

---

Dissertations


---

Spring 4-15-2018

## An Exploration of the Perceptions of Teachers and Administrators on the Relationship Between Professional Learning Community Practices and School Success

Lawrence L. Haggquist  
*Brandman University*, lhaggqui@mail.brandman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/edd\\_dissertations](https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/edd_dissertations)

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Secondary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Haggquist, Lawrence L., "An Exploration of the Perceptions of Teachers and Administrators on the Relationship Between Professional Learning Community Practices and School Success" (2018). *Dissertations*. 202.  
[https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/edd\\_dissertations/202](https://digitalcommons.umassglobal.edu/edd_dissertations/202)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by UMass Global ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of UMass Global ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [christine.bombaro@umassglobal.edu](mailto:christine.bombaro@umassglobal.edu).

An Exploration of the Perceptions of Teachers and Administrators on the Relationship  
Between Professional Learning Community Practices and School Success

A Dissertation by  
Lawrence Lee Haggquist

Brandman University  
Irvine, California  
School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

April 2018

Committee in charge:

Len Hightower, Ph.D, Committee Chair

George Giokaris, Ed.D

Tim McCarty, Ed.D

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY

Chapman University System

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Lawrence Lee Haggquist is approved.

  
\_\_\_\_\_, Dissertation Chair

Len Hightower, Ph.D

  
\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Member

George Giokaris, Ed.D

  
\_\_\_\_\_, Committee Member

Tim McCarty, Ed.D

  
\_\_\_\_\_, Associate Dean

April, 2018

An Exploration of the Perceptions of Teachers and Administrators on the Relationship  
Between Professional Learning Community Practices and School Success

Copyright © 2018

by Lawrence Lee Haggquist

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate my work at Brandman University and the work contained in this research study to my wife Kathryn, whose support and understanding allowed me to accomplish my goal of achieving a doctoral degree; my two beautiful daughters Chloe and Hannah, whose love, energy, and patience lifted me up during the challenging moments; my mother and father Yun Hee and Gregory Haggquist, who have always been there for me; and the teachers and staff at Brandman University, whose expertise and guidance made my work possible.

I would like to extend special acknowledgement to my dissertation committee. First and foremost, my chairperson, Dr. Len Hightower, is a mentor for whom I have utmost respect. His approach of detailed criticism coupled with strong support brought out the best in me. I am ever thankful for the countless hours that Dr. Hightower spent advising me in my studies. Additionally, committee members Dr. George Giokaris and Dr. Tim McCarty are truly experts in the field of education. Their vast experience, knowledge of my topic, and thorough reviews of my work provided me with insights that improved my process and final product.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Delta Cohort of Monterey. This group of dedicated students and professionals gave me inspiration and much needed camaraderie throughout my entire doctoral journey. Go Ducks! A special thanks goes out to my cohort partner Dr. Marcie Plummer. Through laughter and tears we made it to the top of Mount Everest. Now, how the heck are we going to get down?

## ABSTRACT

### An Investigation of the Perceptions of Teachers and Administrators on the Relationship Between Professional Learning Community Practices and School Success

by Lawrence Lee Haggquist

**Purpose:** Professional learning communities (PLCs) have provided a popular means by which schools have used structured collaboration to improve student outcomes. For this reason, the PLC model for collaboration has a strong reputation for helping schools achieve success. However, teachers and administrators regard PLC efficacy differently. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how high school teachers and administrators in Basic Aid funded school districts define success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices. A secondary purpose of this study was to explore the differences in perception between teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices.

**Methodology:** This study used the qualitative methodology of phenomenology to gather data via semi-structured interviews of eight teachers and eight administrators who work in Basic Aid School districts in Coastal California that utilize PLC systems. Interview subjects were asked questions influenced by DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker's (2008) PLC framework. Interview responses were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed along with other documents and artifacts to achieve triangulation.

**Findings:** This study arrived at six major findings: 1) teachers perceive that administrators are image oriented, 2) administrators think results are the most important aspect of PLC work, 3) results are difficult to measure, 4) depression rates are high in

high performance schools, 5) there is a need for more teacher leaders, and 6) there is an attitude of complacency in high performance schools.

**Conclusions:** The study's findings led to the following conclusions: 1) teachers are distrustful of administrative motives around issues of student learning, 2) administrators prioritize student test performance over other learning related factors, 3) teachers and administrators are unclear about the link between actions and results, 4) Students in high performance schools face more pressure to succeed, 5) there is a need to grow leadership capacity among teaching staff, and 6) reform in high performance schools lacks a sense of urgency

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	3
Public Education in the United States.....	3
Defining Success in the United States Public Education System.....	4
Traditional Definitions of Success.....	5
The emergence of empirical approaches.....	5
Student-centered learning.....	6
Modern Definitions of Success.....	7
The Perception of Decline in United States Public Education.....	8
Teacher and Administrator Perceptions.....	8
National Legislation Reflecting Educational Decline.....	9
The Rise of Outcomes-Based Education.....	9
National Legislation Mandating Outcomes.....	10
California State Mandated Outcomes.....	12
Professional Learning Communities.....	12
Diffusion of Leadership.....	13
The Shift toward Collaborative Models.....	13
PLCs as an Educational Framework for Improving Success.....	14
Gap.....	15
Statement of the Research Problem.....	15
Purpose Statement.....	17
Research Questions.....	17
Significance of the Problem.....	19
Definitions.....	21
Delimitations.....	22
Organization of the Study.....	23
 CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	 24
Public Education in the United States.....	24
The Colonial Era and the Roots of American Public Education.....	24
The Progressive Era and the Growth of the Public School System.....	29
Defining Success in United States Public Education.....	30
The Call for Centralization.....	31
Traditional Definitions of Success.....	32
The hidden curriculum.....	33
The Call for De-centralization.....	34
Saving the minutes.....	34
The Carnegie Unit.....	35
Modern Definitions of Success in a De-centralized System.....	38
Success as Perceived by Administrators and Teachers.....	42
The Perspective of Administrative Progressives.....	43
The Perspective of Pedagogical Progressives.....	46
Student-centered learning.....	46



The Rise of Outcomes-Based Education .....	48
The Outcomes/Standards Distinction .....	50
National Outcomes-Based Legislation .....	52
Goals 2000. ....	52
Content standards.....	54
Performance standards.....	54
Opportunity to learn standards.....	55
No Child Left Behind.....	56
Race to the Top. ....	57
California State Mandated Outcomes .....	59
Common Core State Standards initiative.....	59
Smarter Balanced assessment. ....	60
Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker’s Theoretical Framework.....	62
Pros and Cons of the DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker Framework.....	68
Current PLC Research .....	69
The Role of the Principal in Relation to PLCs .....	71
The Role of the Teacher in Relation to PLCs.....	72
The Perceptions of Administrators and Teachers in Relation to PLC Practices.....	73
Summary .....	74
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	76
Overview.....	76
Purpose Statement.....	76
Research Questions.....	76
Research Design.....	78
Qualitative Research .....	78
Population .....	80
Target Population.....	81
Sample.....	82
Instrumentation .....	84
Interviews.....	85
Reliability.....	86
Triangulation.....	87
Intercoder reliability.....	87
Audit trail .....	88
Validity .....	88
Field Test .....	89
Data Collection .....	90
Human Subjects Consideration.....	91
Artifacts and documentation.....	94
Data Analysis .....	95
Collecting and Documenting Data.....	95
Coding and Categorizing the Data.....	96
Coding software. ....	98
Theoretical framework.....	98
Identifying and Legitimizing Themes.....	99

Depicting and Displaying Findings .....	99
Limitations .....	100
Summary .....	101
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS.....	102
Purpose Statement.....	103
Research Questions.....	103
Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures .....	105
Population .....	105
Target Population.....	106
Sample.....	106
Demographic Data .....	106
Presentation and Analysis of Data .....	108
Research Question 1 .....	109
Defining PLCs .....	110
Collaboration.....	110
Results orientation .....	111
Systems management.....	113
Defining success .....	113
Students at the center .....	113
Student learning is experiential and subjective.....	114
Student learning is objective and measurable.....	115
Image orientation .....	115
Perceptual differences.....	116
Image orientation .....	117
Positive outlook .....	118
Research Question 1a.....	119
Student learning defines success.....	120
Goal orientation enables success .....	121
Positive outlook on the relationship between vision and educational success ...	121
Research Question 1b .....	122
Collaboration has a positive effect.....	123
Research Question 1c.....	124
Collective inquiry is a goal .....	125
Limiting factors.....	126
Collective inquiry is happening .....	126
Research Question 1d .....	127
Action thwarters.....	128
Factors influencing action.....	129
Action requires structure.....	129
Research Question 1e.....	130
Factors that impede commitment.....	131
Disingenuous commitment .....	132
Factors that enhance commitment .....	133
Research Question 1f.....	134
Results are hard to measure .....	135

Results orientation not apparent.....	135
Results orientation is apparent.....	136
Research Question 2 .....	137
Defining PLCs .....	138
Results orientation .....	139
Collaboration.....	140
Systems management.....	140
Defining success .....	141
Students at the center .....	141
The learning gap and equity.....	142
Workplace relationships.....	142
Perceptual differences .....	143
Reasons for lack of agreement.....	143
Role differences .....	144
Research Question 2a.....	145
Student learning defines success.....	146
Positive outlook on vision.....	147
Barriers to vision.....	147
Research Question 2b .....	147
Collaboration as a positive.....	148
Mixed reviews on collaboration.....	149
Collaboration as a negative.....	149
Research Question 2c.....	150
Limiting factors.....	151
Collective inquiry is a goal .....	152
Collective inquiry is happening .....	152
Research Question 2d .....	153
Examples of actions taken .....	154
Factors that inhibit action.....	154
Research Question 2e.....	155
Factors that enhance commitment .....	156
Factors that impede commitment.....	157
Research Question 2f.....	157
Results orientation is apparent .....	158
Results are hard to measure .....	159
Results orientation is not apparent.....	160
Research Question 3 .....	160
Action orientation .....	161
Commitment to improvement.....	162
Results orientation .....	163
Essential elements.....	163
Defining PLCs .....	164
Defining success .....	165
Perceptual differences.....	165
Summary.....	166

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	167
Summary .....	167
Purpose Statement.....	168
Research Questions.....	168
Methodology .....	170
Population and Sample .....	171
Major Findings.....	172
Research Question 1 .....	172
Major Finding 1 .....	173
Research Question 2 .....	174
Major Finding 2 .....	174
Research Question 3 .....	175
Major Finding 3 .....	175
Unexpected Findings .....	175
Unexpected Finding 1 .....	176
Unexpected Finding 2.....	178
Unexpected Finding 3.....	179
Conclusions.....	181
Implications for Action.....	184
Recommendations for Further Research.....	186
Concluding Remarks and Reflections.....	188
REFERENCES .....	191
APPENDICES .....	216

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1. ....	67
<i>The Essential Elements of a PLC</i> .....	67
Table 3.1. ....	81
<i>Number of California School Districts by Tax Code Status</i> .....	81
Table 3.2. ....	82
<i>Number of Districts by District Type and Basic Aid Status, 2010-11</i> .....	82
Table 3.3. ....	95
<i>Artifacts Collection</i> .....	95
Table 4.01 .....	107
<i>Age, Gender, Ethnicity and Education Level of Teacher Participants</i> .....	107
Table 4.02 .....	107
<i>Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Education Level of Administrative Participants</i> .....	107
Table 4.03 .....	108
<i>Professional Roles and Years of Service of Teacher Participants</i> .....	108
Table 4.04 .....	108
<i>Professional Roles and Years of Service of Administrative Participants</i> .....	108
Table 4.05 .....	109
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQI</i> .....	109
Table 4.06 .....	110
<i>Summary of Trends for RQI High Frequency Themes</i> .....	110
Table 4.07 .....	114
<i>Frequency and Sources of Trends for Student-Centered Theme</i> .....	114

Table 4.08 .....	117
<i>Comparison of Frequencies and Sources for the Image Orientation Theme .....</i>	<i>117</i>
Table 4.09 .....	120
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1a .....</i>	<i>120</i>
Table 4.10 .....	120
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ1a High Frequency Themes .....</i>	<i>120</i>
Table 4.11 .....	122
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1b .....</i>	<i>122</i>
Table 4.12 .....	123
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ1b High Frequency Themes .....</i>	<i>123</i>
Table 4.13 .....	125
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1c .....</i>	<i>125</i>
Table 4.14 .....	125
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ1c High Frequency Themes .....</i>	<i>125</i>
Table 4.15 .....	127
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1d .....</i>	<i>127</i>
Table 4.16 .....	128
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ1d High Frequency Themes .....</i>	<i>128</i>
Table 4.17 .....	130
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1e .....</i>	<i>130</i>
Table 4.18 .....	131
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ1e High Frequency Themes .....</i>	<i>131</i>
Table 4.19 .....	134

<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1f</i> .....	134
Table 4.20 .....	134
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ1f High Frequency Themes</i> .....	134
Table 4.21 .....	138
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2</i> .....	138
Table 4.22 .....	138
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ2 High Frequency Themes</i> .....	138
Table 4.23 .....	146
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2a</i> .....	146
Table 4.24 .....	146
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ2a High Frequency Themes</i> .....	146
Table 4.25 .....	148
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2b</i> .....	148
Table 4.26 .....	148
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ2b High Frequency Themes</i> .....	148
Table 4.27 .....	150
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2c</i> .....	150
Table 4.28 .....	151
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ2c High Frequency Themes</i> .....	151
Table 4.29 .....	153
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2d</i> .....	153
Table 4.30 .....	153
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ2d High Frequency Themes</i> .....	153

Table 4.31 .....	155
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2e</i> .....	155
Table 4.32 .....	156
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ2e High Frequency Themes</i> .....	156
Table 4.33 .....	158
<i>Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2f</i> .....	158
Table 4.34 .....	158
<i>Summary of Trends for RQ2f High Frequency Themes</i> .....	158
Table 4.35 .....	161
<i>Summary of Top Themes per Sub-question</i> .....	161
Table 4.36 .....	164
<i>Summary of Top Themes per Essential Elements</i> .....	164



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1	Map of California Basic Aid Districts.....	82
Figure 3.2	Population and Sample.....	84

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Public education in America is in the midst of a crisis (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Kozol, 2005; Ravitch, 2016). American students are performing gradually lower on international comparison tests than students from many other industrialized countries of the world (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011); and as American educational performance has been declining, the achievement gap between whites and other ethnic minorities has been widening (Kozol, 2005). To solve these problems America needs to reform its education system; the country needs a new vision for success and needs to begin its march toward that vision (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011).

