spent time ensuring that schools had moved beyond the implementation stage to the embedment and sustainment of the CCLS. The school visits revealed that the schools were at different places along the implementation and sustainment continuum of CCLS. As challenges arose, they were addressed. At the end of the first year, they organized a retreat to reflect on the data collected and to refine the way in which school leaders are supported.

RQ1: Finding 1. Both district leaders and three building leaders described the role of the district as that of a "thought partner" in implementing, embedding, and sustaining the CCLS within schools. DYFSL2 perceived a thought partner as an individual who provided feedback to school leaders about their ideas. For example, DYFSL2 talked with the school leader about the systems and structures that are in place to support students as well as the principal's ability to provide differentiated professional learning among teachers. One of District Y's goals was to conduct an analysis of the district schools to identify where they were in implementing, embedding, and sustaining the CCLS. They utilized the PPR initial visit and review of advance data along with the QR and school report card data to determine each school's needs.

According to DYFSL2, most of the schools had been exposed to the standards but were in varying places along the implementation and sustainment continuum. As a result, district

leaders began to include opportunities for school leaders to share best practices during the learning conferences.

A review of the November 2016 agenda from the retreat revealed that the goals of the district leaders were to build capacity within district schools and to move toward the goal of embedding and sustaining the standards to impact student performance. While conducting an analysis the first year, the District established principal conferences as a monthly learning opportunity to support and guide schools in the implementation and sustainment process. District leaders wanted to establish a collaborative environment where schools learn from each other. As a result, each principal was responsible for sharing a best practice with other schools. In addition, district leaders talked with school leaders about best practices in alignment with the standards. So, these are some of the ways in which district leaders within District Y served as a thought partner to school leaders.

As a thought partner, DYFSL2 said that the district worked in partnership with school principals to critically examine a variety of data sources to triangulate the information to isolate the root cause, need, or challenge. As a thought partner, the DYFSL2 stated that in conjunction with district leaders, school leaders delved into the data to find patterns and trends. Finally, DYPLF2 suggested that working with principals in this nonthreatening role as a thought partner enabled principals to focus their lens on specific areas that they may not have looked at previously.

DYFSL2 stated the following:

As a thought partner the district provided feedback to leaders about their ideas. District leaders served as a thought partner to school leaders, for example, the district talked with the school leader about the systems and structures that are in place to support students as

well as the principal's ability to provide for differentiated professional development among teachers. In addition, District leaders talked with school leaders about best practices in alignment with the standards.

The PLF elaborated on how the leadership support was given and how the district leadership role was perceived. For example, DYPLF2 described the following instance:

In terms of the professional development plan, the district team sometimes assisted the principal with teasing out ideas or strategies to better align the feedback and next steps of what they could do to make a better implementation plan or a more sensible one. According to DYPLF2, the feedback and discussions with principals on creating and revising yearly professional learning plans helped principals to understand the need to monitor and revise professional learning plans throughout the year to reflect the need to address instructional gaps or instructional trends and/or new initiatives from the city. DYPLF2 further stated the following: School leaders began to perceive professional learning plans as living documents rather than documents etched in stone. Now, throughout District Y, school leaders collaboratively work with school and district staff to continually adjust the professional learning plans throughout the year.

This partnership demonstrated that District Y leaders were as vested in ensuring student success as the school leaders. The district worked closely with principals in a positive manner providing the appropriate feedback to improve the school.

A review of the November 2016 agenda from the principals' learning conference revealed that the goals of the district leaders were to build capacity within district schools and to move toward the goal of embedding and sustaining the standards to impact student performance. While conducting an analysis the first year, the District established principal conferences as a

monthly learning opportunity to support and guide leaders in the implementation and sustainment processes. District leaders wanted to establish a collaborative environment where schools learn from each other. Each principal was responsible for sharing a best practice with other schools.

RQ1: Finding 2. Four out of six leaders within District Y perceived the role of district leaders as a Leadership Developer in helping principals to implement, embed, and sustain the CCLS within schools. The data revealed that district leaders served as a Leadership Developer. According to the data, a Leadership Developer is defined as district leaders providing professional learning and leadership support to school principals to help implement, embed and sustain the CCLS within schools.

Both DYPLF2 and DYFSL2 provided evidence of the role of a leadership developer. DYPLF2 viewed district leaders as leadership developers because they provided learning experiences that strengthened school leaders' understanding of how to utilize data to isolate challenges and align appropriate resources to support student improvement in schools. DYFSL2 pointed out that leadership developers provided opportunities for school leaders to engage in district led monthly professional learning experiences based on the school leaders' specific needs. DYFSL2 further stated, "To ensure the Common Core Learning Standards were implemented and embedded, the district leaders conducted on-site visits to schools".

This bi-monthly inter-visitation session for school leaders (principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders) provided an opportunity for a bridge-to-practice or lab site session focused on helping leaders to engage in analysis of best practices to support student engagement and explicit teaching of the CCLS. For example, the principals during inter-visitation observed teachers using explicit teaching of fractions and differentiation to improve student performance.

DYMPR2 and DYEPR2 talked about how participating in these learning experiences helped school leaders to reflect on their practices and to better provide feedback to teachers. DYPLF2 further explained:

> The purpose of these sessions was to enhance school leaders' craft in leading and supporting the work in their schools. Bi-monthly, professional development was provided to school administrators and teacher leaders which afforded opportunities for them to share best practices.

This example shows how engaging in inter-visitations supported the professional growth of school leaders. According to DYFSL2 school leaders engaged in district led monthly professional learning experiences based on their specific needs. DYFSL2 further stated that "To ensure the CCLS were implemented and embedded, the district conducted on-site visits to schools." This bi-monthly inter-visitation session for school leaders (principals, assistant principals and teacher leaders) provided an opportunity for a bridge-to-practice or lab site session focused on helping leaders to deeply engage in analysis of best practices to support student engagement in and explicit teaching of the Common Core Standards. For example, the principals during inter-visitation observed teachers using explicit teaching of fractions and differentiation to improve student performance.

As a leadership developer, the district leaders conducted professional learning for a variety of different audiences on a variety of topics. Primarily, the district utilized a medical model of intervention which focused on providing and developing a research-based toolkit to address students where they were. Also, this toolkit was utilized to determine, through inquiry, how well the selected research-based methodologies are working to assist schools in embedding

and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standards with the purpose of improving student performance and teacher practice.

For example, DYFSL2 explained that during principals' meetings learning opportunities were conducted on inquiry and looking at student work. Afterwards, the principals were expected to share the information with teachers during a professional learning sessions. These topics were derived from on-site visits, feedback from school leaders during monthly meetings and new initiatives introduced at city, district or school level. The teams engaged in protocols that facilitated looking at student work, the standards, learning objectives, and a rubric related to a piece of student work and the feedback provided. The purpose was to ensure that the design of lessons was achieving the goal of the standards and to ensure that assessment practices both formative and summative were aligned to the goals of the standards, and the feedback to students was articulated in a user-friendly manner, though use of I-Can statements.

Schools described the role of the Leadership Developer. According to DYEPR4, the district expected each principal to present individually, in partnerships or in small groups a best practice that was successful. In addition, District Y engaged in bi-monthly inter-visitations to other schools to examine effective models on how to sustain practices within schools. DYMPR2 and DYEPR2 talked about how participating in these learning experiences helped them to reflect on their practices and to better provide feedback to teachers. DYPLF2 further explained that the purpose of these sessions was to hone school leaders' craft in leading and supporting the work in their schools.

Analyses of a November 2016 conference, six agendas of previous conferences conducted from Oct 2015 through 2016 and the May 2016 annual retreat revealed that the meetings focused on a specific topic of interest to the principals. The meeting began with a

protocol on data, followed by a presentation on data analysis of student scores that informed teacher needs. Principals were given an opportunity to discuss their challenges and receive feedback from their peers.

Bi-monthly, professional development was provided to school administrators and teacher leaders which afforded opportunities for them to share best practices. DYFSL2 described the district leader's role as follows:

As a leadership developer, the district leaders conducted professional learning for a variety of different audiences on a variety of different topics. Primarily, the district utilized a medical model of intervention which focused on providing and developing a research-based toolkit to address students where they were and to determine, through inquiry, how well the selected research-based methodologies are working to assist schools in embedding and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standards with the purpose of improving student performance and teacher practice.

For example, DYFSL2 explained that during principals' meetings, learning opportunities were conducted on inquiry. The principals were expected to share information with full faculty professional learning sessions on a topic, such as inquiry or looking at students' work. These topics were derived from on-site visits, feedback from school leaders during monthly meetings, and new initiatives introduced at city, district, or school level. The teams engaged in protocols that facilitated looking at student work, the standards, learning objectives, and a rubric related to a piece of student work and the feedback provided. The purpose was to ensure that the design of lessons was achieving the goal of the standards and to ensure that assessment practices, both formative and summative, were aligned to the goals of the standards, and that the feedback to students was articulated in a user-friendly manner, through the use of I-Can statements.

By the fall of 2016, District Y had expanded the half-day monthly principal conferences to full-day conferences. The full day allowed the principals an opportunity to share best practices. According to DYEPR4, the district expected each principal to present individually, in partnerships or in small groups, a best practice that was successful. In addition, District Y engaged in bi-monthly inter-visitations to other schools to examine effective models on how to sustain practices within schools.

RQ1: Finding 3. Five out of six leaders in District Y perceived the role of district leaders as a guide in helping leaders with professional growth and in embedding the CCLS. Based on the data collected from the interviews, observations and document reviews district leaders are viewed as a guide for principals. The school principals saw district leaders as guides in helping school leaders to grow professionally and support the goals within their schools. If the district saw that the school or the school leader was facing some challenges, the district leader intervened. For example, DYEPR4 talked at length about how the superintendent recommended a special writing program to improve the quality of writing across the school. This special program made a difference in the quality of student writing and the way in which teachers supported students in writing.

DYMPR4 shared how the advance specialist supported the school's administrative team in looking at the consistency of feedback to teachers through the use of Danielson's Effective Teaching Framework and the consistency of feedback given to children's work. Some teachers were assigning work to students and were not explicitly teaching students. In addition, the feedback was not specific to the task and standards. For example, some samples of comments found on student work were "good work" or "you are on the right track." The students did not have a clear picture of what they did well and what their next steps were.

The specialist helped the team to work toward developing inter-rater reliability among the administrative team members on teacher feedback to students. The Advance Specialist engaged the administrative team in observation of lessons together to look for evidence of teacher feedback to students and to discuss the strengths of the feedback and identify an area of focus to improve the feedback. The feedback was aligned to a standard and illustrated what students did and the next steps to improve student work. This process was repeated until the team was looking at teacher feedback to students from the same lens.

In addition, DYPLF2 shared that looking at the feedback that the administrators gave to teachers indicated inconsistency of purpose. DYPLF2 cited the following example of how administrators provided inconsistent feedback:

 On one lesson, the focus was on explicit teaching; the next lesson focused on timing, and in a third lesson, the administrative feedback focused on assessing students' understanding. While all of these were important, the feedback did not show at least three feedback responses to a teacher that illustrated how the teacher gradually shifted instructional practices over time. In essence, the focus was inconsistent. Once this was brought to their attention, the team began to focus on one strategy at a time. The principal pointed out that the team began with developing a common understanding of "explicit teaching." After modeling explicit teaching, teachers were given specific feedback.

During the interview the principal shared samples of observations and teacher lessons illustrating how the feedback centered on explicit teaching. The feedback on each lesson observed showed how the teachers were improving in planning explicit teaching experiences and delivering explicit teaching in the classroom.

The data binders demonstrated the specific feedback that teachers gave students in writing and during conferences, and how this feedback was aligned to the lesson plans. The data binder also showed how the feedback to students was given consistently over time on one area of focus to support student growth. The feedback indicated a specific focus on looking at what students were doing, thereby pushing students to their next level via feedback.

Another example of how the district team members acted as guides occurred when some new principals did not understand the importance of continually updating the professional learning plans. The DYPLF2 stated that "The principals were not revisiting their professional learning plan to revise and adjust them based on the introduction of new initiatives." The need for revising the plans was discussed. Ways to adjust the plan was explored. The writing of plans received ongoing feedback and suggested next steps. District leaders provided direct support to new school leaders when needed. Now, they are working collaboratively with their professional development teams to continually monitor and revise the professional learning plans.

DYPLF2 emphasized the point that principals are supported to do what they need to do to address their school needs. The PLF pointed out that "The district does not work in a way so as to create co-dependency on the district to resolve school based challenges." The support is given in a way to promote and protect the principal autonomy. They are not told or directed about what to do. Collaboratively, they come up with a strategy to implore and monitor.

According to DYFSL2, the inter-visitations have provided a structure to improve student learning. It has provided an opportunity for teams to work more efficiently and effectively. It has encouraged the use of the adoption and replication of best practices. It has also allowed principals to focus their lens on specific areas that they may not have looked at previously.