Determining how to achieve success, however, has always been an elusive task in the arena of public education (Lagemann, 2000). From its earliest days, the American education system has been driven by utopian thinking, by a desire to perfect the future, a desire fueled by the perpetual perception that the current system is faltering (David B. Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Initially, the Progressive Era system was insufficiently preparing young people for factory work (Levine, 1995; Reese, 2011; David B. Tyack, 1974). Modern reform efforts, in contrast, have pointed to problems with equity, achievement gaps, and global competition (Hunt & Staton, 1996). In any case, perceived deficiencies, either in society as a whole or within the education system itself, have made the attainment of success elusive or have caused reformers to continually seek better ways to educate (Boser, 2014; David B. Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Modern reform efforts, those initiated after the publication of the controversial national report “A Nation at Risk” in 1983, have used an outcomes-based approach to remediating perceived problems in the system (Boser, 2014; Ravitch, 2016). The Goals

2000 legislation under President Clinton began a national effort to implement rigorous academic standards in every state (*The History of Goals 2000*, 2017). No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which directly succeeded Goals 2000, advanced reform efforts by demanding measurable increases in student performance (Klein, 2015). And more recently, Race to the Top (RTTT) legislation, has further coordinated the standards movement by peddling a common curriculum to the states as part of a national competition to improve student outcomes (Boser, 2012).

In California, the Smarter Balanced assessment, which is aligned to the California Common Core curriculum, was administered statewide for the first time in 2016 (Harrington, 2016). The pressure to improve student outcomes on tests like the Smarter Balanced has led school districts to rethink management approaches (Fullan, 2014). One popular management strategy that has proven to positively impact student outcomes is the professional learning community (PLC) (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). By diffusing the decision-making process, encouraging collaboration, and promoting a learning culture, PLCs have helped many schools to transform their pedagogical culture, and, consequentially, to improve student outcomes (DuFour et al., 2008).

Although the PLC framework and its relationship with student outcomes has been widely studied for over two decades, there is a need for more qualitative research on the subject (Andersen, 2016; Cohrs, 2014; Curry, 2010). In particular, research on PLC efficacy in California schools is limited. Hamilton (2013) examined the relationship between the presence of PLC systems and school outcomes as evidenced by California average performance index (API) scores and found that PLC schools fared better than non-PLC schools in many areas (Hamilton, 2013). But there are no current studies that

examine the relationship between levels of PLC integration and outcomes as measured by the new Smarter Balanced assessment, and no studies that explore how PLCs function within the more affluent schools districts in Coastal California.

### **Background**

The background to the research addresses five topics pertinent to the study. First, the researcher discusses the origins of public education in the United States and the ever-present challenge of measuring success within the education system. The background then transitions into a discussion about the perception of decline in public education, as promulgated at the federal level by key legislative acts. Next, the researcher reviews how the federal legislation precipitated an ideological shift toward outcomes-based education; one result of this shift, as the background pursuantly examines, is that many schools adopted the Professional Learning Community (PLC) framework in attempts to improve and measure growth in student outcomes. The gap in the literature on professional learning communities comprises the last section of the background.

### **Public Education in the United States**

The public education system in the United States grew out of the forces of urbanization and industrialization during the 19<sup>th</sup> century that had shifted the social, political, and economic landscape of the country (Cubberley, 1919; Mondale & Patton, 2001; Rice, 1893; David B. Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Public education, Tyack (1974) explained, became a solution to the problem of increasing political and social instability arising especially in urban areas. There was a need for coordination. Drawing their ideas from other successful industries, leading educators of the time attempted to solve the problem of urban growth by designing a school system that ran like the efficient

businesses and factories that were thriving around them (Mondale & Patton, 2001; David B. Tyack, 1974). Whether or not the public school experiment has been successful in America is still a matter of debate.

### **Defining Success in the United States Public Education System**

Success within the context of the public education system in America is an elusive concept. For decades, since the advent of American public education in the late nineteenth century, the term success has been ever-present in the educational lexicon, and the aspiration to achieve success has been a consistent motivating force (Mondale & Patton, 2001; Ravitch, 2010; David B. Tyack, 1974). Teachers, administrators, system architects, and politicians in pursuit of success have worked to overcome perceived deficiencies and find ways to measure success in that endeavor (Lagemann, 2000; David B. Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As Lagemann (2000) explained, the role of public education since its inception has always been meliorative; the American polity—and by association, its education system—is perpetually bent on bettering itself. Thus, the attainment of success has always been contingent on the presence of identifiable deficiencies and the system’s ability to overcome these deficiencies (David B. Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

Since the nascent years of public education in America, a number of prominent societal deficiencies have beckoned the need for ongoing educational reform and the regular crafting of new visions of success. Forces of economic growth, income disparity, immigration, population expansion, language barriers, and cultural learning gaps have consistently challenged the system to find new ways to improve itself. Bowles and Gintis (1976) expounded upon this notion by discussing how, in the early days, growing labor strife, social unrest, and “the specter of political upheaval” (p. 180) created structural

deficiencies that the new education system would need to address. Instrumental Progressive Era reformers like Frederick Winslow, Franklin Bobbitt, G. Stanly Hall, John Dewey, and Edward Lee Thorndike were called to recraft a new vision for American education during this period—a vision that would come to measure success by the system’s ability to help combat the struggles confronting the ailing democracy at the time (Labaree, 2005). One of the first challenges they faced in executing the new progressivist vision for success was how to measure progress.

### **Traditional Definitions of Success**

Traditional definitions of success in American public education were shaped largely by a shift toward empiricism that impacted reform during the Progressive Era (Lagemann, 2000). Using empirical approaches, reformers could now determine success using more objective measures (Iorio, 2011; Reese, 2002).

**The emergence of empirical approaches.** Prior to the Progressive Era in education, ideas about the purpose of public education and the means by which to best educate—in essence, theories and methods—were based on “abstract values” and “theological beliefs” (Lagemann, 2000, p. 23) Thus, measuring success was a highly subjective venture. However, the rise of empiricism and the emergence of psychology as new science during the late nineteenth century offered educators a more objective means by which to measure progress (Lagemann, 2000). By using scientific methods to examine student learning, educators no longer needed to use perceptions and stochastic approaches to determine whether they successfully met intended educational goals (Lagemann, 2000). The use of new assessment instruments like the Stanford-Binet intelligence test, as well as experimental methods borrowed from the emerging science of

psychology, allowed an objective approach to tracking student development (Lagemann, 2000; Sternberg & Wilson, 2004). The notion of educational success, in turn, had a new benchmark. Instead of focusing outwardly on macroscopic issues like improving employability and promoting social equity, educators could now center their goals directly on student learning. The achievement of these goals would be tantamount to the achievement of success (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; Walberg & Geneva, 1990).

**Student-centered learning.** In addition to a shift toward empiricism, another important shift characterized the traditional perspective of American public education, the shift toward student-centered practice. The development of standardized tests, which began with the work of Theodore Simon, Alfred Binet, and Lewis Terman on assessing intelligence (Myers, 2014; Sternberg & Wilson, 2004), was only small part of a much larger progressivist picture. Although new testing instruments enabled educators to track student progress at an intellectual level, proponents of the “child study movement” were not comfortable with such a narrow view of growth (Englund, 2000; Walberg & Geneva, 1990). They felt it necessary to learn more about the whole child. Many child study educators began using experimental approaches to study aspects of educational development that extended beyond the standards that had been established by the testing instruments. G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey, for instance, advocated for a more balanced examination of the student within the context of the democracy. Objective data about intellectual growth attained through testing instruments, were not sufficient indicators of success. In fact, Dewey (1916) himself asserted that “pedagogy, as an alleged science of methods of the mind in learning, is futile—a mere screen concealing the necessity a teacher is under profound and accurate acquaintance with the subject in

hand” (p. 165, sic). The achievement of success in the mind of Dewey and other child study advocates involved integration of all aspects of the learning gestalt (Englund, 2000).

### **Modern Definitions of Success**

Labaree (2005) explained that “the movement for progressive education was the primary force that shaped the modern American system” (p. 276). The progressive era legacy and its accompanying polemic—empirical methods versus child study—has continued to have a profound influence on the modern system and the way it defines success (Englund, 2000; Franklin, 1989; Labaree, 2005). Labaree detailed how the empirical approach paved the way for “administrative progressivism,” while the child study movement became what the author called “pedagogical progressivism” (p. 280). The split between these two paradigms, administrative and pedagogical, created new means by which the modern system has now come to evaluate success. The administrative perspective places emphasis on standardization, centralization, efficiency, and accountability (Mondale & Patton, 2001). This emphasis, Ravitch (2010) asserted, has created a scenario in which schools have learned to judge success or failure by test scores. “They [the scores],” Ravitch argued, “[have become] more than a measure; they [have become] the purpose of education” (p. 17). Alternatively, from the pedagogical perspective success is arrived at in less quantifiable ways, such as through efforts to build leadership capacity, foster resilient learning, and promote collaboration (Fullan, 2014; Schmoker, 2011)



## **The Perception of Decline in United States Public Education**

Hull's (1943) drive reduction theory of human motivation asserted that lack of homeostatic balance creates needs, or deficiencies, that impel drives (Burgoon, Burgoon, Miller, & Sunnafrank, 1981). Hull (1943) applied this theory to the field of education, claiming that learning often occurs after an organism has been placed in a state of disequilibrium (as cited in Weiner, 1990). According to Ginsburg and et al. (1989), system imbalances and societal needs create a constant state of disequilibrium, which subsequently motivates reform movements. Following this logic, the motivation to move the American education system forward necessitates imbalance, or at least the perception the current system is on a path of decline.

### **Teacher and Administrator Perceptions**

Since the progressive era, administrators and teachers have differed in their perceptions about the need for educational reform (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Administrators have taken a more macroscopic approach to diagnosing needs in education; their efforts have focused on broad, system-level needs like centralization, governance, and curricular reform (Labaree, 2005; Mondale & Patton, 2001). Teachers, on the other hand, have tended to look at educational reform through a more microscopic lens; they have been more inclined to equate successful reform with student learning (Tyack, 1974; Walberg & Geneva, 1990). In either case, reform efforts have always been precipitated by concerns about the efficacy, or lack thereof, in the current system (Mondale & Patton, 2001; Tyack, 1974).

## **National Legislation Reflecting Educational Decline**

The Goals 2000 legislation, which was passed in 1994 under President Bill Clinton was born out of economic concerns of the time period (Mulcahy, 1994). The former secretary of education under President Ronald Reagan, Terrel H. Bell (1988) warned that double-digit interest rates, massive unemployment, and a cultural wage gap were symptoms of an unhealthy education system (as cited in Hunt & Staton, 1996). The new legislation aimed to use an emphasis on standards to combat perceived complacency within the system (Hunt & Staton, 1996; Mulcahy, 1994). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, which was approved by Congress in 2001, continued to emphasize higher educational standards in reaction to a negative outlook on United States performance on global educational performance indicators (Kozol, 2005; Ravitch 2010). The legislation demanded that all students score proficient or above by the year 2014 on state standardized tests (Klein, 2015). Onosko (2011) described how Race to the Top (RTTT) legislation under the Obama administration extended the legacy of the prior two national education policies. Like Goals 2000 and NCLB, RTTT continued the push for standardization of curriculum, centralization of management structures, and test-based accountability. Despite similarities to prior national education legislation with respect to content and purpose RTTT's unique distinction from the former legislation was its direct focus on teachers. RTTT offered a very narrow definition of teacher efficacy by tying efficacy directly to student performance on state issued tests (Corcoran, 2010).

## **The Rise of Outcomes-Based Education**

There is widespread agreement that the standards movement in American public education began in 1983 with the publication of the controversial report *A Nation at Risk*

(ANAR) by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (Goyette, 1995; Hunt & Staton, 1996). The report pointed to weak education standards as a primary cause of the America's decline in educational performance globally (Porter, 1994). The recommendations forwarded by ANAR began a new era in American education where standards would be the center of focus (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983; Ravitch, 2016).

ANAR was the impetus behind a national standards movement that began approximately in 1990 and continues today (Barton, 2009; Porter, 1994; Ravitch, 1996). The national legislation that followed ANAR—including Goals 2000, NCLB, and RTTT—all called for the implementation of standards (Goyette, 1995), thus they have all been commonly referred to as standards legislation (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009; Ravitch, 2016). The outcomes mandated by each, however, were markedly different (Goyette, 1995; Porter, 1994; Ravitch, 2016).

### **National Legislation Mandating Outcomes**

Although there is much discussion about outcomes-based education in the dialogue around the standards movement, there is widespread disagreement over what the term “outcomes-based” means (Lawson & Askill-Williams, 2007; McNeir, 1993). Spady (1994), however, suggested that outcomes-based learning involves integrating entire systems around “what is essential for all students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning experiences” (p. 12). The integration of such a system at the national level has been a slow and controversial process that has involved implementing standards and demanding outcomes at multiple levels with the goal of student success in mind (Porter, 1994).

Barton (2009) offered a helpful framework for conceptualizing the various levels of standards integration necessary to arrive at an outcome-based model, where pedagogy is standards-driven and student learning is measurable. Barton's framework differentiated between three types of standards: content/curriculum, performance, and student achievement. These differentiations reflect the progression toward an outcome-based learning model at the national level (Barton, 2009; Goyette, 1995; Porter, 1994).

Enacted under the Clinton administration in 1994, Goals 2000 (also called America 2000) initiated the development of national standards for content and curriculum, as well as student performance (Mulcahy, 1994). Although state participation under the Goals 2000 legislation was voluntary, non-participating states were denied federal funds (*The History of Goals 2000*, 2017). The document stated that a National Standards and Improvement Council was to “certify *voluntary* national content standards and *voluntary* national student performance standards using the criteria developed...” (*Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, 1994, emphasis added). Albeit voluntary, the move toward developing national content and performance standards had begun with Goals 2000.

President Obama's signature education policy, RTTT, took the standards movement a step further; it incentivized performance by offering grants to states that could demonstrate significant growth in student achievement (Boser, 2012; Ravitch, 2016). The allegation under NCLB was that mandatory proficiency cut points were actually making states lower standards to ensure a higher percentage of ostensibly proficient students (Barton, 2009). Multiple sources referred to this lowering phenomenon as the race to the bottom (Onosko, 2011; Stern, 2013). RTTT legislation,

however, attempted to turn the trend around by pressuring states to align standards under a national common core curriculum and to look more closely at student outcomes using data management systems.

### **California State Mandated Outcomes**

The educational mandates in California are multifold and not all relate directly to curriculum and instruction. Curricular mandates, however, began with the adoption of the California Common Core State Standards in 2010 and the pursuant implementation plan that was approved in 2012 (*Common Core State Standards*, 2016). These standards mandate that local education agencies (LEAs) provide evidence of adherence to the state curriculum in order to receive block grant money (Boser, 2012; Taylor, 2014).

Additionally, states that adopted common core state standards automatically became eligible for the RTTT award. Student outcomes, which are now measurable by the Smarter Balanced Assessment, an instrument administered for the first time in 2015, provide data that RTTT grantors use to determine which states are ahead in the Race to the Top—in essence, which states have students who are showing the most impressive growth in learning outcomes (Webber et al., 2014).

### **Professional Learning Communities**

Recent legislative actions in education—such as Race to the Top (RTTT), the Common Core State Standards, and the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF)—have loosened bureaucratic controls and subsequently have given more decision-making authority to school districts (Education, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Taylor Kerchner, 2015; Webber et al., 2014). Many school districts, as a result of their newfound decision-making authority, have followed suit and have begun to decentralize leadership roles

within their own organizational structures (Fullan, 2011; Lambert, 1998). Educational researchers exploring the topic of management efficacy have described this trend toward decentralization of authority using the phrase leadership capacity building (Farrace, 2002; Lambert, 1998). One popular management structure that managers have turned to in their attempts to build capacity is the professional learning community (PLC) (DuFour, 2004; Stanton, 2009). DuFour et al. (2008) asserted that schools using a PLC management structure—one that gives educators more say in the decision-making process—have been more effective in producing positive educational outcomes.

### **Diffusion of Leadership**

By promoting diffused decision-making within the organizational structure, the PLC model of school leadership redefines the traditional role of the school leader (Cranston, 2007; DuFour et al., 2008; Hill, 2009); under the PLC model, managers are advised to reduce top-down decision-making and increase leadership capacity by cultivating new leaders. One common way to build leadership capacity involves management’s utilization of a “lead learner” approach (Fullan, 2011; McKibben, 2015). This management approach suggests that school leaders use pedagogical strategies that help to develop a culture of learning within the organization.

### **The Shift toward Collaborative Models**

In discussing optimal strategies for approaching leadership at a school site, Fullan (2014) distinguished between two types of leadership approaches: the micromanagement approach and an approach he calls “motion leadership.” The author draws contrast between these two leadership paradigms in order to illustrate that leaders who focus strictly on accountability, those who micromanage results, actually serve to undermine

motivation and thwart effectiveness in the work place—in this case, the American public school. In describing “motion leadership,” Fullan defended that leaders who help cultivate workplace cultures that constantly seek to innovate and transform will have the best chances at success (pp. 63-67). The research indicates that capacity building, collaborative effort, pedagogy, and system coherence should be the drivers of success in optimally managed schools (Fullan, 2014; McKibben, 2015; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006) In essence, when staff work together, embrace the reciprocal nature of the learning-teaching process, and participate in a culture that encourages organic, ground-up growth, they are more likely to perform at their highest levels, thereby expanding the institution’s capacity for positive growth (Dufour, 2012; Farrace, 2002; Lambert, 1998).

### **PLCs as an Educational Framework for Improving Success**

In the arena of K-12 education, the PLC is popular and proven means by which school leaders have used the learning organization approach to successfully impact student outcomes (DuFour et al., 2008; Hattie, 2015, June; Marzano, Pinkering, & McTigh, 1993). The PLC framework includes six essential features (DuFour et al., 2008, pp. 15-17):

1. A shared mission and vision
2. A collaborative culture with a focus on learning
3. Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality
4. Action orientation: learning by doing
5. A commitment to continuous improvement

## 6. Results orientation

### **Gap**

The PLC framework has been widely researched and instrumentalized in peer review literature, most of which points to a strong positive correlation between presence of PLC structures and improved student outcomes (Andersen, 2016; Curry, 2010; Tuttle, 2015). A small percentage of the existing studies examine PLC efficacy in California schools (Hamilton, 2013; Webber et al., 2014). There is a gap in the literature, however, with respect to the relationship between success and PLC systems in Basic Aid High Schools in Coastal California.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

In public education, the phenomenon of the professional learning community (PLC) gained prominence during the late 1980s—in the wake of the national report “A Nation at Risk” and during the lead up to the Goals 2000 legislation that demanded improvement in national education standards (DuFour et al., 2008; Matthews, Smith, & MacGregor, 2012). PLCs grew out of an educational “restructuring movement” that aimed to create national goals while simultaneously decreasing top-down, command-style reform (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 35). Schools that utilize PLC structures differ from traditional schools in that they are intentionally aligned around a common vision, have a collaborative culture, engage in collective inquiry and action research, have a commitment to improvement, and are outcomes oriented (DuFour et al., 2008).

Although schools have been institutionalizing the PLC framework as a means to positively impact student outcomes for over two decades, much of the research of PLC efficacy has focused on teacher perceptions about the impact of PLC practices on



pedagogy and/or school culture (Curry, 2010; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). There are some studies that examine the relationship between PLC practices and student outcomes, but among these studies there is wide variation in way they operationalize the term “outcomes” (Hamilton, 2013; Vescio et al., 2008). Hamilton (2013) compared California average performance index (API) scores between PLC and non-PLC schools. Arbetter (2008) looked at the relationship between the degree of PLC integration and student scores on the Missouri Assessment Program Index. Rogers (2014) examined the impact of PLC implementation of student reading achievement as measured by the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards. So, while the research points to strong agreement that PLC structures positively impact student outcomes, findings reflect a varying and unpredictable range of standards by which the research has measured outcomes (Barton, 2009).

Lianides (2006) determined that student achievement could best be predicted by the amount of per-student funding that schools receive. Highly funded schools, like Basic Aid schools in Coastal California, report markedly higher student outcomes. Research reveals that as school funding increases, student test scores go up (Boser, 2014; Lianides, 2006; Siminski, 2000). Research indicates that student outcomes may be affected by multiple factors, including: the presence of PLC systems and/or other demographic influences such as school funding (Boser, 2012; Vescio et al., 2008). This presents a challenge to the researcher trying to determine causal influences in schools where test scores are relatively high, funding is high, and PLC systems are in place. No studies currently exist that explore staff and administrative perceptions about how PLC systems influence success in such a demographic.

The current research that does identify positive outcomes yielded by PLC systems points to a need for more qualitative or mixed method investigations of the topic (Cohrs, 2014; Curry, 2010). Although several studies conclude that there is a strong positive correlation between the presence of PLC systems and student outcomes (Vescio et al., 2008), most studies do not qualitatively explore perceptions as to why the correlation exists.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how high school teachers and administrators in Basic Aid funded school districts define success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices. A secondary purpose of this study was to explore the differences in perception between teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices.

### **Research Questions**

- RQ1: What do high school teachers perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?
- a. How do high school teachers view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?
  - b. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?
  - c. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about

students' levels of learning?

- d. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?
- e. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?
- f. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?

RQ2: What do high school administrators perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

- a. How do high school administrators view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?
- b. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?
- c. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?
- d. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?
- e. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important

is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?

- f. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?

RQ3: Are their differences in perception between high school teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

### **Significance of the Problem**

The professional learning community (PLC) has been a popular management strategy in education for over two decades (DuFour et al., 2008). Many K-12 schools have adopted the PLC model in attempts to improve school outcomes (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Hord, 1997). Ample research indicates a strong positive correlation between the presence of PLC models in schools and positive outcomes; the means by which those outcomes are determined, however, vary widely (Vescio et al., 2008). Some studies point to improved perceptions about school culture, whereas other studies look more directly at student test data to affirm the positive influence of PLC practices (Andersen, 2016; Curry, 2010). So despite the breadth of research that points to the positive outcomes yielded by PLC systems, the lack of consistency on what constitutes an outcome makes determining the efficacy of PLC systems a somewhat arbitrary endeavor (Vescio et al., 2008).

Adding further difficulty to the problem of measuring success in relation to PLC systems is the fact that quantitative test instruments and the standards which they aim to

measure vary from state to state (Boser, 2012). Not until recently, in 2016, was an assessment instrument developed that tests common standards across states (Herman & Lynn, 2013). Even with improved reliability in testing standards, problems with determining if, how, or why PLC systems are successfully improving schools continue to persist (Vescio et al., 2008). Research indicates, for example, that the main factor influencing successful student outcomes is school funding—not necessarily the presence of PLC systems (Boser, 2014; Siminski, 2000). There is no current research that describes how the presence PLC systems impact perceptions of success within the context of already high performing, affluent schools.

This study will add to the existing body of research by offering descriptions of the lived experiences of teachers and administrators with respect to the phenomenon of the PLC. The study will examine the notion of success in relation to PLC practices from the teachers' perspective. It will also offer descriptions of success in relation to PLC practices from the administrative perspective (Andersen, 2016; Curry, 2010).

Overall, this study will provide a rounded and current picture of the perceptions that administrators and teachers hold about the ways that PLC practices impact student success. More specifically, it will examine these perceptions within the context of affluent Basic Aid schools in Coastal California, where success in the form of high test scores is the norm. Lastly, the study will contribute some of the first information on PLC practices since the institution of the Smarter Balanced assessment.

## Definitions

The following definitions are relevant to this study:

**Advanced Placement (AP).** AP courses are any of the college level courses offered by the College Board that can be taken by high school students for credit (Skinner, 2005).

**Average Performance Index (API).** The API is a feature of the California Public Schools Accountability Act used from 1999-2013 to measure academic performance growth in schools ("Academic Performance Index," 2016)

**Basic Aid.** Basic aid school districts and school districts funded primarily by local property taxes. Schools operating in these districts are better off financially than revenue limit schools (Weston, 2013).

**Common Core Standards.** The Common Core Standards are academic content standards adopted by the State of California in 2010 ("What are Common Core Standards?," 2015)

**Cut Points.** Cut points are mandatory scoring standards used to determine student proficiency under No Child Left Behind legislation (Barton, 2009).

**Local Education Agency (LEA).** Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are synonymous with school districts, county offices of education, and direct-funded charter schools operating under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) ("Local Educational Agency Plan," 2017).

**Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF).** California's new school funding formula under legislation enacted in 2013. The legislation changed the way Local Education Agencies (LEAs) are funded ("Local Educational Agency Plan," 2017).

**Professional Learning Community (PLC).** A professional learning community is a group of educators who meet on a consistent basis to examine student outcomes, share best practices, and improve their craft (Hord, 1997)

**Program Improvement (PI).** Under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, if a California school failed to make adequate yearly progress for two consecutive years, it was deemed a program improvement school and was thus subject to administrative intervention ("Program Improvement," 2017)

**Revenue Limit.** Revenue limit school districts are school districts that receive per capita funding from the state of California based on average daily attendance (ADA) (Weston, 2013).

**Smarter Balanced Assessment.** Developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), the Smarter Balanced Assessment is a state standardized test given to students in grades three through eight, as well as in grade 11 (Harrington, 2016).

**Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).** WASC is one of six regional associations that accredit public and private schools ("Accrediting Commission for Schools: Western Association of Schools and Colleges," 2016).

### **Delimitations**

This study was delimited to Basic Aid high schools in Coastal California. It was further delimited to Basic Aid schools that have had professional learning community (PLC) systems in place for at least three years; participants selected for the study were teachers and administrators who have been part of the PLC process at the selected

schools. Lastly, the study was delimited to include Basic Aid schools that also have given the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

### **Organization of the Study**

This study that explores the relationship between professional learning communities and perceptions of success in Coastal California Basic Aid schools includes five chapters, appendices and references. Chapter 1 introduces the topic of inquiry. Chapter two reviews literature related to perceptions of school success and the phenomenon of the professional learning community. Chapter three explains the methodology used for the study, including the population and sample, data collection, and procedures for analysis. Chapter four provides an analysis of the data, as well as the study's findings. Chapter five offers research conclusions and recommendations for further research.



## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the literature related to the study. The review of literature unfolds in six sections. The first section examines the early years of public education in the United States when a new system was set in place to help solve social and economic problems of the time. The second section explores how the measuring of success within the education system has presented a constant, ongoing challenge for social science researchers. The third section discusses the differing view that teachers and administrators have in relation to educational success. The fourth section details the rise of outcomes-based education as a means to reform an outdated system. The fifth section looks at the emergence of professional learning communities (PLCs) as a means to improve student outcomes; the theoretical framework for the study—DuFour’s professional learning community (PLC) framework—is housed in this section. The sixth and final section reviews the current research on the phenomenon of the PLC.

### **Public Education in the United States**

#### **The Colonial Era and the Roots of American Public Education**

The government of the United States has funded public education at some level since it awarded the first education land grant to the state of Ohio in 1802 (Cubberley, 1919). This grant was part of the Land Ordinance of 1785, an act of Congress that predated the Constitution (Geib, 1985). The land grants issued under the ordinance gave one square mile of every township (a township was made up 36 square miles) to states entering the union (Cubberley, 1919). The ordinance was the first of many legislative acts—through decades of educational policymaking—that would determine the role of

the national government in affecting the country's educational agenda (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002; Chicosky, 2015; Cubberley, 1919).

Although the Land Ordinance of 1785 did set a precedence for federal involvement in public education, Triche (1992) asserted that this involvement was minimal. Governance of public education since the time of Ohio's land grant has been largely left to the states. McGuinn (2015) stated that "schooling was a very locally run affair from colonial times through the early days of the Republic" (p. 79). There was no mention of education in the United States Constitution. Furthermore, the Tenth Amendment, which was ratified in 1791, reserved state control for "powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution" (U.S. Const. amend. X). Despite the lack of legally stipulated federal control in educational affairs, the federal government has played an important, albeit peripheral, role in funding and regulating the governance of public education (Cubberley, 1919; McGuinn, 2015).

By the time of the Land Ordinance of 1785, state governments in America's 13 colonies had already made public schooling a priority. Massachusetts, for instance, had passed the Compulsory Education Law in 1647, which required that townships larger than 50 use public tax dollars to pay for a local schoolmaster and that townships larger than 100 set up a grammar school. Cubberley (1919) acknowledged that the Compulsory Education Law of 1647, also known as the "Old Deluder" Law, "became the basis for legislation in all the other New England colonies, except Rhode Island..." (p. 19). Kuritz (1972) explained that as the populations in the colonies expanded and economies grew, the unified spirit of the New World settlers and the orthodoxy of the church came under threat. People were concerned that Satan, the Old Deluder, was infiltrating their

communities and causing the new lot of settlers to stray from the church (Allan, 1969). The Old Deluder Law itself was follow up legislation to a law enacted 5 years prior in 1642 that required parents to educate their children in religion and the laws of the commonwealth (Chicosky, 2015). The Puritans of Massachusetts were so concerned about children losing their church-centered values that the general court issued an order calling for “death or maiming” of children who “cursed or smote” their natural father or mother, unless their parents had been “unchristianly negligent” in education them (as cited in McClellan, 1992, p. 6). Lack of adherence to the 1642 law precipitated the issuance of the Old Deluder Law, which, for the first time in America, made the education of children a social responsibility. According to Chicosky (2015), the mandatory schooling laws in Massachusetts and elsewhere helped assuage the fears of many colonists because, under these laws, the churches became the primary cultivators of the rudimentary system of education that resulted from their enactment.

After America gained independence as a nation, the colonial model for public education—the model built primarily by Christian settlers of the northern colonies and one that regarded public education as a social responsibility—was endorsed at the federal level when the Congress of the Confederation passed The Land Ordinance of 1785 (Chicosky, 2015; Cubberley, 1919; Triche, 1992). The spirit of the Land Ordinance was to promote and spread colonial ideals across the newly developing nation (Hughes, 2011). The locally controlled schools of colonial townships—a system which grew to be comprised of an assortment of Latin grammar schools, dame schools, charity schools and private tutors—served as a model for future planning that influential leaders wanted to emulate (Allan, 1969, Chicosky 2015; Reese, 2011). However, at the time of the

ordinance, the domain of America had not yet begun expanding west beyond the colonies, and the lack of governing authority at the federal level meant that new states had significant freedom within their state constitutions to interpret the Land Ordinance in ways that suited their own intentions (Meinig, 1993).