RQ1: Finding 4. All of District Y's school and district leaders referenced the PPR as an evaluative tool that also served as a source of professional learning that provided one-on-one feedback to school leaders and schools. The data from the interviews, observations and document reviews indicated that District Y leaders saw the PPR as a source of professional learning and as an evaluative tool. The PPR is an evaluative process that is used to rate principals. The PLF and the superintendent were responsible for conducting the PPR process. According to DYEPR4:

> …the PPR consists of three parts: goal setting, mid-year review and annual review. The PPR utilizes the Principal Practice Observation (PPO) tool. The PPO tool is an evaluative rubric that focuses on the key areas of leadership that affect personal and school leadership. It focuses on feedback, instruction, student learning, assessments, planning, monitoring, and revising

It is aligned to the CCLS, Danielson's Teacher Effectiveness Framework 2013, and the Quality Review rubric. These school visits are an integral part of the leader's rating; it is conducted as an opportunity for having the one-on-one feedback from the district in the form of a professional learning opportunity (NYCDOE, 2017).

As part of the PPR process, the superintendent and/or the PLF meet(s) with the principal to review summative and formative data that helped them to identify concerns and needs of the school leader and review school's feedback on its progress and identify subsequent steps. During this session, DYPLF2 described the PPO as "an evidence gathering tool" used to evaluate the principal's leadership practices as evident in the leadership competencies. Also, DYPLF2 stated the following:

For example, when I conduct a PPR, I used the PPO rubric to examine curriculum to ensure that it's aligned with the standards. If I am looking at pedagogy, I am examining QR 1.2 to ensure that it's aligned to the standards. Or, if I am looking at teacher observations, then I am examining QR 4.1 to ensure teachers are observed and given specific feedback using Danielson's Framework. This tool helps the leader to keep track of school coherence and focus on improving instructional practices that are aligned with rigorous expectations of the standards.

Although the PPR is an evaluative process, both DYFSL2 and DYPLF2 perceived the process as a one-on-one professional development opportunity for school leaders. For example, DYFSL2 pointed out:

…the PPO served as a reflective tool that helped principals think about whether standards-based instruction was embedded in the school, and how effective feedback to teachers continuously improved instructional practices and teacher effectiveness. It reflected the school leader's ability to leverage instructional and organizational resources to meet school goals. These effective instructional and pedagogical practices lead to increased student performance as demonstrated in classroom and school wide assessments.

In essence, DYPLF2 added "this one-on-one support increases the principal's ability to refine leadership practices that support instruction, assessment and teacher effectiveness." This example, showed how the leaders in District Y perceived the PPO as a professional learning tool. DYPLF2 provided additional evidence of how district leaders saw the PPO as a professional learning tool:

To unify our thinking, the district staff engaged in initial walk-throughs to schools

to calibrate our thinking using the Performance Review Observation Tool. We

engaged the principal in a deep dive into the school level data, a walkthrough of the

school using the Principal Performance Observation Tool and an extensive discussion

using the different evidence collected in order to isolate and/or refine the specific goals of

the school.

DYPLF2 stated the following:

The superintendent's vision is my vision. I carry out the superintendent's vision when

conducting Principal Performance Reviews. Therefore, it is critical that we are on the

same page. It will create reliability and validity of the feedback. Individuals receiving

consistency of feedback are better able to make appropriate decisions.

DYPLF2 stated that the superintendent used the Principal Performance Observation Tool

(PPO) to assess the principal performance and used student work, student formative and

summative assessments, teacher observations, and quality reviews as forms of school data to

identify the needs of the school. With the principal, instructional goals are reviewed and an

improvement plan is formulate based on data collected. DYPLF2 continued to explain how

district led school walkthroughs are intended to give feedback to school leaders about their

progress in leading the school to implement and embed effective practices that support the

implementation of the standards with the purpose of increasing student performance.

As part of the PPR, the PLF collaborated with leaders to set instructional and

organizational goals based on data collected during the school visit. The PLF used the following

interview questions to focus the school's plans for continuously monitoring achievement and

instructional goals: What is the goal? What does this sample tell about what students know and

can do? What are the gaps in student learning? How can this need be addressed? These questions

helped leaders to isolate needs and to identify strategies to address the needs. Both school and district leaders in this case study saw the PPR process as a tool that supports the principal and school's ability to set and achieve targeted, strategic and attainable goals.

The district played different roles in supporting school principals. The need of the school was indicative of how the district served the school. The roles varied as follows: thought partner, leadership developer, guide, and evaluator. DYPLF2 described the roles and responsibilities of a district PLF as that of an evaluator. The DYPLF2 stated the following:

The PLF conducted regular visits to schools in conjunction with others or sometimes alone. The first visit ideally focused on identifying the specific needs of the school. During this visit, the school leader discussed its goals, shared school data, identified concerns and linked data to the identified concerns. The PLF prior to the site visit studied the school data with the district team before school visits. The principal shared school data and CCLS school improvement action plans. They worked collaboratively with other team members to provide professional learning opportunities for school leaders and utilized the Principal Performance Observation Tool, a central component of the Principal Performance Review, an evaluative process for principals to enhance their leadership effectiveness. The Principal Leadership Facilitator conducted evaluative visits and provided on-site coaching to school leaders. In addition to the instructional focus, they trouble shoot parent complaints and organized C-30 processes. In essence, the PLF's focused on improving principal leadership performance and educational effectiveness in the following areas: school leadership performance, strategic plans for curriculum, instruction, and organizational management.

DYFSL2 confirmed:

The overall visits to schools revealed that there were few schools where there was little

evidence of effective instruction and student engagement. This issue was resolved by

having principals revisit and revise the focus of the professional learning plans, and they

examined the coherence of feedback to teachers through use of Danielson's Framework.

DYFSL2 further stated "the FSL's role is to assist school leaders in clarifying the intent of the

standards for various audiences and to discuss how to use the standards to meet students where

they are, to form assessment, and to create a framework for intervention."

RQ2. What types of supports do principals provide to teachers that affect the

implementation and sustainability of the Common Core Learning Standards? The

researcher conducted a careful analysis of the data collected from the principals and assistant

principals' interview questions numbers one, two and five through ten as indicated in Table 12.

The researcher also used interview questions, professional development plans, professional

development agendas, and teacher feedback from principal observations, and Quality Reviews.

The following four findings emerged from the examination and analysis of the data for Research

Question Two. These findings indicate the types of supports principals provided to support

teachers in implementing, embedding and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standards with

the purpose of improving teacher practice and student performance.

Table 12. *Research question two data alignment*

Interview Questions	Documents	Documents
School Leaders	Teacher Data Binder	Teacher Team Agenda
IQ1-2 & 5-10	Quality Review 2015	Feb, Apr, May 2015
	Sample Principal Feedback	Oct, Jan, Mar, May 2016

RQ2: Finding 1. The first finding that developed from the data is that all principals and assistant principals in District Y indicated that Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are used as a resource to implement, embed and sustain the CCLS, to improve teacher instructional practices, leadership skills and build capacity within schools. DYFSL2 states that each school has developed Professional Learning Communities that consist of teachers across grades, within the grade and within the same content area. These teachers use an inquiry process to focus on student learning and effective teaching practices. They meet in teacher teams to plan units or lessons, examine teacher practice, analyze data and look at each other's work.

DYMPR3 stated, "Professional Learning Communities play a critical role in helping to improve teacher instruction". DYMPR3 stated:

> The tone, practices and attitudes of the teachers have shifted since empowering teachers to make decisions about student learning. They hold themselves accountable to making sure students are on and above grade level in both mathematics and English language arts. Implementing Professional Learning Community has shifted teachers' conversations about students from what they cannot do to what can we do to help a struggling student or what strategy have you used to help student x. If done with fidelity, PLC's can play a significant role in building capacity within a school community, improve teacher practice and student performance. Thereby, it is essential that leaders embrace PLC's as a viable tool to utilize to improve schools.

As DXEPR2 cited, "To support this process, we built into the instructional program a common planning time across the grades. This gave teachers a chance to reflect on their practice, read research strategies, utilize protocols and provide feedback to each other." The teachers utilized a teacher meeting program that records the meetings and post their work and revisions in a shared

online space. It is similar to Google Docs, an online document sharing program which allows real time revisions. Administrators have access to the program which allows them an opportunity to monitor and give feedback. DXEPR2 continued, "At least twice a month, we've put in across grade team meeting time, too. So, we've done quite a bit."

DYEPR2 continued to explain that as the semester progresses, more time is spent on looking at student work and teacher practice to plan units or lessons or adjust lessons to meet the needs of all students. The grade teams and focus groups of new teachers and sometimes veterans met together to learn strategies to meet the needs of small groups of students. DYEPR4 stated:

> To sustain practices, during our common planning time teachers engaged in four-week learning cycles where the teachers look at units of study and update them for one week. During that week, instructional shifts are embedded, multiple entry points are identified and the necessary curriculum adjustments are made. This is followed the next week with the team utilizing student work and a gap analysis protocol to compare student work products against the standards to determine the following: what is the child doing well, what is the child missing, and what are the next steps?

The DYMPR4 principal outlined the way in which the teachers utilized the inquiry work during PLC to determine the best strategy to support students who have not met the standard and are in need of scaffolding to help them reach the CCLS. If a strategy worked, it is shared with others or is maintained in their repertoire of strategies. If a strategy does not work, they try a new one. This cycle is repeated as needed to address other concerns until the teachers have improved their practice and students have demonstrated understanding of the standard.

DYMPR3 and DYEPR4 expressed that teachers were willing to share their practice, share the responsibility and commit to the professional learning community process. Both

DYMPR3 and DYEPR4 shared how their schools participating were able to share evidence of their meeting structure and process. DYEPR4 explained how the teachers have taken ownership of the teacher meetings. They planned the agendas and decided on the facilitative process to use when conducting the meetings. DYMPR3 shared how teachers are more open and willing to talk about their teaching and share their successes as well as their challenges as they work very closely together in grade level teacher team meetings examining teacher practice, student work, and assessment data.

According to all school leaders of this study in District Y, teachers have taken full ownership of the PLC process and hold each other accountable. Teachers are improving their practices, coaching others, and sharing ideas through the collaborative process. "Everyone benefits," says DYMPR3. DYMPR continued to explain:

> This type of support contributes to improving teacher practice and implementing, embedding and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standards. Teachers are able to lead the professional development. They get together and they do the Japanese lesson plan protocol. A couple of the teachers have agreed to being videotaped. Lessons were reviewed and critiqued. That happened because we first established a safe environment in the beginning of the year where teachers felt that they could take risks with their practice. Teachers were allowed to take on more leadership roles when it comes to the Common Core Standards as implementation. Looking at the observations in advance, we see that areas that were developing are progressively moving to effective school wide.

RQ2: Finding 2. The data revealed that principals in District Y provided opportunities for teachers to improve their practice through engagement in inter-visitations in the form of walkthroughs and instructional rounds within their school and other district schools to

implement and sustain the Common Core Learning Standards. Some leaders shared how Inter-visitations within schools and outside are used as a resource to build capacity and to embed and sustain practices throughout the school. DYMAP3 shared how Inter-visitation is used as a way of embedding and sustaining practices within classrooms.

A comparison of DYMAP3 and DYMPR3 responses revealed that both of them talked about how teachers used Japanese Lesson Study Approach, a collaborative approach geared to improve teacher practice and build their content knowledge. Each teacher, comfortable with the Japanese Lesson Study Approach, participated in a Lesson Study in which they engaged in the following process: analysis of need, collaborative planning, low inference feedback, adjust the lesson, and revise, reteach to a different group. The teacher reteaches the revised lesson to a different group of students while her colleagues took low inference notes. In mathematics, their focus was on the development of explicit teaching of concepts to students.

DYMPR4 pointed out:

Utilizing this lesson study approach has made teachers more aware of the need to use the CCLS to support lesson planning, focused teaching, examining student learning and creating assessments aligned to objectives and standards. As a result of implementing Japanese Study approach and the inter-visitation process, I have seen how teacher practice has changed. Teachers are better able to explicitly teach and match concepts with needs.

This was an example of how the middle school used inter-visitation of classrooms within their school to improve teacher practice in mathematics.

To celebrate and share the work across schools, school leaders from both schools in District Y talked about how teachers used programs similar to Google docs for collaborative

work to plan and publish lessons. For example, DYMAP3 stated "Atlas Rubicon is an on online platform the school used to plan curriculum, units of study and lesson. It is Common Core aligned". This platform served as a resource to help teachers align their lessons to the Common Core Standards.

Both DYEPR4 and DYEAP4 discussed how teachers in the PLCs are utilizing inter-visitation as a tool to support their learning. Sometimes groups of teachers visit classrooms to give colleagues feedback on a specific concept. At other times, they visit each other classroom to observe a best practice. The visiting teachers implements the strategy and invites colleagues to observe them and give feedback. As a result of this practice, DYEAP4 noted:

> Teachers are taking a lot more initiative when it comes to planning and more risks when it comes to presenting the material. Teachers are getting out of their comfort zone in terms of only presenting one way or only hitting the surface of topics. They are inviting feedback from others. They do understand that sometimes delving deep into a topic requires you to expose yourself to the possibility of failure, and with that, they are requesting more training.

The teachers are requesting online classes, opportunities to visit other schools and they are seeking professional opportunities independent of the school.