The first public schools in America that sprang up in the wake of the Land Ordinance legislation were called common schools, and these schools were modeled after the Christian charity schools of the colonial period (Iorio, 2011; Mondale, 2001; Reese 2011). The charity schools had offered a solution to problems of poverty and social agitation that had become notably apparent in the larger cities like New York and Philadelphia (Mondale, 2001); they used public tax money to pay for schooling children whose families could not afford educational alternatives like private tutoring or the more expensive Latin grammar schools (Allan, 1969). Key lawmakers during America's transition to a new government—names like John Adams, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Rush—used the charity school concept as an ideological prototype while contemplating their vision for an American educational system, a system that they felt should be accessible by the entire body politic (Cubberley, 1919; Goldin & Katz, 2003). Carpenter (2004) explained how Thomas Jefferson envisioned a public system of education where, “regardless of socioeconomic status,” all children would receive a “common educational experience” (p. 1). Like the charity school founders, Jefferson believed in educating the poorer classes; however, Jefferson's conceptual model of lower class education had some fundamental distinctions that made it markedly different from what had been attempted in the charity school. Unlike the charity school model, it was free from religious ties, it used public monies as a funding source, and it

offered a varied academic curriculum (Carpenter, 2004). According to Fuhrman and Lazerson (2005) the common schools “would offer basic curriculum of a few years’ length, ensuring that the populace as a whole had the minimum intellectual skills needed to be self-sufficient and develop an upright and steady character” (p. 3).

Although a network of common schools did begin to develop across the states as America stretched its borders westward, the means by which new states implemented public education systems under the provisions of the Land Ordinance varied widely (Mondale & Patton, 2001; Reeses, 2011; Usher, 2011). As new states entered the union, some followed the Massachusetts example and set up district systems that provided suitable support for public schools, while others took no action (Cubberley, 1919). The wide variation between states’ implementation of public school systems was due, in part, to the lack of specificity in the language of the original Land Ordinance (Tyack, Benavot, & James, 1987). Usher (2001) attested that many early state land trusts were poorly managed due to lack of regulations. To address the problem of poor management, Congress, throughout the nineteenth century, steadily added specificity to land trust provisions, thereby increasing its role in regulating state governance of public education (Tyack et al., 1987; Usher, 2011).

Despite federal efforts to increase regulation of the education land trust during the nineteenth century, states still had the authority to govern their own education systems, and the federal efforts did very little to improve system conformity (Triche, 1992; Usher, 2011). The wide variation of educational policies that developed across states during nineteenth century American expansion reflected a growing diversity in the American populace; leaders of the new frontier were tasked with managing competing religious

interests, growing inequality, and disparate attitudes about education (Cubberley, 1919). Settlers from New England, mainly Puritans, tended to have a strong zeal for education; whereas those from poorer southern states where slavery and plantation life were the norm, did not make education a priority (Mondale, 2001; Reese, 2011). To add to the challenge of these ideological differences, Semuels (2016) noted that the period between 1800 and 1860 also saw one of the most profound growths of income inequality in the nation's history. According to Hood (1993) the "patchwork" educational system that resulted from the convergence of the socio-political factors of the time eventually became a liability for America (para. 13).

### **The Progressive Era and the Growth of the Public School System**

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, the "patchwork" system that Hood (1993) referred to was in need of repair (Cubberley, 1919; Mondale & Patton, 2001; Reese, 2011; Tyack, 1974). Tyack (1974) described how "mob violence [had] exploded again and again in American cities of the nineteenth century, sparked by religious, racial, ethnic, and class conflict" (p. 74). The nineteenth century common schools, which were designed to help ameliorate such conflicts, were not doing enough to hold fabric of American society together (Fuhrman & Lazerson, 2005; David B. Tyack, 1974). Tyack (1974) argued that by the last decade of the 1800s the compulsory education laws were failing and districts were overcrowded with poor immigrant children who were unwilling to assimilate into the routines of civilized classroom life. The school system, which was now governed by thousands of locally controlled school districts throughout the country, had become so decentralized and loose that it was overcome with corruption and graft (Hood, 1993). Educational reformers, toward the turn of the century, began to search for

new means to heal a faltering system (Allan, 1969; Mondale & Patton, 2001; Reese, 2011). What emerged from the efforts of these reformers, according to Reese (2002) were the beginnings America's modern, bureaucratized mass education system that still in use today. The success of this system, from the Progressive Era forward, would hinge on its ability to handle the challenges that it was called upon to resolve (Cubberley, 1919; Mondale & Patton, 2001; Reese, 2002).

### **Defining Success in United States Public Education**

The public education system in America, since the common school days, has always been accompanied by a political desire to measure progress, which is essentially the means by which success has been determined (Labaree, 2007). However, as Rossi (1987) asserted, the complexity of social institutions like the public education system make determining success difficult (as cited in Labaree, 2007). The problem according to Fullan (2001) is that reform in education is a multi-leveled social process that requires the mobilization of thousands of people—from students, to teachers, to administrators, to parents, to communities, to governments. The diverse array of actors who have a stake in the reform process often have competing agendas that complicate and impede the system's ability to establish clear goals and measure efficacy (Labaree, 2007).

The determination of success in public education has, since the nascent days of the system, been related to the fundamental purposes driving reform (Ravitch, 2016; Wolpert-Gawron, 2011). These purposes have consistently shifted and have steered American education toward a broad range of outcomes serving multiple levels of system players (Peifer, 2014). Wolpert-Gawron (2011) asserted that one of the problems with assessing outcomes in education has been the variety of opinions people have about the

purpose that public education serves. “Ask 100 people and you will likely get 100 answers,” stated Peifer (2014) in describing the struggles people experience when asked to articulate a purpose for public education. Although researchers and citizens alike struggle to agree on a singular, overarching purpose served by the public education system, this does not presume that the system is entirely devoid of purpose. In fact, Peifer (2014) defined 19 categories under which various descriptions of purpose can be classified. There is wide agreement among researchers that public education serves a multiplicity of purposes for a broad range of constituents (Labaree, 2007; Lagemann, 2000; Wolpert-Gawron, 2011). The challenges researchers have experienced in identifying the variety of different purposes that have compelled educational reform through the years directly relate to the challenges they have faced in trying to understand the nature of success with respect to American education educational reform (Schlechty, 1990).

### **The Call for Centralization**

Laud (1997) posited that prior to the late nineteenth century, “the transmission and development of moral values dominated as the central purpose of education” (p. 2). Reinforcing this notion, Mondale and Patton (2001) attested that the education system that developed from colonial times until about 1890 was a locally controlled “patchwork” system of common schools whose purpose was “to develop good character; good character [was] based of religion” (p. 5). America’s “grassroots” system had no central ministry of education to set standards or enforce regulations (p. 4) Consequently, determining if or how the system would be successful presented a formidable challenge, due to the “circuslike confusion caused by the decentralized policy-making apparatus for



education” (Lagemann, 2000, p. xi). Berman (1983) attested that the late nineteenth century American education system was in “a state of anarchy and confusion, and complete disorganization” (p. 310). In order to establish control and attempt to re-orient the faltering education system in America, reformers at the end of the nineteenth century (also the beginning of the Progressive Era) began to construct a new purpose around which American education could centralize (Allan, 1969; Berman, 1983, Reese, 2011; Tyack, 1974). This purpose, one more grounded in the objective laws of science and industry than the moral laws of the church, helped to provide the system with a new point of sail (Lagemann, 2000; Reese, 2002).

### **Traditional Definitions of Success**

Success in American public education during the early stages of the system, as Progressive Era reforms began to take effect, was contingent upon the system’s ability to achieve the purpose of centralization and social control (Fuhrman & Lazerson, 2005; Reese, 2011; David B. Tyack, 1974). Progressive Era reformers sought to build a system that operated like the factories that were driving the newly emerging industrial economy (Rury, 2005; David B. Tyack, 1974). In fact, the conceptual framework that characterized Industrial Era education has since come to be known as the “factory model” (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; David B. Tyack, 1974). This model, derived from the F.W. Taylor’s theory of “scientific management” (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 32) demanded that schools implement rigid, top-down management structures that could effectively enforce adherence to the system (DuFour et al., 2008). Classes grew in size, bells mechanized the daily schedule, and managers required that teachers, like factory workers, follow a prescribed curriculum (Levine, 1995; David B. Tyack, 1974). To illustrate the

extent to which progressive era public schools emphasized systematic procedures, Harris and Doty (1874) described that:

military precision is required in the maneuvering of classes. Great stress is laid upon (1) punctuality, (2) regularity, (3) attention, and (4) silence, as habits necessary through life for successful combination with one's fellow men in an industrial and commercial civilization. (as cited in Tyack, 1974, p.50)

**The hidden curriculum.** Success under the factory model was measured more by the system's ability to produce rule followers than students who could demonstrate a grasp of curricular material (Vallance, 1973). Explaining how the early public school experience offered lessons in conformity and behavior more than it did matters of intellect, authors such as Tyack (1974) and Anyon (1980) have used the phrase hidden curriculum. The phrase refers to the rules of behavior and habits of social conformity that students become inculcated with when exposed to the regimented routines of the standardized education; it also suggests that bureaucratic agencies can socially benefit by subjecting its citizenry to the same sort of hidden curriculum (Anyon, 1980; Tyack, 1974; Vallance, 1973). The term hidden itself connotes secrecy on the part of power holders in the system. As Dewey (1916) explained, by keeping students unaware of the hidden curriculums, governing powers can undermine the forces of rebellion that invariably accompany situations of extreme social inequality. In essence, the hidden curriculum that became part of progressive era reform served as a propaganda tool used to subversively justify and perpetuate social inequality (Vallance, 1973). In an analysis of the hidden curriculums in 19th century common schools, Perko (2003) argued that the McGuffey Reader, the primary textbook of the time, contained stories that deliberately emphasized moral behavior. Virtues such as "punctuality, piety, and subordinacy to authority" (p.

105) comprised the content of most of the McGuffey stories. Vallance (1973) pointed out that in light of the “growing diversity of cultural and political structures” (p. 15) that characterized the era of the first public schools, one can easily see the pragmatic aspects involved in such teachings. If schools could teach students to be silent, to follow rules, and not to question authority, then governments could be assured, or at least partially so, that even in the face of injustice, educated people would remain insouciant.

### **The Call for De-centralization**

Although many Progressive Era reformers extolled the successes of factory model education, criticism of the new system came early and have remained ever since (Cubberley, 1919; Ravitch, 2016; Rice, 1893). The primary allegation against the system was and has been that centralization and bureaucracy impede the learning process (DuFour et al., 2008). This criticism was promulgated during the progressive era by reformers who felt that the system, while it may have successfully help to quell social unrest, did not adequately address the problem of inequality. More recently there have been reformers opposed to the standards movement who have also pushed for decentralization.

**Saving the minutes.** One of the first progressives to speak out against the injustices of the factory model system was Rice (1893), a social activist who wrote extensively about the ills of American schooling at the turn of the century. After visiting and conducting research at dozens of city schools across the country, Rice gave interviews to and wrote a series of articles for two prominent New York publications: the Epoch, and Forum (“Joseph Mayer Rice,” 2013). Through these publications Rice, a pediatrician by trade, offered, through first-hand anecdotal accounts, a grim diagnoses of

the ailing public school system in America (Tyack, 1974). Even though the schools had prided themselves in emulating factory efficiency and militaristic organization, Dr. Rice felt that they were not truly educating their children, rather they were producing unthinking automatons by mechanizing the curriculum and subscribing to a maxim he calls “saving the minutes” (Rice, 1893, p. 31; Vallance, 1973). In writing about one New York school Rice visited Rice says, “The spirit of the school is, ‘do what you like with the child, immobilize him, automatize him, dehumanize him, but save, save the minutes’” (p. 31). This concept of saving the minutes involved replacing the time required for thinking by offering students ready-made thoughts. In essence, teachers were to supply knowledge to their students, rather than letting their students discover meaning on their own by thinking critically. Under this assembly line approach to learning students were not expected to understand, care about, or even take interest in the curriculum that they were expected to know. They simply needed to know it; and the more expediently they could do so, the more successful a school would be in “saving the minutes” (Rice, 1893).

**The Carnegie Unit.** Rice’s concept of saving minutes arrived at a time when school bell schedules were helping to mechanize factory model schools (Tyack and Cuban, 1995). As Piefer (1979) explained, the traditional bell schedule, which was introduced during the Progressive Era, consisted of a 5 period day with classes lasting from 50 to 55 minutes. This schedule owes its origination to another famous Progressive Era social activist, A. Carnegie who, like Rice (1893), was a strong critic of the American school system. The story behind Carnegie’s connection to the standard bell schedule is an interesting one. In 1905, Carnegie established The Carnegie Foundation for the

Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) a charitable foundation whose primary aim was to improve the teaching profession by offering free pensions to professors at nonsectarian institutions of higher learning. The problem Carnegie had to confront in achieving this end, however, was creating a standard by which institutions could qualify. As Dr. Rice had already discovered, the concept of higher learning was, at best, a questionable one. So, among other qualification standards, including endowment contributions and faculty size, the CFAT devised a rudimentary means by which to differentiate the institutions of higher learning from other less reputable ones; to do so, it created the Carnegie Unit, which essentially set the parameters for defining a standard secondary level course: "A unit represents a year's study in any subject in a secondary school, constituting approximately a quarter of a full year's work." (Piefer, 1979, p. 9) In order to qualify for the free pension program, colleges had to have a minimum entrance requirement for its students of 14 Carnegie Units. Each unit was tantamount to 130 instructional hours, or a course that met for five periods weekly for about 50-55 minutes (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, p. 91). Although unintentional, what the CFAT effectively accomplished by introducing the Carnegie Unit as a standard of quality control was it made the passing of time a priority academic standard. Students achieved success in public education by simply logging minutes, which would qualify them for college acceptance (Tyack and Tobin, 1994).

Piefer (1979) makes the point clear that Carnegie's plan in setting up a system by which to give pension money to quality educators was not part of any subversive scheme to undermine learning in the classroom. In fact, Carnegie's intentions were quite the opposite. Carnegie was a philanthropist bent on improving the system. The design of the

Carnegie Unit was “only conforming to the existing practice of the better institutions and examining boards” (Piefer, 1979, p.8) of the time. However, in the context of Industrial Era America, the standardization of classroom instructional time that the Carnegie Unit effectively imposed served to perpetuate the problem that Dr. J. M. Rice described as “mechanization” in the schools. While teachers busied themselves by “saving the minutes” (Rice, 1893, p. 31), their students could sit in disengaged silence while earning credits for the university; or simply letting life and time pass them by. Regardless, schools around the country began to adopt the standard bell schedule as if it offered the one and only method by which to structure school curriculum (Tyack & Tobin, 1994).