Both DYMPR3 and DYMPR4 shared how they engage in bi-monthly district led inter-visitations. According to DYMPR3, "these inter-visitations have opened my eyes to how I needed to approach improving or implementing practices within my school". Also, DYMPR4, shared how visiting other sites helped her to better how understand how to support explicit teaching. She took a group of teachers to visit another school to observe a model lesson.

The use of inter-visitations has helped teachers to improve their practice, and they are better able to implement the CCLS.

RQ2: Finding 3. While teacher observation is a part of the teacher rating process, the data revealed that all principals and assistant principals in District Y interviewed in this study perceived the teacher observation process as both a professional learning and evaluative tool. They referenced the teacher observation process as a one-on-one professional learning resource to support teacher growth and learning in implementing and sustaining the CCLS with the purpose of improving student performance**.** In this study school leaders indicated that the development of teacher practices was monitored and supported through observations. The observation process was also used as a tool to support the implementation and sustainment of the Common Core Learning Standards within curriculum units, lessons and assessments. The observation process relied on providing feedback to teachers utilizing Danielson's Teacher Effectiveness Framework (2013), a research-based rubric which defines quality teaching.

DYMPR3 stated, "Through analysis of teacher observations, we discovered that teachers were not 'explicitly teaching' concepts, especially in mathematics. They were explaining procedures or assessing students without teaching the concept; therefore, some did not understand how to solve problems."

DYMPR3 further stated:

> We had everything that we wanted them to know and be able to do, but we were not doing a good job at explicitly explaining it to the students, breaking it down step-by-step. So, this year we spent a lot of time discussing what…it [means] to explicitly teach. Some teachers were doing a really quick review or just assessing students.

DYMPR3 explained:

Teachers needed to see explicit teaching of concepts using the 7 Steps of explicit

teaching. Therefore, the school team relied on Japanese Lesson Study, a peer observation

approach to improve teacher practice. This approach helped them to understand the

concept of explicit teaching first. They saw examples of explicit teaching before

collaboratively planning a model lesson. Each person was given an opportunity to be

observed by their peers teaching the lesson. After receiving feedback from peers, the

lesson was adjusted to include the feedback and taught to another group of students. At

the end of that session, the lesson is discussed again and feedback is given. If needed, the

lesson is retaught again. The process was repeated until each teacher was open to

participating in the process had received feedback from peers. We spent a lot of time with

that, and it really was helpful in terms of changing the culture of presenting lessons.

We did a lot of work with looking at the standards in ELA and mathematics. So, for them

they were used to looking at the standards, writing their lessons based on the standards,

really incorporating the standards into their units and turning those standards into

objectives--breaking out the verbs and the nouns to reveal what students must know and

do.

DYEPR4 also saw the observation process as a resource to strengthen teacher practice

and to implement and sustain the Common Core Learning Standards. DYEPR4 shared an

analysis of student current writing with an Item analysis of students writing on the most recent

state Common Core exam. The analysis revealed that some students were not doing well in

writing because they did not supply sufficient details to explain the evidence. Children were able

to choose evidence but were not linking it to the claim or explaining the significance of the piece

of evidence chosen. Some of the students were the same students who had scored lowest on the writing portion of the exam. DYEPR4 stated:

> `A comparison of the achievement data with the teacher observations revealed that teachers were not teaching this skill. With the exposure to explicit teaching, teachers were able to increase the level of rigor in planning, delivering lessons, and helping students to understand concepts.

> DYEAP4 indicated that through frequent observations she was able to monitor teacher growth in the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards within instruction. DYEAP4, further stated, "One can look to see if the lessons are aligned with Common Core Learning Standards and whether the teacher has taught a concept. The observations were used to monitor the teacher's progress toward a goal".

Also, DYMPR4 stated:

> Last year our school made a six percent increase in reading and seven percent in math. I would definitely correlate this to the impact that the implementation of Common Core Learning Standards has had on improving teacher practices. Since teachers used the standards to isolate concepts and to scaffold student learning in lessons, they were better able to plan for and provide specific support to students. I attribute this progress to teachers having a better grasp on how to plan for and teach concepts.

RQ2: Finding 4: Both principals and assistant principals in District Y provided differentiated professional development to improve teacher practice. Evident in both schools were different structures school leaders used to support the implementation and sustainment of the Common Core Learning Standards. As revealed through the interviews, the professional development plans and description of team structures used in schools are as follows:

differentiated professional learning, Professional Learning Communities, Inter-visitations, and teacher observation process. Each principal used weekly teacher team meetings, monthly professional development, teacher observations, inter-visitations, walk-throughs and instructional rounds as structures to facilitate teacher growth in the implementation and sustainment of the Common Core Learning Standards.

DYMAP3 and DYMPR3 talked about how the Japanese Lesson study is one way the school provided differentiation for teachers in mathematics to support teachers with explicit teaching. According to DYMPR4 and DYAPR4, the teachers improved in their practice and became more open to sharing ideas with others.

DYEAP4 stated that most teachers are experienced teachers; however, there are about five new teachers who have joined the school within the last two years. These teachers for the first year met monthly with the assistant principal to acclimate to the school culture. Sometimes they met as a small group, while on other occasions; they met one-on-one with the assistant principal. These were mostly reflective sessions intended to encourage and strengthen their commitment to teaching. On other occasions, the lead teacher would meet with them to provide feedback on their lessons. Sometimes experienced teachers needed supporting with learning a new initiative, the teacher team leader also would provide one-on-one support by arranging inter-classroom visits. Other times the teachers will go out to other professional development based on their needs. These professionals learning lab sites are key schools that model best practices for other schools to observe. Teachers are encouraged to present their work at monthly professional learning sessions.

DYMAP4 stated that teacher teams and teacher leaders are sustaining instructional practices. School leaders provided planning time after school for teachers to revisit the lessons and units of study.

RQ3. What leadership behaviors of district leaders are evident in supporting principals in embedding and sustaining the leadership practices with the purpose of improving teacher practice and student performance? Research Question Three is intentionally structured to inquire about the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent's behaviors that support principals in embedding and sustaining leadership practices with the purpose of improving teacher practice and student achievement. A complete review of the data collected from interview, agendas and observations revealed the following three findings: Table 13.

Research question three data alignment

Relevant Interview Questions	Meetings	Documents
PLF1/FSL1 IQ# 1 – 3 & 7 - 9 School Leaders IQ# 3, 4 & 5	Professional Learning Conference November 2016	Learning Conference Agenda 9/16, 10/16, 11/16 Professional Learning Plan 2016-17

RQ3: Finding 1. The Data revealed that District Y used inter-visitations, walkthroughs, and teacher observations to model practice and provide structures that foster continued leadership development in principals. Both district leaders interviewed talked about how they used data from PPO visits to schools, Walk-Throughs and teacher observations as an entry point to discuss effective teaching and the consistency of administrative teacher ratings. In both districts the visits were conducted for two reasons: one to give feedback to the school, to

establish inter-rater reliability among the district team and across school level administrative teams. In addition, they used on the state reports and school leaders' observations of teaching and evidence of student work to guide their conversations on teacher practice and student learning within schools.

As part of the support to principals, Districts Y built in opportunities for principals to share best practices and reflect on the work in their schools to improve their practices. DYMPR3 stated that during these bi-monthly professional learning opportunities, principals engaged in inter-visitation sessions at selected schools. The leaders of the school site shared a best practice. The visiting principals provided low inference feedback to the host principal. DYMPR3 specified that, "The sharing of best practices was insightful. It expanded school leaders' ideas, encouraged reflection to deepen leaders' thinking about best practices to improve student performance."

DYMPR3 said the following:

These visits have been very powerful because we get to bring back really good ideas from what's working, and we get to see what's not working. You're even able to reflect on your own school because you'll see similarities between things that are happening in your building and things that are not. So, these focused visits have been very helpful in supporting me with how to help my teachers around that, just those conversations that we have on how to make things better. We come back with a wealth of ideas, so that's one way.

Each district leader shared that informal inter-visitation is encouraged. These informal visitations happen when two or more principals agree to work together to improve their

practices. The district leaders shared that on occasions they may informally arrange visits between two principals to support each other's development.

Most principals indicated that the visits whether formal or informal were beneficial because everyone learned--the facilitator, host principal, and visiting principals. The participants' knowledge was evident in the following ways: expanded understanding of the practice, the host benefited from the targeted feedback and the school benefited from the reflection shared to identify the gaps and create a plan for implementation.

RQ3: Finding 2. The data analysis revealed that three out of four school leaders stated that inter-visitations were beneficial to the school leaders. All leaders interviewed in District Y indicated that school leaders engaged in opportunities to share best practices. The data was collected from interviews, document reviews and observation of meetings. The data showed that sharing best practices during inter-visitations was a process district leaders used to support school leaders' growth and development in implementing, embedding and sustaining the common standards. Both District Y leaders interviewed indicated that both formal and informal ways were used for shared practices.

Formally, District Y provided opportunities to share best practices during the bi-monthly principal conferences and focused inter-visitations. DYEPR4 stated, "All principals were expected to present a best practice in their individual schools". She explained that this share occurred during principal conferences and inter-visitations. Sometimes two or three principals joined together to present a best practice. The following is a brief overview of the Bridge-to-Practice process utilized during principal conferences and inter-visitations that DYEPR4 shared:

The team was given about an hour at each conference to present a model practice that is embedded in his/her school. Each team member was given fifteen minutes to speak about

the model practice. The presentation included the following: 1) a description of the practice, 2) the process used to implement it, 3) a description of challenges encountered during implementation and ways the challenges were addressed, 4) a description of the successes and 5) the audience was given an opportunity to question the presenters. The session ended with the facilitators providing an opportunity for the principals to think about ways these practices aligned with the work in their schools. If the practice is already in place, how can it be improved? Each principal created a plan for revision or implementation of one of the strategies presented. The presenters served as support resources during the planning time.

This is an example of how District Y leaders included in the monthly professional learning conference a Bridge-to-Practice segment which provided principals an opportunity to share and investigate ways to implement best practices. A review of the data from the observation of learning opportunities conducted during the November 2016 principal conference and the review of sample documents collected from other principal conferences held in April, September and October 2016 principals' conferences corroborate that District Y utilized the sharing of best leadership practices to support principals' growth and development in implementing, embedding and sustaining the CCLS.

Another formal process that District Y leaders utilized to embed practices was inter-visitation. Inter-visitations were professional learning opportunities in which a small group of participants visited model sites to learn about a best practice. During bi-monthly meetings in District Y, small groups of principals participated in a visit to a host school to see model practices. During this session, the hosting school shared a best practice and discussed the process used and challenges encountered as they worked toward embedding and sustaining a particular

practice. The following example described DYMPR3's opportunity to participate in an inter-visitation at a host school:

> The sharing of practices is one of the best things that District Y has done. Visiting different schools with a specific focus in mind gave participants an opportunity to provide low inference feedback to the host school based on their best practice. The participants engaged in a discussion with the host school leader to identify possible challenges the principal faced and how the challenges were addressed. During that same session, the participants are presented a new practice or ideas for expanding a current practice while the host school principal identified possible strategies to continue to support the work. Everyone benefited.

DYMPR3 continued, "Furthermore, these sessions are powerful because everyone is learning. They are observing the practice in action. The way in which the visit was conducted helped me to reflect on my practice and my school's instructional needs". During this process, both the host school leader and the visiting school leaders expand their understanding of how to improve the practice that was observed.

These half day inter-visitation sessions focused on different topics. For example, DYEAP4 cited, "They [inter-visitations] covered any new information that we needed to know such as inquiry, gap analysis, formative and summative assessment, effective teaming, design of lessons, and the use of I-Can statements". Also, DYMAP3 identified some additional topics which included "understanding the Advance system and giving feedback to teachers."

According to DYPLF2, "principals were informally matched with other principals based on their strength and need." For example, as evidence of the informal pairing of principals, DYPLF2 stated:

> I paired a principal who is a veteran with a brand-new principal who became a principal in October, and there were some concerns about instruction. So, I paired her with the principal who was seasoned and knew instruction. The season principal goes to the school every week to walk the building and give feedback. Then the novice principal goes to the other principal's school to observe best practices. Sometimes, she takes a team of teachers with her.

She explained that because it was an informal pairing that formal documentation was not required. The logistics and frequency of the meetings were left up to the two principals. DYPLF2 pointed out that sometimes principals interested in improving the same practice will meet informally to support each other's development.

The researcher observation of the November 2016 principal learning conference corroborated the evidence revealed during the interviews of the district and school leaders. The data showed that most school leaders in District Y indicated that sharing of practices formally and informally during conferences and small group inter-visitations was beneficial to the host leader and the visiting leaders. In addition, the data revealed that these informal processes were specifically geared to supporting leadership practices in implementing, embedding and sustaining CCLS.

RQ3: Finding 3. The data revealed that four of six participants at both the district and school levels indicated that the district leaders provided differentiated learning opportunities that led to principal growth and development. The researcher examined data from the

interviews, observation of meeting and document reviews. Differentiated learning opportunities were provided to meet the specific needs of schools and build capacity within schools through mentoring, inter visitations, and instructional rounds. For example, DYPLF2 explained how principals would comment on how they had benefited from the presentations of colleagues at the learning conference. She highlighted a specific instance she recalled:

> I have one principal who is very, very strong in the area of assessment. So, we planned an inter-visitation so principals could see how assessment is used and tools that this principal was using. In October 2015, we visited the school. By November 2015, I saw an immediate shift in practices in schools that I visited. So many principals have adapted their assessment practices, and they have even gone on their own for follow-up visits with their teams to build capacity within their schools. As I have gone into schools recently, I have seen that their practices are continually evolving.