Pritchett, director of the CFAT from 1905 to 1930 and an instrumental player in the conceptualization of the Carnegie Unit, had warned of a too rigid interpretation of its standards, arguing in 1934 that “these standards have served their purpose...They should give place to more flexible, more individual, more exact and revealing standards of performance as rapidly as these may be achieved.” (Piefer, 1979, p. 9) Pritchett had recognized that, while the implementation of the Carnegie Unit standard was helping the Foundation achieve its original aim of providing free pensions to worthy educators, an unintended consequence of its legislation was the undermining of curricular standards in the classroom. Like Pritchett, reformer Helen Parkhurst also saw problems with the “lockstep instruction and mechanical definition of units as seat time” (Tyack and Tobin, 1994, p. 463) that characterized the classroom environment in the highly centralized factory model era. Parkhurst went so far as to develop a plan to combat the *en masse* approach to learning that had come about with the adoption of the Carnegie unit. The plan, known as the Dalton Plan (named after a town in Massachusetts), encouraged

districts to abandon the Carnegie unit, whole class recitations, fifty-five minute schedules, and many of the overly systematized approaches to teaching and learning that had resulted from Progressive Era reforms. Tyack and Tobin (1994) pointed out that Parkhurst was just one of many opponents to the “scientific management” approach to education. She believed that heavy bureaucratization and centralization had led to the “batch processing of individuals who were intrinsically different” (p. 464). Despite objections from reformers like Rice, Pritchett, and Parkhurst, the Carnegie Unit would remain throughout the rest of the century as a standard by which colleges and universities would measure academic readiness.

### **Modern Definitions of Success in a De-centralized System**

In an analysis of the historic trends of decentralization in the United States, Edwards and DeMatthews (2014) begin by pointing out that the American education system has always been decentralized. As earlier referenced, McGuinn (2015) noted that the federal government has never had the authority to directly govern public education. Following up this notion, Timar (1997) further asserted that even state governments, which have legal governing authority over public education, have traditionally deferred much of that authority to local agencies. The “day-to-day provision of public education” (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014, p. 5) is carried out mainly by local school districts. Ironically, the public education system of the United States, despite being a decentralized system built upon principles of federalism, pivoted strongly in the direction of standardization and centralization during the Progressive Era (Cubberley, 1919, Mondale & Patton, 2001, Tyack, 1974). The widespread centralization that manifested during this time period, however, resulted more a general cultural shift toward “scientific

management” than a top-down political effort (Timar, 1997). So the fact that there have been subsequent movements to decentralize America’s education system, as Katz (2001) stated, adds yet another layer of irony to story of American public school reform. The movements to decentralize the education system in America did not begin to occur until the 1960s (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014; Ravitch, 2016; Triche, 1992). Since this time, decentralization efforts have continued. Edwards and DeMatthews (2014) explained how decentralization efforts occurred in two phases and for differing reasons.

The initial phase of decentralization occurred primarily as a reaction to the failure of the Progressive Era system, which many regarded as strongly centralized system, to adequately address racial and class inequalities (Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014). In the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education II*, which mandated the desegregation of public schools with “all deliberate speed,” (Skeltcher, 2008, p. 163) many schools across the country, especially in urban ghettos, were not remedying the problem of discrimination against blacks and other lower class ethnic minority groups (Gittell, 1972). As a result, local ad hoc agencies were formed in several cities to hopefully wrest political control of failing school systems. Gittell (1972) articulated that, “...constantly declining education quality and lack of success in achieving integration in the 1950’s and 1960’s led to the emergence of the decentralized-community control concept as a new thrust for school reform” (p. 672). The progressive era ambition to construct a centralized system that would “prevent divisions among classes from hardening” (Fuhrman & Lazerson, 2005, p. 6) had not been actualized in over half a century, and, now, decentralization had become the new promise of hope.



The pressure from interest groups pushing for decentralization during the 1950s and 1960s ultimately influenced what Gamson, McDermott, and Reed (2015) state has been “the most important piece of education legislation in U.S. history”: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (p. 1). This federal legislation, which was part of President Lyndon Johnson’s “war against poverty” platform (Jeffrey, 1972, p. 1), granted funding to states based on their reported numbers of low income families. The legislation was designed with the intent of handing decision-making authority directly to districts so as to escape the heavy bureaucracy typically affiliated with national educational legislation. As Jeffrey (1972) explained, “local public schools [under ESEA] would have the major responsibility for carrying out projects” (p. 49). Unfortunately, even the ambitious ESEA legislation could not do enough to rescue the public school system in America from harsh criticism (Gamson et al., 2015).

Phase two of decentralizing the public education system, according to Edwards and DeMatthews (2014), began during the 1980s—15 years after ESEA was passed—at the same time that a new push for standards and accountability became part of the rhetoric around education. This push for standards and accountability became such a focal point in education during the 1980s for two primary reasons: the lack of significant progress resultant from ESEA and the emerging trend of globalization (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002; Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014)

According to Gamson et al. (2015), one of the reasons why it was difficult to measure the efficacy of ESEA reform prior to the standards movement, which began in the 1980s, was that the purpose of the original legislation—especially around Title 1 involving “compensatory funding” for “disadvantaged students” (para. 8)—was unclear.

As Gamson et al. (2015) contended, “The murky stories of ESEA’s origins are themselves the products of competing visions about how the legislation was crafted and what the legislation should do” (para. 12). The authors explain that a lack of a clear sense of purpose behind the original legislation made measuring success nearly impossible; politicians and system agents had no pre-established metrics to help determine whether or not the billions of dollars handed to states under ESEA were making an impact. Instead, they had to rely on the narratives that emerged around public education in the wake of the ESEA legislation (Gamson et al., 2015; Gittell, 1972).

According to Astiz et al., (2002), by the 1980’s the narratives around American public education were being driven by an emerging neoliberalist mindset that was harshly critical of the state of the system. America had fallen into a deep economic recession, unemployment rates were high, and interest rates were rising rapidly (Astiz et al., 2002). T.H. Bell, the secretary of education under President R. Reagan, claimed that the “national mood was one of self-doubt and helplessness” and the education system became a scapegoat for the country’s struggling situation (as cited in Hunt & Staton, 1996, p. 272). In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) published the controversial report *A Nation at Risk (ANAR)* which detailed how the quality of American education was eroding and jeopardizing America’s position globally. According the report, America was being outpaced by countries like Japan, Korea, and Germany in international markets. Pointing to declines in Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) from 1963 to 1980, as well as declines across the board in literacy rates, math and science scores, reading and writing skills, and more, ANAR drew correlation between the health of the country’s political situation and the health of the public school system. The

declining educational trends, according to the report, had much to do with the “weakness of purpose, [and] confusion of vision” of past reform (A Nation at Risk, 1983, The Learning Society, Para. 4). Again, as was the case with educational reforms of the past, a lack of clear purpose had impeded the ability for those attempting to evaluate reform efficacy to establish benchmarks by which to measure success.

The standards and accountability movement that began with the publication of ANAR in 1983, marked the beginning of a new era of reform in American public education (Hunt & Staton, 1996). The report detailed findings in four key areas: content, expectations, time, and teaching. It then followed up with specific recommendations pertinent to these findings (A Nation at Risk, 1983). The overall report and its recommendations laid the groundwork for future federal legislation that would make accountability to specific standards a priority in education. Success, in the era after the publication of ANAR would now be equated with the meeting of articulated standards. A new era of outcomes-based education would soon follow.

### **Success as Perceived by Administrators and Teachers**

Even though the phenomenon of scientific management began impacting American public education over a hundred years ago during the Progressive Era, it continues to have a significant impact on the ways that schools function (Normore, 2008; Maduakolam, 2016). Many elements of progressive era reform and the *en masse* approach to education it espouses remain relevant in the modern educational setting (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Maduakolam, 2016). Katz (1971) attested that “The basic structure of American education had been fixed by about 1880” (as cited in Reese, 2002). Bowles and Gintis (1976) agreed that Progressive Era reform laid the foundation for

modern educational practice. They claimed that modern reform has simply been “a natural extension of over a century of progressive thought” (p. 18). Reflecting on how Progressive Era reform helped to shape the American educational landscape, Labaree (2005) theorized that an important split occurred during the time period that caused “administrative progressives” and “pedagogical progressives”—in essence, administrators and teachers—to adopt competing visions on the nature of success in public education (p. 280).

### **The Perspective of Administrative Progressives**

Tyack (1974) explained how the bureaucratization of American public schools that occurred as a result of progressive efforts to centralize the system propagated new crop of administrators. In order for the factory model system to function effectively, there was a need to bring managers into the schools to oversee operations in the factories of education in order to guarantee efficiency. Up until this juncture in the timeline of American education, the classroom had been the dominion of the classroom teacher (Mondale & Patton, 2001). But with the emergence of factory education, Tyack (1974) attested that, the numbers of system administrators grew exponentially in major cities across the nation. The expansion of the administrative role during this period opened the door to an entirely new way of conceptualization of educational success (Labaree, 2005). Administrative progressives, according to Labaree (2005), began to look at educational reform through a new lens of governance and curriculum.

In terms of governance, school administrators began to apply F.W. Taylor’s scientific management approach to the educational process, which, Maduakolam (2016) asserts, became the dominant model guiding the administrative mindset at the time that

factory model education was popularized. The transition to “Taylorism” (Normore, 2008, p. 3) in the arena of education, had much to do with the work of J.F. Bobbitt a pioneer in scientific management who adapted Taylor’s factory model concept to his own work as an educational leader (Lagemann, 2000). Bobbitt’s (1920) work emphasized the importance of using predetermined objectives as a means to measure success. He believed that centralized authority was necessary to achieve efficient outcomes and that top-down management structures should control decisions about instruction. One of the outcomes that administrative progressives placed high priority on was social control (Cubberley, 1919; Lagemann, 2000; Ravitch, 2016). To this end, new curricular objectives were established that emphasized behaviors like following directions, learning good work habits, speaking English, as well as developing skills in technical areas that would increase employability (Goodman, 1995). To execute the vision of administrative progressives, principals and school managers, in addition to increasing in numbers, had to take on new roles. Citing Strayer, Engelhardt, and Elsbree (1927), Brooks and Miles (2006) attested that “principals became business managers responsible for devising standardized methods of pupil accounting and introducing sound business administration practices in budgeting, planning, maintenance, and finance” (p. 3).

There is evidence that administrative progressives were successful in their endeavor to adapt the factory model of management to the education system (Labaree, 2005; Normore, 2008; Tyack, 1974). Labaree (2005) attributes the success of administrative progressives to the pragmatic purpose that impelled the administrative progressive reform effort. People in power, Labaree (2005) claimed:

were attracted to a mode of educational reform that promised to eliminate waste, to organize and manage schools more efficiently, to tailor

instruction to the needs of employers, to Americanize the children of immigrants, and to provide students with the skills and attitudes they would need to perform and to accept their future roles in society. (pgs. 284-285)

The shift within the national education system toward standardization and centralization that occurred during the Progressive Era, Bowles and Gintis (1976) explain, was largely a result of the reform efforts of, “a small army of ‘education executives’ trained and deployed across the country” (p. 180); the transformation did not occur as a result of top-down political legislation (Labaree, 2005; Timar, 1997). Not only were administrative progressives successful in their efforts to construct a system founded on theoretical principles of standardization and centralization, but there is also evidence that they achieved many of their “predetermined goals” (Bobbitt, 1920, p. 738). Between 1890 and 1930 there was a 25 percent increase in the numbers of students who had graduated from high school and a 14 percent increase in the numbers of students enrolled in public high schools (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Class sizes, which were overpopulated and swelling prior to progressive reform, diminished as the education system “grew in size and administrative complexity” (Tyack, 1974, p. 184). In terms of curriculum, the administrative progressives successfully orchestrated a system shift away from traditional curriculum, which tended to focus on verbal studies and academic pursuits, to a more vocational curriculum that was more in tune with the industrial labor market of the time (Labaree, 2005; Mondale & Patton 2001). Quantitative measures of success, as well as ostensible shifts in the structure of the system, especially in large city urban schools, indicated that progressive reform, indeed, was helping to centralize the American education system and to assist the government in maintaining social control (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Tyack, 1974).

## **The Perspective of Pedagogical Progressives**

While administrative progressives were focusing their attention on macroscopic issues like school governance and social improvement, a different camp of progressives, pedagogical progressives, attended to the more microscopic, classroom-level issues of teaching and student learning (Labaree, 2005; Lagemann, 2001; Tyack, 1974). Labaree (2005) positioned that the split in ideology between the administrative and pedagogical camps created a polemic that would impact public education in America throughout the next century. Discussing the same polemic, Tyack (1974) referred to the pedagogical progressives as part of a “small libertarian wing of educational progressivism” (p. 196) who wanted school to conform to the child—not vice versa, as the administrative progressives intended.

**Student-centered learning.** At the same time that scientific management practices were being put into place by school administrators, a group of pedagogical theorists began using scientific approaches to study student learning (Walberg & Geneva, 1990). Charles (1987) discussed how the field of educational psychology grew rapidly throughout the Progressive Era. Educational training centers were established at a number of universities, including Harvard College, University of Chicago, and the Teachers College at Columbia University (Charles, 1987; Mondale & Patton 2001). At these training centers, educators used the new science of psychology to study aspects of child growth, development, and learning. Lagemann (2000) detailed how E.L. Thorndike, a prominent pedagogical progressive from the Teachers College at Columbia, used scientific approaches to measure mental and social growth in children. In fact, Thorndike became known as the “father of the measurement movement” (Lagemann,

2000, p. 57). Walberg and Geneva (1990) described Thorndike as a positivist whose “stimulus-response paradigm served as an impetus to the scientific movement in education” (p. 8). Dewey, a contemporary of Thorndike’s and also a prominent pedagogical progressive, developed his own child centered theory that supported a “learning by doing” approach to pedagogy (Mondale & Patton, 2001, p. 67). Dewey (1916) firmly believed that education needed to be adapted to the changing world of the child and that forcing the child to conform to externally mandated curriculum would undermine natural learning. Another influential figure amongst pedagogical progressives was G.S. Hall, who pioneered the “child study” movement (Lagemann, 2000; Walberg & Geneva, 1990). Hall’s focus was on the learning process of the whole child; he used questionnaires as a method to study a broad range of topics related to child development, including worldly knowledge, opinions, and language concepts (Lagemann, 2000; Walberg & Geneva, 1990).