This example demonstrated how school leaders have benefited from inter-visitations. It has helped principals enhance their personal leadership abilities and helped them to build leadership and instructional capacities within their schools.

Although the PPO is an evaluative tool, it was also perceived as a source of one-on-one professional learning support given to help schools and school leaders improve. The feedback that is given is based specifically on the needs of the school. These needs that were a direct result of the schools' on-site visit of classrooms, analysis of the data and the school's short and long term goals.

DYMPR3 points out how the needs of a veteran principal and a new principal are met. For example:

Schools are tiered according to their specific needs. So, every other month, teams of

school leaders visit schools based on their needs. I just participated in an inter-visitation

where I observed explicit teaching. This visit opened my eyes to what I needed to do in

my school. So, I have engaged my teachers in a lesson study focused on explicit teaching.

As a result, I have seen a difference in teachers' instructional practices.

DYEPR4 shared an instance in which the specific needs of her school were met. She

pointed out:

The superintendent learned of my need and he provided the school with training and

special resources to support advance writing literacy development. Other senior

principals are given a sense of autonomy to utilize outside resources that will better meet

their special needs.

PLF2 indicated that the professional learning that is provided to the district is based upon

need. For example, "after visiting the school within a four-week period, I would see certain

trends across the district. And based on that, at our next principal conference, provide resources

that are seen as a value to meeting the needs of the principals we served".

District leaders provide various opportunities to support the growth and development of

principals. District leaders provided formal and informal differentiated learning opportunities for

school leaders that promoted their growth and development.

RQ4. In consideration of concerns and issues raised about the Common Core

Implementation process in New York State, how will the Common Core Task Force Report

2015 affect the embedding and sustainment processes in schools and districts? All the

District Y participants' responses to interview questions seven through ten of in the study were

used to collect data to address this research question. In addition, Table 14 shows other data

sources that aligned with the interview questions to provide evidence to support Research

Question Four. There were two findings for Research Question 4.

Table 14.

RQ 4 data alignment

Interview Questions	Meeting	Documents
DYPLF/FSL	Professional Learning Conference Nov 2016	Agendas
IQ# 7-10		Oct 15, Nov15, Feb 16, Mar 16, April 16
School Leaders		Professional Development Plan 2015-2016,
IQ# 7-10		2016-2017 Retreat May 16

RQ4: Finding 1. The Data revealed that all District Y leaders on both the district and

school levels expressed that they valued the Common Core Learning Standards. All the

participants at the district and school level indicated that they valued the Common Core Learning

Standards in spite of the way in which the standards were implemented. While DYMPR3, stated,

"The implementation was too fast. It did not give the school leaders a chance to digest the

standards before they were implementing the assessments. The same was true of the Danielson's

Teacher Effectiveness Framework". DYMPR3 added, "Having all three together without fully

understanding each one was overwhelming and frustrating. It felt like we were implementing

three different initiatives". DYMPR3 further argued, "This rapid introduction of these initiatives

limited the school's ability to properly implement the initiatives in a cohesive and coherent

way".

However, once the links were made among these initiatives, it made it easier because the

understanding of one informed the other. DYEPR4 said, "What is also good is that the PPO,

CCLS and Danielson's Teacher Effectiveness Framework are all linked". Most importantly,

DYMPR3 concluded that these tools are linked to the Quality Review Rubric. All the participants on some level expressed a commitment to continue to use the standards because they are valuable to supporting student learning and improving teacher practices.

RSQ4: Finding Two. All the leaders in District Y did not report a significant impact of the task force report on the work of their district or school. They were only aware of the main elements of the report and had not read it in depth. None of the leaders stopped doing the work because of the report. **I**n spite of these challenges, all the leaders felt the standards were good because they helped leaders and teachers to plan for individualized student instruction. DYEPR4 said, "What is also good is that the PPO, CCLS and Danielson's Teacher Effectiveness Framework are all linked". Most importantly, DYMPR3 concluded that these tools are linked to the Quality Review Rubric. All the participants on some level expressed a commitment to continue to use the standards. Although the because they are valuable.

Summary: District Y's Findings. The system leaders in District Y utilized different roles to support school leaders based on the individual leader's abilities and the context of the school. They provided differentiated and embedded support through use of protocols and processes to support school leaders' growth and development. The district leaders perceived the standards as valuable tools to support schools and school leaders.

Cross District Data Analysis

A comparison of the data collected from Districts X and Y based on the four research questions revealed that there were some similarities and differences between the Districts in the perception of roles in relationship to school leaders, in how principals supported teachers, in how the district leaders supported school leaders and in how the leaders responded to the NYS Common Core Report 2015. The researcher compared comments and included information that

was characterized in this study through interview, observations, document review and other resources.

District Y is a smaller district whose majority population is African American while District X is a larger district whose majority population is Hispanic. Both districts have a high population of Title 1 students. Additional district level roles have been added each year since 2015. The Superintendent of District X has been in place for more than 15 years while the Superintendent in District Y has been serving since 2014. Both the PLF and FSL in District X had worked in the District in a previous capacity. As noted in this study District leaders have joined the District Teams within the last two years. It should be noted that the leadership in District Y had changed three times within the last five years. The two principals interviewed had been in the District for at least fifteen years. The leaders of the schools participating in District Y experience varied three to fifteen years. One had been in the position for at least eleven years and the other was three years as shown in Table 5.

RQ1. What role does the district play in helping principals to implement and embed the CCLS within schools? The four findings that emerged from the data in response to Research Question One focused on four roles district leaders utilized to provide support to principals. While each district utilized a balanced approach to supporting school leaders, there were some subtle differences.

RQ1: Finding 1. The data revealed that ten out of twelve participants referred to district leaders as a thought partner. This finding was based on the evidence gathered from interviews, observations and documents reviewed. A Thought Partner was defined as a person with whom an individual share and discuss ideas. The district leaders provided reflective

protocols to helped school leaders to think through ideas, examine data, and isolate needs and set goals based on the data collected.

As a thought partner, the district administrators worked collaboratively with each school to discern its needs based on formative and summative data collected from various reports, articulated concerns and best practices gleaned from on-site visits. They assisted school leaders in setting goals based on the school's needs and implementing the Common Core Standards and standards-based practices to improve teacher and student performance. As a result, principals perceived the support as beneficial to their professional growth. Within both districts, the district leaders served as thought partners for school leaders.

This was a collaborative partnership which held each other accountable to developing students with the essential 21st century skills embodied in the Common Core Learning Standards. This symbiotic relationship illustrated how district leaders were equally vested in school leaders' success in achieving school goals.

RQ1: Finding 2. **Eleven out of twelve participants characterized the district leader as a leadership developer**. According to the data, a leadership developer is defined as a district leader who provides professional learning and leadership support to school leaders to help implement, embed and sustain the CCLS. This finding was based on evidence collected from the professional learning conference observed, agendas of meetings, professional development plans and interviews. These evidence sources supported the description of the role of a Leadership Developer. In this study, the district leaders were characterized as a leadership developer. However, more leaders in District X than in District Y used the term, "Leadership Developers," to describe the role of district leaders.

In District X, the term was used to describe how the district supported the growth of the principals through professional learning experiences that refined leaders' abilities to implement, embed and sustain change within their school's context. The district provided embedded on-site professional learning through these processes: one-on-one support, inter-visitations, walkthroughs and instructional rounds. These generative processes and protocols helped to facilitate the implementation and sustainment of CCLS initiatives and the development of effective leadership practices. This support consisted of differentiated and individualized embedded support to school leaders. The agendas of the leadership conferences illustrate how the professional learning focused on a specific practice that was needed by the group and provided in-depth and differentiated opportunities for school leaders to apply the learning to their individual schools. In this capacity, the district focused on creating learning opportunities to meet the needs of the organization and the school leader. In other cases, leaders were given an opportunity to present at learning conference or use their schools as a best practices sites to share their expertise with others.

The data collected from the district and school leaders revealed that district leaders acted as leadership developers for the purpose of developing the knowledge base of each school leader and strengthening the school leader's abilities to lead the implementation and sustainment of the CCLS within their schools to best serve the needs of the student population in helping them meet the rigorous expectations.

RQ1: Finding 3. Ten out of twelve participants saw the role of district leaders as a guide. The data collected from both district sites illustrated how district leaders function as a guide. The data described a guide as an individual who advises or gives guidance to others without creating dependency or stifling creativity. Sometimes serving as a guide the district

leader pointed the school leader to resources, special professional learning opportunities or offered advice. The school principals saw district leaders as guides in helping school leaders to grow professionally and support the goals within their schools. If the district saw that the school or the school leader were facing some challenges, the district leader intervened. As in the example of the advance specialist, they gave support to strengthen the school team in providing feedback to teachers. Once they were able to establish validity and consistency in feedback, the school team continued to work independently of the coach to strengthen their practice in giving feedback. Thus, the district leader provided support that promoted independence rather than dependency. This approach promoted and protected the principal autonomy. They were not told or directed what to do. Instead they worked together as partners to devise a strategy to implore and monitor.

RQ1: Finding 4. Eleven out of twelve participants in the study referenced the Principal Performance Review process as an evaluative tool that also served as a source of professional learning. Both District X and Y leaders capitalized upon the one-on-one site visit, a part of the PPR process, to engage in an open and extensive discussion of data with school leaders to determine the school's progress toward the identified goals.

District leaders worked closely with school leaders to examine hard and soft school data to isolate current school needs. District leaders utilized reflective protocols to help school leaders leverage a specific focus. For example, the PLF used the following interview questions to focus the school's plans for continuously monitoring achievement and instructional goals: What is the goal? What does this sample tell about what students know and can do? What are the gaps in student learning? How can this need be addressed? These questions helped leaders to isolate needs and to identify strategies to address the needs. In conjunction with the district leaders, the

school leaders set instructional and organizational goals based on data collected during the school visit and refined the planning to achieve school goals.

Both school and district leaders in this case study saw the PPR process as a tool that supports the principal and school's ability to set and achieve targeted, strategic and attainable goals.

Summary

In both District school leaders and system leaders are developing a strong trustful partnership. Principals are open to seeking guidance on instructional and operational concerns. As evident in the learning conferences observed in both districts, the day began with celebrating individual and district accomplishments. The district leaders include the school leaders in the planning of the professional learning conferences, and they provide opportunities to gather feedback that inform the planning of the principal conferences.

RQ2. What types of supports do principals provide to teachers that affect the implementation and sustainability of the Common Core Learning Standards? The researcher collected data from interviews and compared it with data collected from document reviews and observation of the principal conference. The data indicated that the principals utilized three collaborative processes to support teacher growth and development and their ability to implement and sustain the CCLS. The three processes school leaders utilized are Professional Learning Community, teacher observations and inter-visitation. These differentiated learning processes helped to build capacity within schools and strengthen teachers' practice.

RQ2: Finding 1. All the school leaders who participated in this study revealed that PLC is a tool utilized to enhance teacher instructional practices, build teacher leadership skills, support teacher growth and development, and increase student learning. In this study,

PLCs are defined as organized collaborative horizontal and vertical content area teacher teams focused on building knowledge, expertise, and experience. PLC is a collaborative process that focuses on examining authentic live best practices to deepen the understanding of the practice in action. They are learning opportunities provided by teachers and for teachers to work as a team to improve teacher practices geared to support student learning and growth. They are empowered to revise curricular, design lessons, plan interventions, examine data, read relevant research, model lessons, and observe best practices. These are some of the PLC experiences that are intended to support instruction, curriculum development and student learning. Teachers have a voice in what students are learning.

RQ2: Finding 2. All principals utilized the teacher observation process as a tool to provide one-on-one support to teachers in helping teachers implement, embed, and sustain the CCLS. Teachers participated in a goal setting process and worked collaboratively with the principal to establish a support plan that reflected the teacher's needs and goals. Teachers are expected to engage in learning experiences that support their growth and development. Principals talked about the level of investment of teachers in their professional learning. They saw the process more as a supportive tool rather than an evaluative tool. Teachers are becoming more open to sharing their strengths and needs with peers and school leaders.

RQ2: Finding 3. All principals and assistant principals provided differentiated support to teachers that is geared to improve teacher practices. The final finding focuses on ways the principal and assistant principal provided differentiated professional learning to ensure that teachers receive specialized support that is targeted and meaningful to helping the individual to implement, embed and sustain the CCLS. The school leaders utilized inter-visitations as a tool to provide differentiated support to teachers that is geared to improve

teacher practice. The inter-visitations were conducted both formally and informally. Sometimes the school leaders arranged visits for an expressed purpose of sharing practices. At other times school leaders would match individuals to observe specific practice. Sometimes, teachers visited classes on their own.

These processes empowered teachers to take responsibility for strengthening their practice, deepening their learning, and improving student learning and achievement.

Summary

Teachers are empowered through use of PLC's and inter-visitations. They are engaging in conversations about their practices and student learning. Teachers are independently offering to share their expertise with others. In addition, they are willing to attend professional learning sessions to improve their ability to deliver more effective lessons. In addition, they are willing to share their expertise with and are open to sharing and providing feedback to others on their practices.

RQ3. What leadership behaviors of superintendents and assistant superintendents are evident in supporting principals in embedding and sustaining the practices? The data revealed three findings based on district leaders' leadership behaviors that are evident in supporting principals in embedding and sustaining practices. The following are the three leadership behaviors that district leaders used: sharing of best practices through use of inter-visitation, the use of a data-based decision-making approach to school improvement, the use of a differentiated learning approach to support leaders' growth and development. Districts defined supports based on data analysis and research.

RQ3: Finding 1. **A**ll participants in both District X and Y used data driven decision making to determine the needs of schools, designed supports for them and provided structures that fostered continued leadership development in principals that resulted in student achievement.* Data was collected and triangulated from the interviews, documents reviewed and agendas of meetings revealed that both districts grounded their decisions in data. In District Y, the researcher observed a direct example during a principal leadership conference. A school team shared its journey toward using data based decision making. After the presentation, the school leaders were given an opportunity to engage in a reflective protocol to think about ways to improve the use of data based decision making practices in schools.

The leaders of District X shared an example of how data from the state advance report, teacher on-site observation, and the principal's teacher ratings were used to identify gaps and inconsistency in feedback to teachers. If there were a difference, they engaged the principal in a discussion to determine a possible source of inconsistency and to establish a plan of action to address the concern. District X leaders believed that effective teaching yielded high student performance. This helped them to build reliability and validity in ratings. More importantly, the district leaders were better able to provide support that reflected the school needs and utilize follow-up visits to provide ongoing support. Also, this helped to improve leadership and teacher practices. Helping principals to provide more effective feedback to teachers will help teachers improve their craft. Developing better teacher practice will support teacher effectiveness in supporting student growth.

RQ3: Finding 2. All participants in both District X and Y engaged in opportunities to share best practices which built capacity within and across schools. The data collected from the interviews at the district and school levels, the observation of meetings and document reviews

revealed that participants in both districts saw that sharing of best practice was a viable tool to build capacity. This data showed that sharing of best practices is another way in which district leaders influenced principal behavior through engaging them in different processes. Each district utilized formal and informal approaches to achieve this goal.

Both District X and Y built into the monthly leadership conferences an opportunity for leaders to share best practices with colleagues. For example, District X provided two Bridge-to-Practices opportunities during the conference. One focused on better utilization of community resources to support students' literacy and numeracy development. The principal shared how and why she decided to review the effective use of support services to students. The services were revamped to maximize benefits to students. The other share session focused on using the expertise of school leaders within the district to support others. Five individuals prepared talks on different topics of need. During the meeting, participants chose the session that best met their need or interest. They were given an opportunity to listen to the presentation and ask questions. These were concerns that arose out of feedback that was given to the district professional learning team, a team that comprised of district staff and school leaders who planned monthly professional learning sessions.

In District Y, a school leader brought a team of individuals to share the school's ongoing work to implement a large-scale change. The steps were revealed and challenges they encountered were discussed. The group did talk about ways they addressed the challenges. At the end of the presentation, participants engaged in a carousel protocol which helped school principals to reflect on their practices in leading reform.

Leaders in both Districts X and Y indicated that sharing of best practice is a primary resource that is utilized to build capacity within and across schools.

RQ3: Finding 3. All leaders interviewed at the district level and school level indicated that district leaders provided differentiated learning experiences that led to principal growth and development. A careful analysis of the interviews, meeting agendas, observation of meeting indicated that school leaders received differentiated support. The differentiated learning experiences also included sharing of best practices during inter-visitation within and across schools. At times, the superintendent suggested to experienced school leaders to participate in independent professional development to ensure that more experienced principals are continually challenged. Principals with special expertise were assigned formally and informally as mentors by district leaders.

Principals have benefited from these practices because leaders are better able to support their teachers. As a result, their schools are continually improving, as evidenced by the change in teacher practices, values, and beliefs about how children learn best. Teachers are more open to possibilities and less weighed down by challenges.

Summary

The data showed that all system leaders in both districts demonstrated effective leadership behaviors that supported the growth and the development of school leaders. The differentiated learning opportunities, sharing of best practices and the one-on-one support provided by district leaders influenced school leaders' behaviors. Principals indicated that this type of targeted support has improved their ability to provide similar support to teachers. They provide differentiated learning experiences and opportunities to share practices inside the school and with other schools both formally and informally. This has strengthened the teacher's abilities to provide specialized support to children.

RQ4. In consideration of concerns and issues raised about the Common Core

implementation process in the New York State, how will the Common Core Task Force

Report 2015 affect the embedding and sustainment processes in schools and districts? There

were three findings and one incidental finding for Research Question 4.

RQ4: Finding 1. The data revealed that eleven leaders interviewed indicated that

the participants valued the standards because it provided a framework for designing

instruction. The data collected from interviews, document review and observation of

meetings provide evidence that leaders valued the Common Core Learning Standards

despite the way in which the standards were implemented.

Most leaders said that they would continue with the standards anyway because these

stair step standards helped teachers with designing and revising units of study, lessons,

tasks, and formative assessments. Moreover, they believed the New York State Common

Core Task Report 2015 had no impact on their current work. Initially, they agreed with

findings of the report that the implementation was too fast. It did not give the school leaders

and teachers a chance to digest the standards before they were implementing the

assessments. The same was true of the Danielson's "Teacher Effectiveness Framework".

The general feeling was that having all three together without fully understanding each one

was overwhelming and frustrating. For them, it felt like three unrelated initiatives were

being implementing. Some school leaders argued that the swift implementation "This rapid

introduction of these initiatives" limited the school's ability to implement the initiatives in a

cohesive and coherent way. Nevertheless, they agreed with the basic findings of the task

force about the decision to not use testing results to affect student promotion and teacher

evaluations.

However, once the links were made among these initiatives, it made it easier. The understanding of one informed the other. Each participant on some level expressed a commitment to continue to use the standards because they are valuable to supporting student

DXMPR1 valued the standards because they were the "bridge" to success, getting a job, and a quality education. It meant that students in this country will be able to compete in the global market as they had done in the past.

RQ4: Finding 2. All district and school leaders did not report an impact of the Task Force Report 2015 on the work of their district or school. They were only aware of the main elements of the report and had not read it in depth. All the leaders felt that the standards were good because they helped leaders and teachers to plan for individualized student instruction. All the participants on some level expressed a commitment to continue to use the standards because they were valuable. However, DXPLF1 had mixed opinions about one of the recommendations: suspending the use of student scores for teacher evaluations. DXPLF1 wondered whether "New York State Task Force Report 2015 was sending a mixed message by rescinding the use of the exam results to evaluate teachers' effectiveness, [This] will make it more difficult for us in the field." This evidence supports the finding that leaders did value the standards as a resource to support teacher development.

RQ4: Finding 3. All district leaders and all school leaders participating in the study expressed that they valued the CCLS and would continue to implement instructional practices that maintain the standards. DXPLF1 concluded that regardless of what the report says, District X would continue to push the CCLS. Responses spanned from DXMAP1's description that standards are "stair steps that help teachers meet the needs of students on or below grade-level",

to DXMPR4 belief that the standards are a framework that "helps teachers in mathematics look at standards across grades ... showing how it builds, like a trajectory", and to DXFSL1 comment that "we do not need to develop anything else but the Common Core". In summary, it seems that the New York State Task Force Report 2015 did not have an adverse effect on the use of standards within schools and districts. Leaders of the district and schools continued to implement the standards and articulated the importance of the standards in helping to improve student performance and preparing them for College and Careers.

RQ4: Incidental Finding. One district leader expressed that he valued the CCLS and will continue to use them, but wondered about the effect the Task Force's suspension of using Common Core assessments to help determine teacher effectiveness might have on district and school leaders' work with teachers. However, the district leader reiterated that he valued the standards and will continue to use them to support the work within the district.

Summary

The data revealed that the role district leaders played in supporting principals in implementing, embedding and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standard is a supportive role. The support is described as a thought partner, leadership developer, a guide and evaluator. The district utilized a balanced approach when supporting school leader. The data revealed that principals provided various ways to support teachers during the implementation and sustainment processes. These processes included the use of Professional Learning Communities and Inter-visitations that included Instructional Rounds and Walk-throughs. Leaders used various protocols to engage teachers in discussions about implementing, embedding and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standards with the purpose of improving teacher practice and student performance.

Nine out of twelve participants also perceived the role of the district as a "guide" in helping leaders with professional growth in embedding the Common Core Learning Standards. A possible factor that contributed to this result might have been that the school leaders in both districts reported that they found the district leaders to be approachable and non-judgmental. If the need arose, the school leaders felt comfortable enough to ask the district leader for support. The PLF in District Y said that she tried to be transparent so the leaders will know what to expect. Particularly for principals and assistant principals, district leaders supported them in embedding and sustaining the CCLS within schools. So, this direct support that was given is about leadership development and not about district leadership.

Finally, In Chapter 5, the researcher utilized these findings to draw conclusions and make recommendations that support the implementation and sustainment processes.

CHAPTER FIVE:

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This qualitative case study has addressed a gap in the literature on system leadership support to school leaders and added to the existing body of research on leading large-scale systemic educational change. Through utilizing the findings revealed in Chapter Four, this information will serve as a foundation to the development of Chapter Five. In this chapter, the researcher will draw conclusions. These results will be used to formulate recommendations to system leaders on ways to support school leaders in implementing, embedding, and sustaining initiatives to improve student performance.

These recommendations will focus on policy or practice that supports and maintains change rather than aborts or hinders it. These findings from the study can guide large-scale reform efforts applicable to educational organizations. System leaders can reference this study to identify best practices to utilize when supporting school leaders in implementing, embedding, and sustaining educational change initiatives such as the CCLS. Likewise, they may be able to use this information to set policy, to plan change efforts, or make informed decisions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this comparative qualitative study of two community school districts with schools that have met state accountability targets was to investigate whether district leaders used different structures, processes, and protocols to support principals in embedding and sustaining the CCLS with the goal of improved student achievement.

Summary of Findings

RQ1. What role does the district play in helping principals to implement and embed the CCLS within schools? The four findings that emerged from the data in response to Research Question One focused on four roles district leaders utilized to provide support to principals. While each district utilized a balanced approach to supporting school leaders, there were some subtle differences.

RQ1: Finding 1. This finding was based on the evidence gathered from interviews, observations and documents reviewed. Ten out of twelve participants referred to district leaders as a Thought Partner. A Thought Partner was defined as a person with whom an individual share and discuss ideas. The district leaders provided reflective protocols to helped school leaders to think through ideas, examine data, and isolate needs and set goals based on the data collected.

As a thought partner, the district administrators worked collaboratively with each school to discern its needs based on formative and summative data collected from various reports, articulated concerns and best practices gleaned from on-site visits. They assisted school leaders in setting goals based on the school's needs and implementing the Common Core Standards and standards-based practices to improve teacher and student performance. As a result, principals perceived the support as beneficial to their professional growth. Within both districts, the district leaders served as thought partners for school leaders. This was a collaborative partnership which held each other accountable to developing students with the essential 21st century skills embodied in the Common Core Learning Standards. This symbiotic relationship illustrated how district leaders were equally vested in school leaders' success in achieving school goals.

RQ1: Finding 2. Eleven out twelve participants in this study characterized district leaders as leadership developers. According to the data, a leadership developer is defined as a district leader who provides professional learning and leadership support to school leaders to help implement, embed and sustain the CCLS. This finding was based on evidence collected from the professional learning conference observed, agendas of meetings, professional development plans and interviews. These evidence sources supported the description of the role of a Leadership Developer. In this study, the district leaders were characterized as a leadership developer. However, more leaders in District X than in District Y used the term, "Leadership Developers," to describe the role of district leaders.

In District X, the term was used to describe how the district supported the growth of the principals through professional learning experiences that refined leaders' abilities to implement, embed and sustain change within their school's context. The district provided embedded on-site professional learning through these processes: one-on-one support, inter-visitations, walkthroughs and instructional rounds. These generative processes and protocols helped to facilitate the implementation and sustainment of CCLS initiatives and the development of effective leadership practices. This support consisted of differentiated and individualized embedded support to school leaders. The agendas of the leadership conferences illustrate how the professional learning focused on a specific practice that was needed by the group and provided in-depth and differentiated opportunities for school leaders to apply the learning to their individual schools. In this capacity, the district focused on creating learning opportunities to meet the needs of the organization and the school leader. In other cases, leaders were given an opportunity to present at learning conference or use their schools as a best practices sites to share their expertise with others.

The data collected from the district and school leaders revealed that district leaders acted as leadership developers for the purpose of developing the knowledge base of each school leader and strengthening the school leader's abilities to lead the implementation and sustainment of the CCLS within their schools to best serve the needs of the student population in helping them meet the rigorous expectations.