**The emergence of empirical approaches.** Lagemann (2001) accounted that, “During the 1890s, the map of higher learning changed profoundly in the United States” (p. 23). The author attributed this change to a new post-Darwinian, scientific mindset that had permeated American culture and had begun to impact the profession of education—one that for centuries had been the ascendancy of the church. During the same post-Darwinian era, the discipline of philosophy underwent a transformation, as it deferred to the new science of psychology (Sternberg, 2004). Empirical research began to replace theological beliefs (Kenny, 1994). In American public school system, the use of empirical approaches had a profound impact (Allan, 1969; Cubberley, 1919; Reese, 2011; Tyack, 2004). It was as a result of the shift toward empirical methods that the first



intelligence test were created (Sternberg, 2004). Lagemann explained how, in 1916, Stanford professor L. Terman developed the Stanford-Binet intelligence quotient (I.Q.) test, a test adapted from the 1905 work of French psychologist A. Binet. Terman's test was used to "differentiate degrees of intellectual ability and all kinds of intellectual unevenness" (as cited by Lagemann, 2000, p. 91). Coupled with the scientific approaches used by pedagogical progressives like G.S. Hall, E.L. Thorndike, and J. Dewey, Terman's efforts to create an objective means to examine intellectual differences among students helped to advance the cause of progressive reform in public education (Mondale & Patton, 2001; Tyack, 1974). However, Labaree (2007) maintains that Terman's I.Q. tests did more to advance the cause administrative progressives than pedagogical progressives. Administrators used student results on the I.Q. tests to develop tracking systems that would steer students toward vocational paths suitable to their perceived ability levels (Labaree, 2007; Lagemann, 2001; Tyack, 1974). The tests were not used to advance the cause of student learning (Labaree, 2007).

### **The Rise of Outcomes-Based Education**

There is broad consensus in the literature that the controversial 1983 report *A Nation at Risk (ANAR)* by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) marked the beginning of a shift in the American public education system toward standards and accountability (Barton, 2009; Hunt & Staton, 1996; Porter, 1994; Ravitch, 2016). As mentioned earlier, Edwards and DeMatthews (2016) discussed how this shift coincided with a second wave of decentralization in the American system that rode on the heels of Civil Rights reform. This second wave of decentralization was markedly different from the first in that it spawned from a cultural mindset shift toward

neoliberalism that accompanied emerging forces of globalization and the presidency of Reagan (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002; Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014). Astiz et al. (2002) explained how a new neoliberal model of public policy that took hold during the early 1980s—concomitant with globalization trends and with the drafting and publication of *ANAR*—turned the federal focus toward “international and market negotiations, ...while they delegated the responsibility of public services, such as health, education, and retirement plans, to either subnational administrative units or to the private sector” (p. 70). Edwards and DeMatthews (2014) outlined the paradoxical nature of the “second wave” that took shape atop the groundswell of Reagan-era neoliberalist forces (p.7); the authors explained that while the federal government took a hands off position in regulating public education, mayors, local school councils, and other public officials, in reaction to “the perceived failures of decentralization” began to centralize control themselves (p.8). Many reformers at the time felt there was a need to recalibrate the system and re-establish a sense of purpose (Kirst & Wirt, 2009; Ravitch, 2016). The perception of the NCEE just prior to the publication of *ANAR*, was that school standards had been eroding in the absence of a clear purpose and leadership (Ravitch, 2016). The commission stated: “Secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose” (as cited by Ravitch, 2016, p. 29). From convergence of these many forces a new era of standards and accountability sprang (Barton, 2009; Edwards & DeMatthews, 2014; Goodman, 1995; Hunt & Staton, 1996; Porter, 1994, Ravitch, 2016).

## **The Outcomes/Standards Distinction**

Porter (1994) asserted that the standards movement that began during the final third of the twentieth century recast the very meaning of public education in America. Prior to *ANAR*, education was “thought about in terms of inputs and procedures” (p. 424). However, *ANAR* awakened the American consciousness and caused a collective mindset shift that permeated America’s entire social fabric (Barton, 2009; DuFour, 2008; Ravitch, 2016); industries beyond education began to establish new standards, and people began to think more often in terms of outputs (Manno, 1994; Ravitch, 2016; Spady, 1994). As a result, schools adopted standards that served a variety of purposes. In discussing how standards began to emerge in education after the publication of *ANAR*, Porter (1994) claimed, “There are so many different types of standards being proposed for so many different purposes that it is difficult to keep them straight, and no account of the particulars stays current for long” (p. 426). Concurring with Porter’s (1994) opinion, Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) explained how America has never had a single coherent system and how the amorphous nature of the system has led to a “lack of clarity on intended results” (p. 65). Barton (2009) stated, “Discussions of standards have not always identified which set of variations are being addressed, thereby not fully identifying what needs fixing” (p.3). Finally, Ravitch (2005) noted, “The term ‘standard’ in education means different things to different people. Sometimes the word is bandied about with no concrete meaning at all...” (p.5). The lack of clarity with regard how standards have been defined in education has invited multiple perspectives on how standards should be employed (Barton, 2009; DuFour, 2008; Porter, 1994; Ravitch 2005).

One approach to implementing standards in education that emerged post-ANAR was outcomes-based learning (Buschee & Baron, 1994; Lawson & Askill-Williams, 2007; Spady, 1994). Outcomes-based learning is “a student-centered, results-oriented design based on the belief that all individuals can learn” (Buschee and Baron, as cited by Henson, 1996, p.49). Buschee and Baron (1994) furthered this definition by claiming that outcomes-based learning defies traditional learning models that credit seat time and completion of coursework as indicators of learning.

The student-centered aspect of the outcomes based learning methodology aligns it with the principles of constructivism (Moll, 1997). Bonk and Cunningham (1998) explained how constructivist methodologies place the learner at the center of the knowledge acquisition process; thus, experiential and social contexts are essential to the acquisition of knowledge. Unlike the constructivist approach of outcomes-based learning, traditional approaches to learning tend to be teacher-centered (Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003; Walberg & Geneva, 1990). Teacher-centered methodologies have been affiliated with factory model education and were the predominant methodologies utilized in American classrooms throughout the twentieth century (Berman, 1983; Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008). Labaree (2005) attributed this predominance to the supposition that administrative progressives won out over pedagogical progressives in an ideological battle that was played out in the theatres of progressive era educational reform. Teacher-centered approaches, which prioritized cognitive information processing over experiential or social interaction, provided a more practical means to achieve the purpose of social control—one of the fundamental aims of the Progressive Era system (Labaree, 2005; Lagemann, 2001; Tyack, 1974).

Along with the teacher-centered methodologies, which were byproducts of scientific management, came a strong push for objective testing (Lagemann, 2001). Lagemann (2001) wrote that, “[survey and testing movements] were self-consciously intended to advance ‘the scientific movement in education’” (p. 94). The push for testing by administrative progressives, ran counter to vision of pedagogical progressives—especially in that tests were used more for differentiation and placement than for aiding the learning process (Lagemann, 2001). Kivinen and Ristela (2003) claimed that constructivism, the philosophy that laid the ideological foundation of outcomes-based education, is a theory of knowledge that asserts that “there can be no objective assessment of how knowledge ‘fits’ the world” (p. 367). In this regard, the shift toward outcomes-based learning, which began with the onset of the standards movement in the 1980’s, marked a significant transition from pedagogical traditions of the past (Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2008; Kivinen & Ristela, 2003; Spady, 1994).

### **National Outcomes-Based Legislation**

**Goals 2000.** At the national level, one of the first legislative moves toward outcomes-based education came in the form of the “America 2000 Excellence in Education Act,” which was introduced in Congress by President George H.W. Bush in 1991 (Manno, 1994; Mulcahy, 1994). The legislation itself was the outcome of an education summit of the National Governor’s Association (NGA) in Charlottesville, North Carolina in 1989 (Mulcahy, 1994). In the spirit of initiating a national level shift toward outcomes-based education, the NGA decided on six broad outcomes to be achieved by the year 2000 (Manno, 1994). The original America 2000 Excellence in Education Act was not passed by Congress (*Civic Impulse*, 2017), but it was later

modified and adopted by the Clinton administration and passed into law in 1994 under a new name, Goals 2000: Educate America Act (*Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, 1994; *History of Goals 2000*, 2017; Ravitch, 2016). Goals 2000 outlined eight national goals to be accomplished by the year 2000. The goals of the legislation were:

1. Every student will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase at least 90 percent.
3. American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, art, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy.
4. The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
5. U.S. students will be the first in the worlds in science and mathematics achievement.
6. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise 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 and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
8. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parent involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. (*Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, 1994)

In addition to establishing national education goals, the Educate America Act allotted \$400,000,000 in funding to states for the first fiscal year of implementation, and "such sums as may be necessary" for subsequent years 1995-1998 (*Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, 1994, Section 303). On top of these funds the law accompanied a re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which supplied additional funds to states for teacher training, standards adoption, state-level testing, and opportunities for disadvantaged students (*Goals 2000 and ESEA*, n.d.). The language of the federal law ensured that state participation in implementing Goals 2000 was

voluntary, however, states that refused to participate were denied the funding that was made available. Hunt and Staton (1996) pointed out that the Goals 2000 legislation was “considered by many as the legislative culmination of the educational reform wave begun by *ANAR*” (p.1). Goals 2000 and its associated economic incentives helped to initiate a process of voluntary standards development at the state level (Manno, 1994; Marzano, Pinkering, & McTigh, 1993; Ravitch, 1995). With a new focus on educational outputs, Manno (1994) explained, states were charged with developing standards in three categories: content standards, performance standards, and opportunity to learn standards.

***Content standards.*** Content standards help to define the curriculum. They determine what teachers are supposed to teach, as well as the expectations for student learning (Ravitch, 1995). Porter (1994) clarified that “at state and district levels, content standards are called curriculum frameworks or curriculum guides” (p.422). These standards, according to Spady (1994), determine how student learning experiences are “defined, organized, and linked” (p.33). When states developed content standards in response to the Goals 2000 legislation, Ravitch (2016) claimed, the standards were written loosely with much room for interpretation. Barton (2009) asserted that the lack of centrality in the development of content standards resulted in wide variation in what was being delivered to students.

***Performance standards.*** Once content standards are in place, educators use performance standards to determine degrees of proficiency (Barton, 2009; Porter, 1994; Ravitch, 1995; Spady, 1994). Spady (1994) explained that performance standards help to provide system accountability. These standards involve the use of “assessment, grading, report cards, transcripts, credits, and diplomas” (p.33). There has been disagreement over

the purposes that performance standards should serve (Goyette, 1995; Porter, 1994; Ravitch, 2016; Spady, 1994). For instance, Porter (1994) explained how some believed proficiency levels of performance should be pre-determined at a national level, whereas others believed that variability in performance is a natural result of variability in content and student ability. Spady (1994) saw the fundamental purpose of performance standards as a means to inform educators about students' development toward mastery of an outcomes-based curriculum; however, Cavanaugh (2010) informed that many critics question whether standardized exams truly measure what students know.

***Opportunity to learn standards.*** The debate about performance standards ignited controversy about equity in the delivery of curricular content (Porter, 1994; Mulcahy, 1994; Ravitch, 1995). This controversy helped to shape the development of opportunity to learn standards within the Goals 2000 legislation. Ysseldyke, Thurlow, and Shin (1995) discussed how variability in performance outcomes could be the result of variability in the quality of the educational experiences that schools offer or variability in the rigor of the academic content students have been exposed to. Opportunity to learn standards were developed to address these potential problems. The Goals 2000 law defined opportunity to learn standards as:

the criteria for, and the basis of assessing the sufficiency or quality of the resources, practices, and conditions necessary at each level of the education system to provide all students with the opportunity to learn the material in voluntary national content standards or state content standards. (*Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1994, Section 213c*)

Mulcahy (1994) posited that opportunity to learn standards posed several problems with respect to accountability. First, schools needed to determine independently the conditions that characterize an opportunity to learn. Then they would need to identify the



“areas for which there ought to be such standards” (p.2). To complicate matters further, Mulcahy (1994) explained, non-content standards such as opportunity to learn standards or performance standards (if they are used for purposes other than informing instruction) can undermine conditions of individuality that are essential to the learning process. Such standards impose a mindset of uniformity reminiscent of industrial era educational reform and run counter to the learner-centered focus of outcomes-based education (Buschee & Baron, 1994; Mulcahy, 1994; Spady, 1994).

**No Child Left Behind.** The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that was signed into law on January 8, 2002 marked a new era in the educational standards movement (Klein, 2015; Muhammad, 2009; Ravitch, 2016). For the first time in history, according to Muhammad (2009), “schools would be judged upon *student outcomes...*” (p.9). Under NCLB, scores on standardized assessments were used to divide student performance into three levels of proficiency: basic, proficient, or advanced. To receive federal funding, which was granted through a re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), schools had to demonstrate that they were making “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) toward a goal of 100 percent proficiency by the 2013-14 school year. Schools failing to make AYP received sanctions of increasing severity for every year that AYP was not achieved (*No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, 2002). Despite the legislative focus on student outcomes that accompanied the NCLB legislation, Alderson and Martin (2007) pointed out that NCLB had the effect of moving American education away from an outcomes-based model. Educational success was now being measured by proficiency “cut-points” (Barton, 2009, p. 15) rather than student achievement of curricular standards.

NCLB's focus on standardized assessment and "tightly defined targets" for schools marked a departure from the principles of outcomes-based education (Alderson & Martin, 2007, p. 1). As Spady stated in an interview with Brandt (1992), "You cannot mandate outcomes based education and hope to have it successfully implemented" (p. 70). So, although NCLB was designed with the intention of boosting student outcomes, efforts at providing a system architecture for accountability undermined efforts to proliferate the use outcomes-based pedagogy (Alderson & Martin, 2007; Ravitch, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2009). Instead, states began developing their own standards, choosing their own tests, and determining proficiency in their own ways (Barton, 2009; Muhammad, 2009; Ravitch, 2016). The overall effect, Barton (2009) claimed, was a wide variation in performance standards, which led to a wide variation in student achievement and ultimately limited the ability to identify the causal factors of low performance.

**Race to the Top.** In July of 2009, President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan launched new federal legislation on top of the existing NCLB legislation that infused more federal funding, via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, into America's state-run, locally controlled education system (Webber, Troppe, Milanowski, Gutmann, Reisner, Goertz, & Regional, 2014). The legislation, called Race to the Top (RTTT), set up a competition between states, whereby the states would compete for federal education dollars based on their ability to demonstrate conformity with and support for federal reform initiatives (Ravitch, 2016; Stern, 2013; Webber, Troppe, Milanowski, Gutmann, Reisner, Goertz, & Regional, 2014). In order to receive RTTT grant money, states had to commit to:

- Adopting rigorous college-ready and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments,
- Establishing data systems and using data to improve performance
- Increasing teacher effectiveness and the equitable distribution of effective teachers, and
- Turning around the lowest performing schools. (Webber, Troppe, Milanowski, Gutmann, Reisner, Goertz, & Regional, 2014, p. 2)

Ravitch (2016) contended that RTTT, like NCLB, was “grounded in Taylorism” (p.274).