RQ1: Finding 3. Ten out of Twelve participants saw the role of district leaders as a Guide. The data collected from both district sites illustrated how district leaders function as a guide. Sometimes serving as a guide the district leader pointed the school leader to resources, special professional learning opportunities or offered advice. The school principals saw district leaders as guides in helping school leaders to grow professionally and support the goals within their schools. If the district saw that the school or the school leader were facing some challenges, the district leader intervened. As in the example of the advance specialist, they gave support to strengthen the school team in providing feedback to teachers. Once they were able to establish validity and consistency in feedback, the school team continued to work independently of the coach to strengthen their practice in giving feedback. Thus, the district leader provided support that promoted independence rather than dependency. This approach promoted and protected the principal autonomy. They were not told or directed what to do. Instead they worked together as partners to devise a strategy to implore and monitor.

RQ1: Finding 4. Eleven out of twelve participants in the study referenced the Principal Performance Review process as an evaluative tool that also served as a source of professional learning. Both District X and Y leaders capitalized upon the one-on-one site visit, a part of the PPR process, to engage in an open and extensive discussion of data with school leaders to determine the school's progress toward the identified goals.

District leaders worked closely with school leaders to examine hard and soft school data to isolate current school needs. District leaders utilized reflective protocols to help school leaders leverage a specific focus. For example, the PLF used the following interview questions to focus the school's plans for continuously monitoring achievement and instructional goals: What is the goal? What does this sample tell about what students know and can do? What are the gaps in student learning? How can this need be addressed? These questions helped leaders to isolate needs and to identify strategies to address the needs. In conjunction with the district leaders, the school leaders set instructional and organizational goals based on data collected during the school visit and refined the planning to achieve school goals.

Both school and district leaders in this case study saw the PPR process as a tool that supports the principal and school's ability to set and achieve targeted, strategic and attainable goals.

RQ2. What types of supports do principals provide to teachers that affect the implementation and sustainability of the Common Core Learning Standards? The researcher collected data from interviews and compared it with data collected from document reviews and observation of the principal conference. The data indicated that the principals utilized three collaborative processes to support teacher growth and development and their ability to implement and sustain the CCLS. The three processes school leaders utilized are Professional Learning Community, teacher observations and inter-visitation. These differentiated learning processes helped to build capacity within schools and strengthen teachers' practice.

RQ2: Finding 1. All the school leaders who participated in this study revealed that PLC is a tool utilized to enhance teacher instructional practices, build teacher leadership skills, support teacher growth and development, and increase student learning. In this study,

PLCs are defined as organized collaborative horizontal and vertical content area teacher teams focused on building knowledge, expertise, and experience. PLC is a collaborative process that focuses on examining authentic live best practices to deepen the understanding of the practice in action. They are learning opportunities provided by teachers and for teachers to work as a team to improve teacher practices geared to support student learning and growth. They are empowered to revise curricular, design lessons, plan interventions, examine data, read relevant research, model lessons, and observe best practices. These are some of the PLC experiences that are intended to support instruction, curriculum development and student learning, Teachers have a voice in what students are learning.

RQ2: Finding 2. Principals utilize the teacher observation process as a tool to provide one-on-one support to teachers in helping teachers implement, embed, and sustain the CCLS. Teachers participated in a goal setting process and worked collaboratively with the principal to establish a support plan that reflected the teacher's needs and goals. Teacher are expected to engage in learning experiences that support their growth and development. Principals talked about the level of investment of teachers in their professional learning. They saw the process more as a supportive tool rather than an evaluative tool. Teachers are becoming more open to sharing their strengths and needs with school leaders.

RQ2: Finding 3. The principals utilized inter-visitations as a tool to provide differentiated support to teachers that is geared to improve teacher practice. The principals and assistant principals provided differentiated professional learning to ensure that teachers receive specialized support that is targeted and meaningful to helping the individual to implement, embed and sustain the CCLS. School leaders utilized inter-visitations as a tool to provide differentiated support to teachers that is geared to improve teacher practice. The inter-

visitations are conducted both formally and informally. Sometimes the school leaders arrange

visits for an expressed purpose of sharing practices. At other times school leaders would

match individuals to observe specific practice. Sometimes, teachers visited classes on their

own.

These processes empowered teachers to take responsibility for strengthening their

practice, deepening their learning, and improving student learning and achievement.

RQ3. What leadership behaviors of superintendents and assistant superintendents

are evident in supporting principals in embedding and sustaining the practices? The data

revealed three findings based on district leaders' leadership behaviors that are evident in

supporting principals in embedding and sustaining practices. The following are the three

leadership behaviors that district leaders used: sharing of best practices through use of inter-

visitation, the use of a data-based decision-making approach to school improvement, the use of a

differentiated learning approach to support leaders' growth and development. Districts defined

supports based on data analysis and research.

RQ3: Finding 1. All participants in both District X and Y used data driven decision

making to determine the needs of schools, design supports for them and provide structures

that can foster continued leadership development in principals that result in student

achievement. The data was collected from the interviews, documents reviewed and agendas of

meeting. This information was triangulated, and it revealed that the districts focused on grounded

their decisions in data.

The researcher observed a direct example in District Y. During a principal conference, a

school team shared its journey toward using data based decision making. The school leaders

were given an opportunity to engage in a reflective protocol to reflect on and improve their practices in the use of data to inform all decisions in schools.

The leaders of District X shared an example of how data from the state advance report, teacher on-site observation, and the principal's ratings. If there were a difference, they engaged the principal in a discussion to determine a possible source of inconsistency and to establish a plan of action to address the concern. This inconsistency helped District X to design targeted support believe that effective teaching yield high student performance. This helped them to build reliability and validity in ratings. Also, this helped to improve leadership and teacher practices.

RQ3: Finding 2. *All participants in both District X and Y engaged in opportunities to share best practices which built capacity within and across school*. The data collected from the interviews at the district and school levels, the observation of meetings and document reviews revealed that participants in both districts saw that sharing of best practice was a viable tool to build capacity. This data showed that sharing of best practices is another way in which district leaders influence principal behavior through engaging them in processes. Each district utilized formal and informal approaches to achieve this goal. Both District X and Y built into the monthly leadership conferences an opportunity for leaders to share best practices with others.

For example, District X provided two Bridge-to-Practices opportunities during the conference. One focused on better utilization of community resources to support students' literacy and numeracy development. The other focused on using the expertise of school leaders within the district to support others. These were concerns that arose out of feedback that was given to the district professional learning team, a team comprised of district staff and school leaders who planned monthly professional learning sessions. Five individuals prepared talks on different topics of interest and need. During the meeting, individuals chose

the session that best met their need or interest. They were given an opportunity to listen to the presentation and ask questions.

In District Y, a school leader brought a team of individuals to share ongoing work to implement a large-scale change. The steps were revealed and challenges they encountered were discussed. The group did talk about ways they addressed the challenges. At the end of the presentation, participants engaged in a carousel protocol which helped school principals to reflect on their practices in leading reform.

Another way both districts share best practices is through use of formal and informal inter-visitation. Inter-visitations allow individuals to observe the practice in action, learn about the implementation process, some barriers that leaders encountered, and strategies employed to resolve concerns. Leaders in both Districts X and Y indicated that sharing of best practice is a primary source that is utilized in promoting the growth and development of school leaders. This learning experience gives them an opportunity to share their expertise and learn from others.

RQ3: Finding 3. All leaders interviewed at the district level and school level indicated that district leaders provided differentiated learning experiences that led to principal growth and development. A careful analysis of data collected from interviews, meeting agendas, observation of meeting indicated the differentiated learning supported the growth and development of principals. The differentiated learning experiences also included sharing of best practices during inter-visitation within and across schools. At times, the superintendent suggested to experienced school leaders to participate in independent professional development to ensure that more experienced principals are continually challenged. Principals with special expertise were assigned formally and informally as

mentors by district leaders.

Principals have benefited from these practices because their schools are continually improving, as evidenced by the change in teacher practices, values, and beliefs about how children learn best. They are more open to possibilities and less weighed down by challenges.

RQ4. In consideration of concerns and issues raised about the Common Core implementation process in the New York State, how will the Common Core Task Force Report 2015 affect the embedding and sustainment processes in schools and districts? There were three findings for this research question, outlined below.

RQ4: Finding 1. The data revealed that eleven leaders interviewed indicated that the participants valued the standards because it provided a framework for designing instruction. The data collected from interviews, document review and observation of meeting provide evidence that leaders valued the Common Core Learning Standards despite the way in which the standards were implemented.

Most leaders said that they would continue with the standards anyway because these stair step standards helped teachers with designing and revising units of study, lessons, tasks, and formative assessments. Moreover, they believed the New York State Common Core Task Report 2015 had no impact on their current work. Initially, they agreed with findings of the report that the implementation was too fast. It did not give the school leaders and teachers a chance to digest the standards before they were implementing the assessments. The same was true of the Danielson's "Teacher Effectiveness Framework". The general feeling was that having all three together without fully understanding each one

was overwhelming and frustrating. For them, it felt like three unrelated initiatives were being implementing. Some school leaders argued that the swift implementation "This rapid introduction of these initiatives" limited the school's ability to implement the initiatives in a cohesive and coherent way. Nevertheless, they agreed with the basic findings of the task force about the decision to not use testing results to affect student promotion and teacher evaluations.

However, once the links were made among these initiatives, it made it easier. The understanding of one informed the other. Each participant on some level expressed a commitment to continue to use the standards because they are valuable to supporting student

DXMPR1 valued the standards because they were the "bridge" to success, getting a job, and a quality education. It meant that students in this country will be able to compete in the global market as they had done in the past.

RQ4: Finding 2. All district and school leaders did not report an impact of the Task Force Report 2015 on the work of their district or school. They were only aware of the main elements of the report and had not read it in depth. All the leaders felt that the standards were good because they helped leaders and teachers to plan for individualized student instruction. All the participants on some level expressed a commitment to continue to use the standards because they were valuable. However, DXPLF1 had mixed opinions about one of the recommendations: suspending the use of student scores for teacher evaluations. DXPLF1 wondered whether "New York State Task Force Report 2015 was sending a mixed message by rescinding the use of the exam results to evaluate teachers' effectiveness, [This] will make it more difficult for us in the field." This evidence supports the finding that leaders did value the standards as a resource to support teacher development.

RQ4: Finding 3. All district leaders and all school leaders participating in the study expressed that they valued the CCLS and would continue to implement instructional practices that maintain the standards. DXPLF1 concluded that regardless of what the report says, District X would continue to push the CCLS. Responses spanned from DXMAP1's description that standards are "stair steps that help teachers meet the needs of students on or below grade-level", to DXMPR4 belief that the standards are a framework that "helps teachers in mathematics look at standards across grades ... showing how it builds, like a trajectory", and to DXFSL1 comment that "we do not need to develop anything else but the Common Core". In summary, it seems that the New York State Task Force Report 2015 did not have an adverse effect on the use of standards within schools and districts. Leaders of the district and schools continued to implement the standards and articulated the importance of the standards in helping to improve student performance and preparing them for College and Careers.

RQ4: Incidental Finding. One district leader expressed that he valued the CCLS and will continue to use them, but wondered about the effect the Task Force's suspension of using Common Core assessments to help determine teacher effectiveness might have on district and school leaders' work with teachers. However, the district leader reiterated that he valued the standards and will continue to use them to support the work within the district.

Conclusions

There are three conclusions for Research Question 1, three for Research Question 2, three for Research Question 3 and two for Research Question 4. These are described in detail below.

RQ1 Conclusions. There are three conclusions drawn from Research Question One. These conclusions focused on the different support roles, the commitment of district leaders, and the perceptions of school principals.

Conclusion one.   District leaders play a supportive role in being a thought partner, leadership developer, a guide and evaluator that facilitate the implementation of initiatives. These roles are implemented based on the context of school and the leader's expertise. As necessary, the system leaders utilize generative processes to support each role. The researcher further concluded that built into these generative processes are components which encourage, pressure and support, as referenced in Leithwood and Louis (2012).

Conclusion two. *Districts were vested in the schools' improvement.* According to Fullan (2007), districts that work collaboratively with schools tend to be equally invested in the success of the schools. District leaders provided one-on-one visits to schools as a part of the Principal Practice Observation (PPO), inter-visitations, and professional learning conferences. Fullan (2007) says that effective district leaders do have a strong presence in the school, but in a respectful way. These schools generally perform well.

Conclusion three. *Principals perceived the support as beneficial to their professional growth and development.* The processes such as inter-visitation and instructional rounds are tools used to sustain practices. These systemic processes support the professional growth of everyone involved and built capacity within schools. Leaders from both districts talked about how engaging in the inter-visitations expanded their thinking and helped them to progress in sustaining the CCLS. Leithwood and Louis (2012) stated the following:

> District professional development … has a greater influence on school leaders when it is focused on explicit, data-informed, system wide targets for improvement. Well intentioned district support for leadership development and practice may be for naught

without good alignment to clear directions for improvement (p. 182).

In this capacity, the district leaders focused on creating learning opportunities to meet the needs of the organization and the school leaders. The system leaders provided embedded professional learning through one-on-one support, inter-visitations, walkthroughs, and instructional rounds. These processes allowed school leaders to engage in inter-school learning which focused on improving student learning and implementation of the CCLS. These processes helped leaders to deepen their understanding, enhance their professional growth, monitor school improvement, and build capacity within schools.

The districts utilized the PPR process to provide one-on-one feedback to school leaders based on data and observations. Although the PPR is an evaluative tool, it is utilized as a professional learning resource to support school leaders. Built into the process is goal setting, monitoring, and planning to track school progress. Embedded in this process is a sense of pressure and support. Because of the collaborative way in which the PPR is designed, it promotes trust between the school leader and the district. Although this is an evaluative process, it is transparent and collaborative. The focus is on improvement. According to

Dufour and Fullan (2011), "essential to effective district leadership is a strong partnership with principals" (p. 46). The way in which the district works with the school promotes the development of effective practices to ensure that every school achieves academically; it has an effective leader in every school and an effective teacher in every classroom.

RQ2 Conclusions. There are three conclusions drawn from Research Question Two. The three conclusions focused on identifying the supports principals provided to teachers in implementing and sustaining the CCLS and how those supports mirrored the same type of supports that principals received.

Conclusion one. Principals used various professional development supports through collaboration and positive interactions among teachers, between teachers and principals as well as with district personnel. The PLC's were a primary source for promoting collaborative work among teachers. They looked at student work, teacher techniques, and revised curricula as needed. As a result, teachers improved their pedagogy and student learning. PLC's were also significant in building leadership skills and procedures among teachers. This enhanced the leadership capacity within the school and district and also improved school performance. It helped to sustain effective teaching practices that support the implementation of the Common Core Learning Standards.

Conclusion two. *The Professional Learning Community process is one professional development tool that principals used to implement, embed and sustain effective teacher practices as well as strengthen the school community*. According to Dufour and Fullan (2013), PLCs are systemic processes that primarily focus on student engagement, teacher performance, and school improvement. The district leaders provided support through inter-visitations and the PPR. Just as principals were given autonomy, the teachers in District X and Y were empowered through engagement in PLC's to take responsibility for strengthening their practice, deepening their learning, and improving student learning and performance.

Conclusion three. The support that principals received from system leaders was

mirrored in the way they supported teachers. This process built teachers' leadership skills and the capacity within the school. Leaders in both districts talked about how the PLC structure provided opportunities for teachers to engage in meaningful learning opportunities focused on enhancing their practices.

RQ3. Conclusions. There are three conclusions drawn from Research Question Three. The three conclusions identified three support systems that districts utilized which fostered leadership development of principal practices.

Conclusion one. The Professional Performance Review provided individualized support to school leaders based on their specific needs. The engagement of school leaders in PPRs was geared to school improvement needs and student achievement. Each principal was given an opportunity to discuss their goals and data with district leaders. This practice developed principals' ability to engage in data based decision making established on the context of their school needs and performance. In addition, they were able to set clear goals and create effective plans for improvement.

Conclusion two. The use of inter-visitations and professional learning conferences helped schools to make informed decisions that supported the instructional and organizational needs of the school. Principals are better able to refine teacher practices and align the school's thinking, values, and beliefs about how children learn best through these practices. The principals and district leaders formulated the grouping or pairing of individuals to participate in school based inter-visitations. The use of inter-visitations and professional learning conferences helped schools to make informed decisions that supported the instructional and organizational needs of the school.

Conclusion three. District leaders used differentiated professional learning to promote principals' growth and development. Based on the principals' needs the district leaders provided individualized or small group support to support their growth and development. For example, one principal was allowed to travel abroad and throughout the country to present at different conventions on topics of interests to the educational community. Another principal was given an opportunity to engage in a special network of principals focused on sustaining effective practices to continually grow the school organization. On other occasions principals talked about serving as mentors to colleagues. Another differentiated activity was the use of inter-visitations where principals were given an opportunity to examine best practices that they can utilize to support their work in school.   Each principal talked about how these opportunities helped to grow their practices.

RQ4. Conclusions. Research Question Four focused on ascertaining participants' responses to the New York State Task Force Report 2015, which resulted from the governor's commission to investigate the implementation of the CCLS. There are two conclusions drawn from Research Question Four.

Conclusion one. The participants affirmed the basic findings of the Common Core Task Force Final Report 2015 and would continue to implement the standards. Participants confirmed that the implementation of CCLS was too fast. The implementation plan, as outlined in the final report, did not allow school leaders and teachers time to align curriculum to the standards. The final report also concluded that the test was too long and, as a result, school administration and teachers could not implement the standards successfully.

Conclusion two. Leaders participating in this study affirmed the basic finding of the New York State Task Force Report 2015 and said that they would continue to implement the

standards with regard to the decision to not use testing results to affect student promotion

and teacher evaluations. They felt that they did not have enough time to digest the standards

and identify how to implement the expectations before they were asked to evaluate teachers

and students. In general, the leaders, did not believe that the Task Force Report 2015 will

impede their work or have a negative effect on the implementation and sustainment of the

CCLS within schools.

Recommendations

There are four recommendations as a result of the research conducted on successful

implementation of school district reform. The recommendations are detailed below.

Recommendation one. Districts should have a comprehensive research based

district plan that incorporates and engages the professionals in the development of the

plan. For example, both District X and Y found ways to engage the school leaders in the

development of the District professional learning schemes. The high level of engagement was

evident from the attendance, interests, willingness to share and questions. District X developed a

team of principals who worked collaboratively with the district leaders to design the focus of

yearly and monthly professional learning for school leaders. Also, in District X, school leaders

are engaged in a year-long book study that is utilized to focus the learning, develop a shared

understanding and build leadership capacities. They helped to structure the meeting so that it was

engaging and met their needs.

On the other hand, District Y solicited the voice of school leaders during the end of

year retreat. Principals worked with the district leaders to plan the yearly focus for the

professional learning in District Y based on the needs of the school leaders and the school

community. Also, each school administrator focused on refining and sharing one effective

practice with colleagues. This best practice was evident in the retreat agenda, professional learning conference, and an inter-visitation agenda. While the City does sponsor lab sites to share best practices, requiring principals to develop and share a practice is a way of building capacity within Districts by first utilizing the expertise from within before accessing outside resources

Recommendation two. **Utilize the Professional Learning Communities or another research based collaborative practice as a key resource to build school culture for learning and capacity in sustaining practices that support the CCLS.** The schools in both District X and Y engaged in developing Professional Learning Communities within their schools. These supported principals in implementing, embedding and sustaining the CCLS. It also provided a sense of autonomy for the teachers to discern their needs and student needs then plan research based strategies to enhance their practice to improve student learning. This opportunity to participate in and lead PLC sessions fostered opportunities to build leadership capacities in implementing, embedding and sustaining the Common Core Learning Standards. The school and district leaders in both districts shared how this process improved the interactions among teachers and focused conversations about practice components that are critical to the development of a professional learning community and not just the use of the coined phrase, PLC. As Fullan (2001) suggests that the implementation and sustainment of initiative are more effective when leaders at all levels of the organization are engaged in the effort.

Recommendation three. Any planned implementation should rely on data, research and resources. The data were collected from many sources and were used for different purposes to support teaching. Both formative and summative data were used to ensure that these resources were consistent, embedded and sustainable foundations for improvement or reform and to build

capacity within schools, across schools, within districts, across districts and throughout the

Department of Education. The leaders of both District X and Y emphasized the importance of

relying on data, research and resources to implement any practice.

Recommendation four. A model for school improvement should be considered as a measured approach to improvement that is comprehensive, researched based and a clear plan for implementation and revision. Included in Figure 4 is the framework for A School Improvement Model.
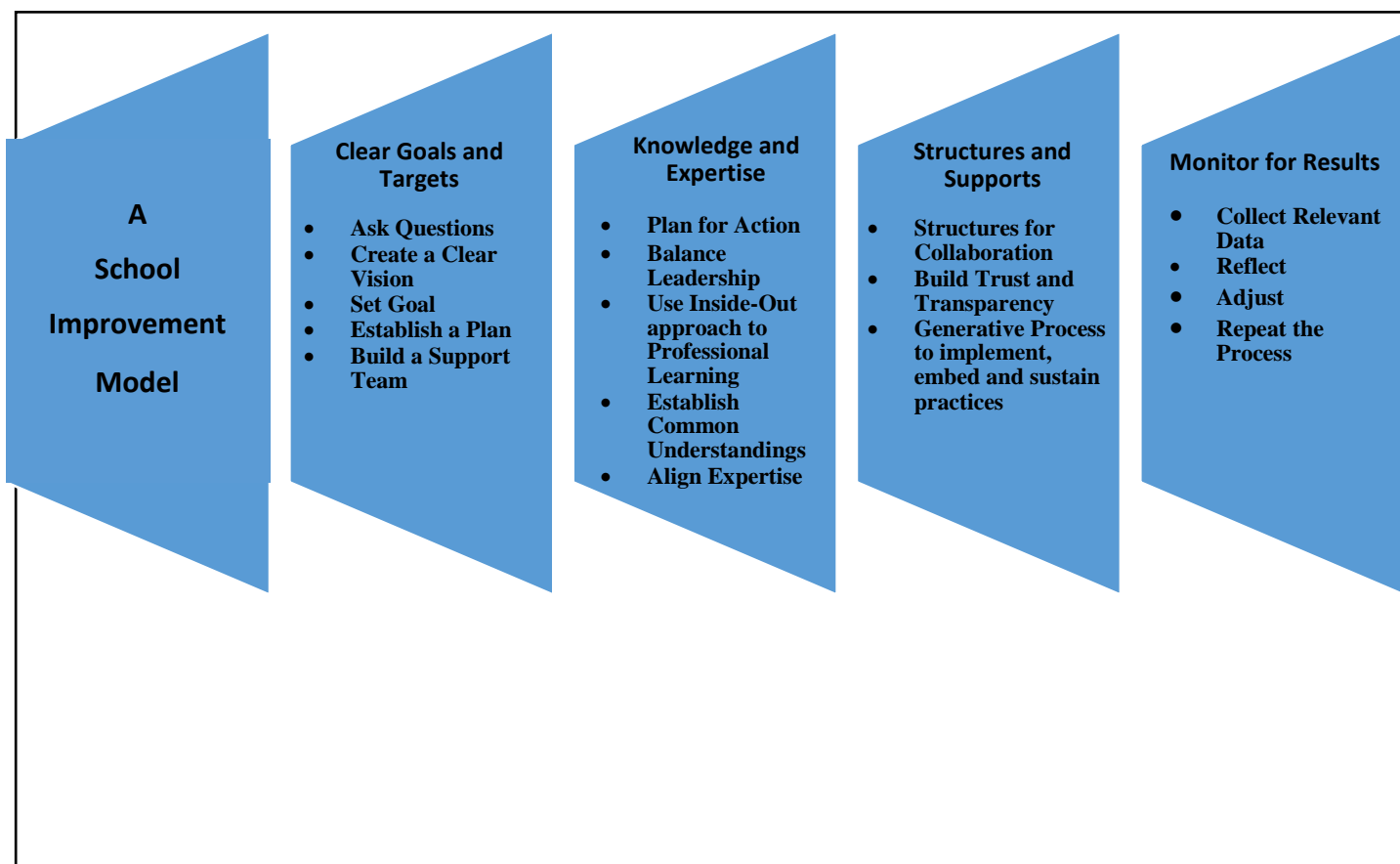
Figure 4. A school improvement model

The model consists of four components: Clear Goals and Targets, Knowledge and Expertise, Structures and Supports and Monitoring for Results. This model relies on the data collected from

the districts that participated in this study.

The first frame involves setting goals and clear targets. When setting goals, the District Leaders in this study worked with school leaders to identify specific goals by examining different forms of data to identify the need. To determine the appropriate focus, the school community engaged in asking questions about the need or practice to help determine a clear vision for improvement. It is important to engage individuals involved in the change in the formation of the action plan to address the change. This practice was evident in both districts. Each participant took different approaches but utilized the one that was most appropriate to the context of the individual sites.

The second frame addressed the Knowledge and Expertise. To become better at one's craft, one must learn from the experts to gain knowledge. This structure highlights the ways in which competence is built and sustained in a learning community. The system leaders emphasized the importance of relying on the expertise and knowledge of individuals within the district. Each participating site incorporated opportunities to share practices with others in the district. Moreover, inter-visitations and other formal and informal methods were used to implement these practices. This inside-out approach to professional learning was evident in the principals' learning conference observed, the agendas of other meetings and apparent in the interviews on both the district and school levels. This professional learning approach seemed to be a regular practice that is used to build capacity within schools and across district schools.

The third frame discusses the structures and supports that will anchor the building of knowledge and expertise for the system leaders, school leaders and teachers through collaborative approaches utilizing generative processes to implement, embed and sustain the change initiative.

The final frame focuses on monitoring for results. The team generates a monitoring tool that can be utilized to produce continuous improvement. This tool will guide reflection on and revision of the school improvement effort.

Recommendations for Further Study

If there had been more time, it would be informing to interview leaders at NYCDOE, especially those heading the division that directly supports superintendents to determine the support given to system leaders. This research might provide a deeper understanding of support processes. Linking this data to the assistance that district administrators give principals should reveal the systemic nature and consistency of practices that build capacity within the NYCDOE.

It might be beneficial to repeat this research again with superintendent, principals and teacher leaders. A repetition of this study after five years will give district leaders' more time to render support to school leaders. More time will give a clearer picture of the impact of the district leaders' support to school leaders in implementing, embedding, and sustaining a change effort to improve student performance.