The two federal reforms, in a means reminiscent of factory model education, used behavioristic measures of punishment and reward to hopefully improve productivity and elevate outcomes. This approach to reform, according to critics, is not optimal for maximizing student learning outcomes (Marzano, Pinkering, & McTigh, 1993; Pink, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2009). For instance, Marzano et al. (1993) explained how behavioristic approaches—in relation to teaching, learning, and assessment—tend to view learning as an accumulation of discrete skills; modern cognitive science, however, recognizes the necessity of interconnectedness in the learning process and views learning more holistically. Noting this discrepancy, Ravitch (2016) opined that the “carrot-and-stick” strategies set in place by RTTT and NCLB stripped the professionalism from teaching and, in doing so, compromised student outcomes (p. 274). Extending the “carrot-and-stick” analogy, Stern (2013), citing the Fordham Institute, called RTTT, “the carrot that feels like stick” (p. 211, sic). In essence, the monetary incentives that enticed states to participate in increased standardization and high stakes testing were accompanied by a reform agenda that would not serve them well in the long run. Reinforcing this notion, Onosko (2011) discussed how test score scrutiny and the sanctioning of teachers that RTTT promoted, undermined the “human relationship between teachers and students” that is critical to the learning process (p. 5). In essence,

under RTTT legislation, pedagogy would, once again, be subordinated to administrative efficiency, and test scores would become the measure of student and school success (Onosko, 2011; Ravitch, 2016).

### **California State Mandated Outcomes**

**Common Core State Standards initiative.** In 2010, the state of California adopted the California Common Core curriculum ("What are Common Core Standards?," 2015). These standards defined "what student should know and be able to do in each grade" (para. 1). California's adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) had much to do with the national RTTT legislation. One of the requisites for states to earn points in the RTTT competition was to adopt "standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy" (*Race to the Top Program Executive Summary*, 2009, Program Description, para. 1). States could earn extra points for working jointly as part of a consortium to develop a common set of K-12 standards and to adopt the standards statewide before August 2, 2010. As was the case with prior national-level education initiatives, state participation was voluntary, however, participation in the RTTT initiative was strong. Within its first two years, Secretary of Education Duncan had already secured commitment from 48 states and had received grant proposals from 40 of those states (Onosko, 2011). Critics of the reform argued that the widespread participation had more to do with the four billion dollar incentive that the federal government was offering than it did with enthusiasm for the reform itself (Bidwell, 2014; Onosko, 2011). Ravitch (2016) added that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation helped secure support by subsidizing the Common Core effort "at a cost of at least \$200 million" (p. 224). States seduced into

adopting Common Core, Onosko (2011) claimed, were making a long-term commitment to an increased level of high stakes testing and accountability. According to Onosko (2011), the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), by infusing “staggering monies” (p.1) into the initiative, was able to circumvent the laws set in place to limit the federal government’s role in education by offering a short-term incentive for a long-term commitment. Despite objections to the centralization that accompanied the rollout of Common Core, perceptions about the legislation were not all negative (Bidwell, 2014; Bleiburg & West, 2014). Those in favor of the reform, argued that national standards would help mitigate variability in content standards, an issue that had rankled the standards movement since its inception (Barton, 2009, Bleiburg & West, 2014). Also, many corporate reformers, such as Bill and Melinda Gates, Eli Broad, and the Walton family (associated with Walmart Corporation), saw RTTT as an opportunity to break through the some of the bureaucratic red tape that they associated with past failures of the public education system. Adoption of national standards, from the perspective of other business leaders, was a necessary action that America needed to take in order to maintain a competitive edge in the global marketplace (Ravitch, 2016). California was one of 42 states that voluntarily joined the national standards movement by adopting the CCSS.

**Smarter Balanced assessment.** The same year that California adopted the CCSS, the state also joined a consortium of 30 states that submitted a grant application to develop a testing system that aligned with the CCSS and that would provide a means of measuring student outcomes relative to the new standards ("About Smarter Balanced," 2017). The system became known as the Smarter Balanced Assessment, and the 30 state consortium that would develop the testing system over the next for years was called the

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). The SBAC received a grant of \$178 million in funding that came from federal RTTT legislation. As it had done with the CCSS, RTTT legislation had also incentivized the development of “common, high-quality assessments” (*Race to the Top Program Executive Summary*, 2009, Standards and Assessments). Onosko (2011) explained that RTTT awarded \$360 million to two assessment groups, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), to develop Common Core standards aligned assessments. The rollout of the SBAC and PARCC occurred over a five year period, from the initial funding in 2010 to the delivery of the first operational assessments in 2015 (“About Smarter Balanced,” 2017; Sargrad, 2016). The Smarter Balanced assessment was an instrument designed to “inform instruction, guide interventions, help target professional development and ensure an accurate measure of each student’s progress toward career-and college-readiness” (as cited in Rentner & Kober, 2014, p. 3). Phillips and Garcia (2015) explained, the SBAC test aimed to establish performance standards, which would allow educators to track student progress toward learning the Common Core content standards. The rollout of the SBAC test, however, incited controversy (Jochim & McGuinn, 2016; Phillips & Garcia, 2015; *Survey results: 2015 Smarter Balanced assessment teacher feedback*, 2015). Jochim and McGuinn (2016) noted that, between 2010 and 2016, 38 states had left either one or both the testing consortia. Additionally, Jochim and McGuinn (2016) discussed how many groups that originally supported the national standards movement were opposed to standards aligned assessments for fear of compromised instructional time and a “teaching to the test” mindset that would undermine natural learning processes (“Political

Resistance,” para. 1). Walker (2016) reported that a survey of over 1500 teachers revealed a perception that tests such as the SBAC as not developmentally appropriate. According to Walker’s report, teachers perceived that their “expertise about their students’ needs and abilities,” were critical for successful implementation of standards. Top-down accountability, according to the teachers who were surveyed, needed to be replaced by “collaboration and local innovation” (para. 8). However, Phillips and Garcia (2015) pointed out that, from an administrative perspective, benchmarked performance standards aligned with national and international scales were necessary because without them there had been too much variability in scores to glean valid and relevant data. The ability of the SBAC to deliver more valid and relevant data has impacted the dynamic of teacher collaboration around student outcomes—specifically operations within professional learning communities (West Ed, 2016).

### **Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker’s Theoretical Framework**

A professional learning community (PLC) is a teaching and learning system that emphasizes the diffusion of authority within a school setting through the cultivation of a collaborative culture whose constituents have a shared vision and pursue common goals that are centered around student learning (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Hattie, 2015, June; Hord, 1997a). The phenomenon of the PLC emerged during the 1990s as an outgrowth of the standards movement (Archer, 2012). Hughes and Kritsonis (2006) discussed how *A Nation at Risk (ANAR)*, Goals 2000, and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) were “external factors” (p. 1) that compelled educational leaders to investigate new ways of meeting federally mandated outcomes. These external factors, the authors asserted, prompted a widespread educational reform movement, one that Archer (2012) referred to

as the “excellence movement” (p. 39). Archer (2012) outlined how the “standardization, reliance on rules and regulations, and detailed specifications” that were characteristic of the excellence movement invited many reforms that school administrators implemented using top-down management styles. As a result, schools were stripped of their autonomy and the teacher’s voice was essentially removed from the reform process (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Archer 2012). In Archer’s (2012) words, “Local educators held no control in the recommendation of reform efforts and fell hostage to the business-based decisions of state legislatures” (p. 39). The innovation of the PLC, however, offered a new way to conceptualize standards-based reform, one by which teachers became active participants in the reform process (Archer, 2012; Dufour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Hord, 1997b; Hughes & Kritsonis, 2006). By providing a structure for reform that welcomed the perspective of the classroom teacher, PLCs took hold as an effective means to transform school culture and position schools for success in the era of accountability and outcomes-based education (Dufour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Hord, 1997b; Muhammad, 2009).

Dufour et al. (2008), explained how the “demise of the top-down excellence movement” (p. 35) was one of the factors that compelled PLC reform. Because efforts at top-down management were not proving successful, politicians and educational reformers pursued a new direction of reform that called for increased decentralization and local control. In 1989, while addressing an assembly of state governors, President G.H.W. Bush demanded “decentralization of authority and decision-making responsibility to the school site, so that educators [could be] empowered to determine the means for accomplishing the [national] goals” (Bush, 1989). Triche (1992) also concluded that



there was a strong push for local decision-making during the late 1980s and early 1990s in the wake of standards reform. At the same time that decentralization was loosening the reins of bureaucratic control at the national level, educators at local levels had begun developing collaboration systems in attempts to improve pedagogical efficacy and student learning (Rosenholtz, 1989). Rosenholtz (1989) found that many of the most successful schools in the post-*ANAR* accountability era used teacher collaboration systems as a way to improve instruction and ultimately reap greater gains in student achievement. Newman and Wehlage (1995) reported that the most successful schools had developed professional learning communities (PLCs). These PLCs involved shared decision-making structures that operated with relative autonomy from external constraints and that promoted teacher influence over their work. The research of Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1994) reinforced findings of a positive correlation between the presence of PLCs and school success. The researchers noted that in schools that have strong PLCs, teachers control standards and accountability. “Instead of obeying bureaucratic rules,” they stated, “faculty members act according to teachers’ norms of professional behavior, which have been shown to be far stronger social control mechanisms” (p. 160). The environmental conditions in education after the *ANAR* report, helped to cultivate the growth of the PLC phenomenon (Newman & Wehlage, 1995; Rosenholtz, 1989; Triche, 1992). Decentralization at the national level, the attenuation of top-down structures at the management level, and the “emphasis on the ‘professionalization’ of teachers’ work” (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994, p. 159) at the classroom level all contributed to an educational environment that would help establish PLCs as prominent means to improve student learning and bolster school success.

In 1998 DuFour and Eaker published a landmark book called *Professional Learning Communities at Work* in which the authors asserted that transforming schools into professional learning communities (PLCs) provided the best hope for significant improvement in public education (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). DuFour and Eaker (1998) pointed out that the “Excellence Movement” of the 1980s and the “Restructuring Movement” of the 1990s failed to improve the public education system in America (p. xv). In an effort to re-orient educational policy-making and to steer public education in the direction of success, DuFour and Eaker (1998) proposed a PLC reform model that was designed around the best practices in change administration and systems management at the time. DuFour and Eaker’s model highlighted four essential building blocks of effective professional learning communities—mission, vision, values, and goals. In terms of mission, the authors felt that school faculty should be involved in “developing a shared understanding of and commitment to the fundamental purpose of its school” (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). That purpose, they explain, should address “why” the school exists and should help staff to collectively understand what they want students to learn. The authors then drew distinction between mission and vision, explaining that in order to develop a shared vision faculty must answer the question, “What must we become to fulfill our purpose?” (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 119). The vision, according to the authors, would orient the organizational purpose toward the future and would create a foundation for third and fourth building blocks—values and goals. Establishing organizational values, DuFour and Eaker asserted, requires a determination of “how [teachers] intend to make their shared vision a reality” (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 88); shared values serve to focus organizational attitudes,

behaviors, and commitments. Finally, once the first three essential building blocks are in place, goal setting helps to create a timeline for change. The authors emphasized the importance of setting clear short term goals to make the change process visible, unambiguous, and clearly related to the change being implemented.

In 2008, ten years after the publication of *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) revisited the initial work and offered revisions to the PLC model that was originally proposed. The authors claimed in their 2008 work that during the decade since the original publication, the term PLC had become ubiquitous part of the educational lexicon. Despite the popularity of the PLC concept, however, DuFour et al. (2008) posited that most schools that had attempted to implement PLC reform had not done so with fidelity. The authors saw a need to reinvigorate a reform process that had not yet yielded the educational success that they had originally hoped for. The 2008 revisions outlined six essential elements necessary for effective PLCs. These elements included: shared mission, vision, values, and goals—all focused on student learning; a collaborative culture with a focus on learning; collective inquiry into best practice and current reality; action orientation; a commitment to continuous improvement; and results orientation (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1.

*The Essential Elements of a PLC*

(Adapted from *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools* by DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2008)

Elements	Descriptions
1. Shared mission, vision, values, and goals—all focused on student learning	The essentials of mission, vision, values, and purpose were carried over from the original 1998 publication. The authors claimed that, since the original publication, too many schools were writing mission and vision statements that did not accurately reflect living truth of their organizations. In 2008, the authors highlighted an important distinction between writing a mission statement and living a mission. Lack of PLC success, in many, cases was a result of superficial “wordsmithing” and disingenuous implementation efforts (p. 114).
2. A collaborative culture with a focus on learning	In a truly collaborative PLC culture, there is a systematic process for collaboration that involves collective analysis of student outcomes. Because the ultimate focus is on learning, teachers must examine and analyze evidence of student learning. As the authors state, “collaboration is a means to an end, not the end itself” (Dufour et al., 2008, p. 16).
3. Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality	Collective inquiry involves honest and candid sharing of best pedagogical practices that serve to enhance student learning. Collective inquiry invites curiosity and openness, which, in turn, encourages innovation of new methodologies.
4. Action orientation	The authors assert that action research is a pillar of the PLC process. PLCs encourage the testing of new methodologies in an ongoing cycle of innovation and analysis. They call recursive PLC process “learning by doing” (p. 16)
5. A commitment to continuous improvement	Constant effort to improve the current situation is essential to PLCs. The authors outline a cycle of improvement that has five elements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gathering evidence on student learning</li> <li>• Developing intervention strategies</li> <li>• Implementing strategies</li> <li>• Analyzing the impact of the strategies</li> <li>• Applying new knowledge to the next cycle</li> </ul>
6. Results orientation	A results orientation directs the PLC effort toward outcomes, rather than intentions. Because change processes inherently focus on producing improved outcomes, all efforts in the process need to be results oriented.

## **Pros and Cons of the DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker Framework**

The research on the DuFour et al. (2008) PLC model clearly points to the positive benefits for schools that the PLC system (DuFour et al., 2008; Muhammad, 2009; Vescio et al., 2008). Arbetter (2008) and Hamilton (2013) found that schools with more mature PLC systems produced higher student outcomes, as measured by state standardized tests. Moore (2010) found a positive correlation between the presence of PLC systems and school climate, as defined by such factors as student interactions, faculty relations, and social relationships within the school. Muhammad (2009) described a how implementing the DuFour et al. (2008) PLC model has helped schools improve school culture and helped administrators overcome the challenge of staff division. Murphy (2012) found that teacher perceptions about the efficacy of writing instruction improved with the presence of PLCs. In a synthesis of PLC research, Vescio (2008) found, in eight-out-of-eight studies, that student achievement improved when their teachers participated in PLCs. Overall, the research indicates that PLCs offer a viable and proven strategy for school improvement and student success.

Despite the ample evidence that points to the positive impact that the DuFour et al. (2008) PLC concept has had in the arena of American public education, there are still skeptics who question whether PLCs can genuinely be credited for such a broad range of educational successes (Vescio et al., 2008, Dufour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). One of the foremost critics of the PLC has been co-author of the original PLC framework R. DuFour (Vescio, 2008). DuFour claimed that the term PLC had become so widely used that it was “in danger of losing all meaning” (as cited in Vescio, 2008, p. 82). DuFour et al. (2008) explained that persuading educators of the merits of the PLC is simple, but getting

them to use PLC systems effectively is difficult. The authors refer to this dilemma as *the knowing-doing gap* (p. 79), an organizational theory phrase used to describe the disconnect that occurs within organizations between employee knowledge and employee action. Sims and Penny (2015) discovered that even some of the most well intentioned PLC reform efforts fail due to the narrow range of student outcomes educators are asked to examine in their collaborative groups. So, despite the ample evidence that PLCs produce positive outcomes in schools, the concept still has shortcomings (Sims & Penny, 2015; Vescio et al., 2008).