Summary

This qualitative case study of two community school districts within New York City School System examined how system leaders supported school leaders in implementing initiatives such as the CCLS in schools. This research has filled a gap in literature on how system leaders support school leaders in implementing, embedding and sustaining change reform.

For example, the research revealed system leaders utilized an individualized and collaborative approach to support school leaders in implementing reform. The Community School District leaders provided support to school leaders through the utilization of any

combination of these four roles to support the reform process: Thought Partner, Instructional Developer, Guide and Evaluator.

Moreover, system leaders utilized learning conferences, inter-visitations, sharing of best practices and formal and informal mentoring to strengthen the growth and development of leadership practices and to build capacity within schools. Finally, they used data based decision making, reflection and one-on-one support to set goals, monitor progress and plan for revision.

The district leaders were invested in the success of the schools. They worked closely with the school to tailor the support based on triangulated data information resources. This case study shows that strong collaborations, focused district leadership, consistency of practice and reflection contributed to implementing, embedding and sustaining school reform.

These findings from the study can guide large scale reform efforts applicable to educational organizations. System leaders can reference this study to identify best practices to utilize when supporting school leaders in implementing, embedding, and sustaining educational change initiatives such as the CCLS. Likewise, they may be able to use this information to set policy, to plan change efforts, or make informed decisions. Certainly, the School Improvement Model can serve as a guide to support system leaders in implementing, embedding and sustaining change within schools.

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Appendices

Appendix A—Interview Protocols

SUPERINTENDENT/DISTRICT LEADER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

School: _____District Leader/Superintendent: _____ Date: _____

Gender _____ Years of Service_____ Years as Principal/Assistant Principal _____

Definitions:

Embedding— incorporating or containing, fit tightly or firmly, envelop

Sustaining—hold onto, support for a long period of time, made an integral part of

Time Allocated: 1 hour

1) How do you see your role as Superintendent/District Leader? How long have you been serving in this capacity?	
2) How do you see your role in leading the common core initiative?	
3) How do you see your role in relationship to the principal's/Assistant Principal's role?	
4) What support has the superintendent/district leaders given you regarding the Common Core Standards Initiatives? Cite specific examples.	
5) In what ways has that support benefited the school or your professional practice?	
6) How has embedding the common core affected or influenced student performance and or teacher practice? How do you know?	
7) What processes, protocols, or structures were used to implement and embed the Common Core within schools?	
8) What processes and protocols have you utilized to sustain the common core standards?	
9) How did you go about actualizing this process? Be specific.	
10) What were some of your challenges and how did you address those challenges? Specifically, how has the Task Force Report 2015 affected your work?	

Principal/Assistant Principal Interview Protocol and Questions

School: _____ Principal: _____ Date: _____

Gender _____ Years of Service___ Years as Principal/Assistant Principal ____

Definitions:

Embedding— incorporating or containing, fit tightly or firmly, envelop

Sustaining—hold onto, support for a long period of time, made an integral part of

Time Allocated: 1 hour

1) How do you see your role as Principal/Assistant Principal? How long have you been serving in this capacity?	
2) How do you see your role as principal in leading the common core initiative?	
3) How do you see the Principal's/Assistant Principal's role in relationship to the Superintendent or District Leaders?	
4) What support has the superintendent/district leaders given you regarding the Common Core Standards Initiatives? Cite specific examples.	
5) In what ways has that support benefited the school or your professional practice?	
6) How has embedding the common core affected or influenced student performance and or teacher practice? How do you know?	
7) What processes, protocols, or structures were used to embed the Common Core within schools?	
8) What processes and protocols have you utilized to sustain the common core standards?	
9) How did you go about actualizing this process? Be specific.	
10) What were some of your challenges and how did you address those challenges? Specifically, how has the Task Force Report 2015 affected your work?	

Appendix B— Introductory Letter

Dear_____:

I am <u>Lucy Wade</u>, a doctoral candidate enrolled in the Educational Leadership program at the Sage Colleges in Albany, New York. The purpose of my comparative qualitative case study is to explore how system leaders support school leaders in embedding and sustaining the Common Core Standards with the purpose of improving student achievement. Selected districts in New York State will engage in this study.

To explore this phenomenon, three districts have been selected that have been characterized, according to the state accountability report, in one of the following ways: *Good Standing, Priority, and Focus*. Within each district, selected elementary and middle school principals and assistant principals are invited to participate in this study.

The Common Core Standards are new to the schools, and students are asked to take exams in, especially, mathematics and the English Language Arts. The APPR and the APPA are linked to student performance on the Common Core Exams as well as the school status. Thus, the students' performance on these exams matters.

Your participation in an interview will inform how system leaders have supported the process with the purpose of improving administrative practices, school performance, and student achievement.

Your participation in this interview will inform others about the successful processes, protocols, and systems that you have used to embed and sustain the standards within your school.

Your participation in this interview is confidential and voluntary. Your interview will be recorded for data analysis only. The recording will be destroyed one year after the document is created. Any findings will be available to any respondent upon request.

If you have any questions regarding the nature or scope of this study, please feel free to contact me at any of the following numbers: (h) 347-663-7523 and/or (c) 718-764-3942.

This research has received the approval of the Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to ensure the protection of the rights of human participants. If you have any complaints about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janice White.

Dean of Sage Graduate School at 518-244-2264

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Collegially,
Lucy Wade

Appendix E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

To:_____

You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled, "The Relationship of Systems Leaders and School Leaders: Embedding and Sustaining the Common Core Standards with the Purpose of Improved Student Achievement".

This research is being conducted by Lucy Wade, a doctoral candidate enrolled in the Sage Colleges Esteves School of Education Educational Leadership Doctoral Program. She will conduct a case study on the following topic: System Leadership Support to School Leaders in Embedding and Sustaining the Common Core Initiative with the Purpose of Improving Student Achievement. The study will be conducted from January 2016 through December 2016.

This study is anonymous. Pseudonyms will be given to schools, districts, and participants. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research, according to the IRB standards.

Participating in this research will afford you the opportunity to contribute to the field of research on system leadership support to school leaders on how to embed and sustain the common core standards. This research will help inform others on how to support school leaders in embedding and sustaining practices.

The following research methods will be used: interview, audio taping, observation, and a review of relevant documents. There are no potential risks of participation in this qualitative study. The researcher will undertake audio taping of interviews and selected meetings. The researcher will utilize these audio tapings solely for the purpose of collecting and analyzing data. In addition, they will be kept confidential, according to IRB standards.

Participation is voluntary. I understand that I may, at any time during the course of this study, revoke my consent and/or withdraw _____[insert name of the person for whom the person is consenting],

I have been given an opportunity to read and keep a copy of this Agreement and to ask questions concerning the study. Any such questions have been answered to my full and complete understanding.

I, _____, having full capacity to consent, do hereby

Print Name
give permission to _____to include me in this research
study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
Participant

This research has received the approval of The Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which
functions to insure the protection of the rights of human participants. If you, as a participant,
have any complaints about this study, please contact:

Dr. Lori V. Quigley, Dean
Esteves School of Education
The Sage Colleges
65 1st Street
Troy, New York 12180
518-244-2326
l.quigley@sage.edu

Appendix D—Transcript Review

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study and for taking time out of your busy schedule to complete this interview.

As promised, I have included a transcript of your interview. Please read carefully to determine completeness. If you would like to add some details, feel free to do so. Highlight the additions that you make to the document so that it accurately reflects the wonderful work that your school has done/is doing based on the Common Core Standards.

If I do not receive your comments by July 1, 2016, I will assume that you agree with the document as transcribed, and that you have no more additional information to contribute.

If you have any questions regarding the nature or scope of this study, please feel free to contact me at any of the following numbers: (c) 718-764-3942 and (h) 347-663-7523, or you may email me at Lucyw772@gmail.com.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Collegially,

Lucy Wade

Appendix E—Confidentiality Agreement Transcriber

I, [your name] individually and/or on behalf of [name of department or facility if applicable], do agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes, videotapes, and/or oral or written documentation received from [Lucy Wade] related to the research project entitled [title of research project]. The information in these tapes and/or documentation has been revealed by those who participated in this research project with the understanding that their information would remain strictly confidential. I understand I have the responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement.

Furthermore:

1. I will follow the established protocol for my role in the project.
2. I will not share any information in these tapes and/or documents with anyone except the researchers listed on this form.
3. I will hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual who may be revealed in these tapes and/or documents.
4. I will not disclose any information received for profit, gain or otherwise.
5. I will not make copies of the audiotapes, videotapes, and/or oral or written documentation, unless specifically requested to do so by [name of researcher(s)].
6. I will store audiotapes, videotapes, and/or oral or written documentation in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
7. I will return all materials; including audiotapes, videotapes, and/or oral or written documentation; to [name of researcher(s)] within the mutually agreed upon time frame.
8. I will return all electronic computer devices to the researchers at the end of the project. I will not save any data provided to me in any format, electronic or otherwise.

Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I pledge not to do so. I am also aware I am legally liable for any breach of confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes, videotapes, and/or oral or written documentation to which I have access.

Printed name _____

Signature _____

Title and/or affiliation with the researchers_____

Date _____

Appendix F—Email Script

I am Lucy Wade, a doctoral candidate enrolled in the Educational Leadership program at the Sage Colleges in Albany, New York. The purpose of my comparative qualitative case study is to explore how system leaders support school leaders in embedding and sustaining the Common Core Standards with the purpose of improving student achievement. Selected districts in New York State will engage in this study.

To explore this phenomenon, three districts have been selected, which have been characterized, according to the state accountability report, in one of the following ways: *Good Standing, Priority, and Focus*. Within each district, selected elementary and middle school principals and assistant principals are invited to participate in this study.

The Common Core Standards are new to the schools, and students are asked to take exams in, especially, mathematics and the English Language Arts. The APPR and the APPA are linked to student performance on the Common Core Exams as well as the school status. Thus, students' performance on these exams matters.

Your participation in an interview will inform how system leaders have supported the process with the purpose of improving administrative practices, school performance, and student achievement.

Your participation in this interview will inform others about the successful processes, protocols and systems that you have used to embed and sustain the standards within your school.

Your participation in this interview is confidential and voluntary. Your interview will be recorded for data analysis only. The recording will be destroyed one year after the document is created. Any findings will be available to any respondent upon request.

If you have any questions regarding the nature or scope of this study, please feel free to contact me at any of the following numbers: (h) 347-663-7523 and/or (c) 718-764-3942.

This research has received the approval of the Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to ensure the protection of the rights of human participants. If you have any complaints about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janice White.

Dean of Sage Graduate School at 518-244-2264

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

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Appendix G—Telephone Introductory Letter

Dear____:

I am <u>Lucy Wade</u>, a doctoral candidate enrolled in the Educational Leadership program at the Sage Colleges in Albany, New York. The purpose of my comparative qualitative case study is to explore how system leaders support school leaders in embedding and sustaining the Common Core Standards with the purpose of improving student achievement. Selected districts in New York State will engage in this study.

To explore this phenomenon, three districts have been selected, which have been characterized, according to the state accountability report, in one of the following ways: *Good Standing, Priority, and Focus*. Within each district, selected elementary and middle school principals and assistant principals are invited to participate in this study.

The Common Core Standards are new to the schools, and students are asked to take exams in, especially, mathematics and the English Language Arts. The APPR and the APPA are linked to student performance on the Common Core Exams as well as the school status. Thus, students' performance on these exams matters.

Your participation in an interview will inform how system leaders have supported the process with the purpose of improving administrative practices, school performance, and student achievement.

Your participation in this interview will inform others about the successful processes, protocols, and systems that you have used to embed and sustain the standards within your school.

Your participation in this interview is confidential and voluntary. Your interview will be recorded for data analysis only. The recording will be destroyed one year after the document is created. Any findings will be available to any respondent upon request.

If you have any questions regarding the nature or scope of this study, please feel free to contact me at any of the following numbers: (h) 347-663-7523 and/or (c) 718-764-3942.

This research has received the approval of the Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to ensure the protection of the rights of human participants. If you have any complaints about this study, please feel free to contact Dr. Janice White.

Dean of Sage Graduate School at 518-244-2264

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

Collegially,

Lucy Wade

Appendix H—Professional Development Observation Tool

SITE	DATE	LENGTH OF SESSION	LOCATION	FOCUS/TOPIC	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE
Professional Development Plan					

	Description	Additional Comment
Session Goals	1. 2. 3.	
Activity 1 **Narrative Description**		
Activity 2 **Narrative Description**		
Closing Activities	•	
	•	
	•	

Appendix I—Professional Learning Conference Observation Tool

SITE	DATE	LENGTH OF SESSION	LOCATION	FOCUS/TOPIC	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE
Professional Development Plan					

	Description	Additional Comment
Session Goals	1. 2. 3.	
Activity 1 **Narrative Description**		
Activity 2 **Narrative Description**		
Closing Activities	●	
	●	
	●	

Appendix J—Document Review Tool

Type of Document	
Site	

Description of Document Components and Alignment with Research Question			
Component 1	Description	Alignment to Research Question	Further Comment
Component 2			
Component 3			
Other			