### **Current PLC Research**

Recent literature on PLCs highlights the issue of reification in relation to the phrase *professional learning community*, a phrase which the literature claims has become ubiquitous in the arena of public education (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016; Watson 2014). Vanblaere and Devos (2016) acknowledged that there is an abundance of research supporting PLCs as a means for schools to successfully improve classroom instruction and learning results; however, the authors contend that the popularization of the PLC phenomenon has caused the term PLC to “become a buzz word over the last decades” (p. 26). As a result, a gap has formed between expectations in the academic community and the reality of PLC practices in schools (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Watson (2014) claimed that assessing the “professional practices and the development of ‘teacher leadership’ in schools” (p. 20) is difficult because of the complex nature of the PLC concept. According to Watson (2014) the phrase *professional learning community* itself presents a dilemma, in that each of the three terms that make up the phrase plays host to a variety of possible meanings, which are all contingent upon the varying perceptions of

the external agents determining those meanings. The term *learning*, for example, can take on two significantly different meanings depending on the ontological perspective one holds (Watson, 2014). Citing Gherardi (2001), Watson (2014) points out that because knowledge is a product of social relations, knowing involves “surrendering to a social habit” (p. 133). By extension, the phenomenon of the PLC, may have become a social habit that has contributed to the reification of professional learning within the educational context (Gherardi, 2001; Watson, 2014).

Another modern development that has had a growing impact on the way PLCs function within schools is the rise of big data in conjunction with the Common Core (Glatthorn, Jailall, & Jailall, 2017; Harris, Jones, & Huffman, 2017; Ravitch, 2016). The availability of large-scale data sets at national and international levels has, according to Harris et al. (2017), increased the political stakes by placing more emphasis on accountability, standardization, and competition; as a result, system managers have resorted to using top-down reform approaches, despite ample research that points to the ineffectiveness of such approaches (Trust, Krutka, & Carpenter, 2016). The research indicates that professional learning is most effective when the “architecture for participation” (Trust, Krutka, & Carpenter, 2016, p. 17) enables participation to occur with or without specific objectives—in essence, when the motivation behind professional learning occurs organically. Harris et al. (2017) pointed out that authentic and effective collaboration within PLCs results when managers work to expand trust within the school and to build a culture that embraces collaboration and professional learning. In the context of large-scale data, government reforms, and high-stakes testing, the ability for

managers and educators to cultivate organic systems of professional learning has become more challenging (Glatthorn, Jailall, & Jailall, 2017; Harris et al., 2017).

### **The Role of the Principal in Relation to PLCs**

Fullan (2014) maintained that the role of the school principal has undergone a massive transformation during the last two decades. The traditional concept of *principalship*, which, according to Pont, Nusche, and Moorman (2008), is rooted in the top-down, factory model management structure, has transformed into a broader concept that recognizes the need for a more distributed leadership style (Fullan, 2014). The changing dynamics of the educational environment have contributed to the shifting role of the school principal (Alvoid & Black, 2014, Fullan, 2014). Glatthorn et al. (2017) referred to NCLB legislation as a “seismic shift” (p. 28) in the landscape of public education and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as an earthquake that will have far reaching consequences in relation to curriculum, instruction and assessment. In this context characterized by rapid environmental change, principals who have successfully adapted have taken on new, non-traditional roles (Glatthorn et al., 2017). Multiple sources refer to the need for principles to abandon traditional management practices to instead embrace the role of curriculum leader (Fullan, 2014; Glatthorn et al., 2017; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008).

Fullan (2014) used the phrase *lead learner* to describe the role which principles will need to play as reformers in the modern educational environment. Lead learners are adept at managing *professional capital* (p. 67), which involves a social craftsmanship and the cultivation of “organic change...that is not tightly planned and controlled” (p. 150). As opposed to traditional top-down managers, lead learners, as Fullan (2014) points out,



manage professional capital in a way that makes their organizations appear leaderless. Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) discussed how principals who effectively manage professional capital help to promote cultures of collaboration and learning that can enhance the functioning of PLCs.

### **The Role of the Teacher in Relation to PLCs**

Reflecting on Hargreaves and Fullan's (2013) concept of professional capital, Harris, Jones, and Huffman (2017) concluded that new models of leadership called for teachers to play a larger role in school improvement. Instead of following administrative commands, as was the case under traditional management structures, teachers working in an environment where there is strong professional capital enjoy more freedom to govern their own collective agency (Harris et al., 2017). However, the notion of shared leadership, Watson (2014) warned, may not be genuinely supported in the language of PLCs. For example, Watson (2014) pointed out that the focus on student outcomes—which is requisite for standard PLC work—sets an agenda that may undermine the dialectical thought processes and critical inquiry necessary for genuine dialogue and collaboration. The author further noted that certain core elements of most PLC frameworks, such as shared values and vision or open dialogue “may also be a form of increased surveillance” (p. 22), a result that would contradict the intended goal of shared leadership.

Vanblaere and Devos (2016) conducted research on teacher perceptions of PLC characteristics and found that school leaders that used an instructional leadership style as opposed to a transformational leadership style were more effective in their efforts to engage teachers in “deprivatized practice” (p.35), a characteristic of strong PLCs. The

authors defined instructional leadership style as one that focuses on “coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating curriculum; controlling instruction and assessment; and promoting a climate for learning (p. 29). Instructional leaders, the authors asserted, assume a “more directive form of leadership” (p. 29). Vanblare and Devos’s (2016) findings point to another dilemma with respect to the notion of shared leadership—that teachers may not naturally be inclined, independent of top-down pressure—to work collaboratively in a manner germane to the core tenets of PLCs.

### **The Perceptions of Administrators and Teachers in Relation to PLC Practices**

The research indicates that perceptions among teachers and administrators in relation PLC practices vary widely (Stamper, 2015; Tuttle, 2015; Vescio, 2008). Vescio et al. (2008) found that teacher perceptions regarding the impact that PLCs have on teaching and learning were positive and that “there is some evidence that the impact [of PLCs] is measureable beyond teacher perceptions” (p. 88). However, the authors acknowledged that their findings “could be the result of the Hawthorne Effect” (p.88), meaning the positive results may have been the effect of teachers being aware that they were part of a study, rather than the effect of PLC interventions. Using pre-test, post-test comparisons, Tuttle (2015) reported that PLCs efforts improved teacher perceptions regarding the impact of job-embedded staff development. Vanblaere and Devos (2016) concluded that teachers’ perceptions about administrative leadership styles—transformational versus instructional—influenced the level of engagement of interpersonal PLC characteristics. Curry (2010) concluded that teachers and administrators had differing perceptions with respect to the relative importance of components of PLC implementation. In a quantitative analysis of teacher and principal

perceptions of professional learning communities, Stamper (2015), found that teachers and principals had differing perceptions regarding the importance of each of Hord's (1997) five dimensions of PLCs. Principal ratings for each PLC dimension were higher than teacher ratings, suggesting that PLC practices were more important to principals than to teachers. Stamper (2015) concluded that the differences in perceptions "may be the result of misaligned definitions of PLCs among participants" (p. 101).

### **Summary**

This chapter began by reviewing the historical roots of the public education system in America. The chapter then examined how determining success within the system has presented an ongoing challenge and how the ability for researchers to understand the nature of success in public education, throughout decades of reform, has remained elusive. The chapter then presented research on the differing perspectives of teachers and administrators in relation to the topic of educational success. Next, the chapter looked at the rise of outcomes-based education, a movement in education that emphasized the importance of using student outcomes as a means to determine success. The chapter next introduced the framework for the study, the DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) professional learning community (PLC) framework—a framework that many schools have used to help improve student outcomes. Lastly, the chapter reviewed the most current literature on PLCs.

The review of literature revealed that contradictions have been pervasive throughout the history of educational research. These contradictions are part of an ongoing dialectical interchange that has given rise to several polemical issues prominent in the research. Some of the polemics include: national control versus local control,

charity education versus the hidden curriculum, empirical research versus qualitative research, pedagogical progressivism versus administrative progressivism, student-centered practice versus social control, and standards versus outcomes. The review of literature has examined each of these polemics from both sides in attempt to offer a rounded picture of the body of literature examined.

This study is significant in that it explores the phenomenon of the PLC from new angle—one that examines how and why PLCs have garnered such positive association with examples of success in public schools. Although accounts of success abound in the literature on PLCs, there is very little research that has examined how success, in relation to PLCs, might be viewed differently by teachers and administrators. Moreover, there is no current research that has looked at the varying perceptions of teachers and administrators within the context of Basic Aid school districts in Coastal California.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Overview**

This chapter presents the research methodology and reviews the rationale behind the selection of this methodology. The chapter begins by revisiting the purpose statement and research questions that form the foundation for the overall study. The chapter then discusses the design of the study and explains why qualitative research design and specifically phenomenology was an appropriate method for exploring the perceptions of teachers and administrators on the relationship between professional learning communities and school success. Next, the population and sample are presented, followed by a description of instrumentation and the methods of data collection and analysis. A discussion of the study's limitations closes out this chapter.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how high school teachers and administrators in Basic Aid funded school districts define success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices. A secondary purpose of this study was to explore the differences in perception between teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices.

### **Research Questions**

- RQ1: What do high school teachers perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?
- a. How do high school teachers view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?

- b. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?
- c. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?
- d. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?
- e. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?
- f. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?

RQ2: What do high school administrators perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

- a. How do high school administrators view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?
- b. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?
- c. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?
- d. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is

- innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?
- e. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?
  - f. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?

RQ3: Are their differences in perception between high school teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

### **Research Design**

The study used a qualitative research approach to gather in-depth information about teacher and administrator perceptions in relation to PLC practices in K-12 schools. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to obtain the descriptive data used in this study. The qualitative research method of phenomenology was employed to examine perceptions about the phenomenon of the PLC.

### **Qualitative Research**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) asserted that quantitative designs emphasize objectivity by using numbers and statistics to help measure data. Qualitative research, on the other hand, takes a personal approach; in this type of research, the researcher himself—not a statistical survey or an objectively evaluated test—is the “instrument of inquiry” (Patton, 2015, p. 3). Quantitative research approaches typically utilize hypotheses to make predictions about the objectively measured findings that the research aims to produce, whereas qualitative approaches are more exploratory in nature and do

not generally utilize hypothesis testing (Flipp, 2014). According to Creswell (2014), the goal in qualitative research is to gain deeper understanding about a topic of inquiry by conducting research in a natural setting and “reporting multiple perspectives” (p. 186).

Because the purpose of this study involved an exploration of multiple perspectives, a qualitative methodology was selected. The research questions, which were designed to fit the purpose of the study, were most appropriately suited for the qualitative interview format. The study utilized semi-structured interviews to obtain data on the perspectives of teachers and administrators regarding the relationship between PLC practices and school success. Attempting to quantify such data would not have yielded the same richness of description—a hallmark of qualitative research—that this study aimed to acquire (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The narrative descriptions made available through the semi-structured interviews helped to provide an in-depth view of the lived experiences of the subjects who participated in the study. Only qualitative research enables such richness of detail (Patton, 2015).

**Phenomenology.** According to Patton (2015), phenomenology helps to “capture and describe how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it...” (p. 115). McMillan and Schumacher asserted that phenomenology helps to “transform lived experience into a description of its [the phenomenon’s] ‘essence’” (p. 24). Because this study involved an exploration of the perceptions regarding the phenomenon of the PLC, the research approach chosen fits experts’ descriptions of phenomenology. This study explored how the phenomenon of the PLC in Basic Aid school districts in California affected how teachers and administrators view the relationship between PLCs and educational success. In keeping with the protocol of



phenomenological research several steps were taken to ensure that the study entailed the necessary rigor that this methodology demands.

The research process proceeded as follows: First, a literature review was conducted to provide a contextual description of the phenomenon in question and to build a knowledge base from which the researcher could begin the process of eidetic reduction. Then a series of questions were strategically crafted to align the interview process with the study's theoretical framework—Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker's PLC framework. Prior to conducting interviews, the researcher engaged a series of personal reflections about his role in the research process; these reflections addressed the meditative element of the phenomenological research protocol and helped to position the researcher in a state of “empathic neutrality” (Patton, 2015, p. 57). Additionally, field research was conducted to ensure validity of the interview questions. Next, in-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and administrators who had direct experience with PLCs. The interview data was then analyzed and themes were extrapolated using NVivo™ qualitative coding software. For reliability purposes, an impartial outside party was consulted to review the coding process and confirm the research findings. Conclusions were then drawn from the study's findings.

### **Population**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined a population as a group to which the results of a research study can be generalized. The general population of this study consisted of teachers and administrators working at California Basic Aid K-12 public schools engaged in PLCs that have achieved successful student outcomes—as defined by performance on state standardized assessments—and who have at least three years of

experience working in PLCs (see Figure 3.2). Basic Aid schools represent a small percentage of California’s K-12 public schools. They are unique in that they receive more funding, via local property taxes, than Revenue Limit schools, which comprise the majority of California’s K-12 public schools (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1.

*Number of California School Districts by Tax Code Status*

	<b>Basic Aid (Excess Tax)</b>	<b>Revenue Limit</b>
Total California Districts	129	816

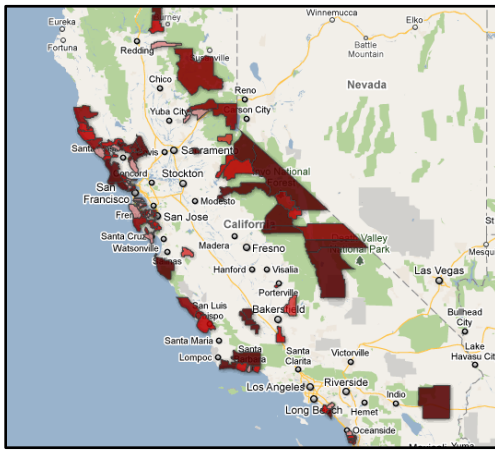
Note: Adapted from "2017-18 Advance Apportionment ADA: Section 75.70," 2017, California Department of Education

### **Target Population**

For this study the researcher focused on a target population that represented a refinement of the general population (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). Asiamah, Mensah, and Oteng-Abayie (2017) explained that “the target population is more refined as compared to the general population” (p. 1612) because the target population aims to minimize elements that could controvert research assumptions. The target population helps to clarify how success is defined in the study. The target population for this study was comprised of teachers and administrators who work in Basic Aid funded schools in Central and Northern Coastal California that utilize PLC systems (see Figure 3.2). Basic Aid districts in Central and Northern Coastal California are located in the counties of Marin, Mendocino, Monterey, Napa, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Sonoma (see Figure 3.1). The requirement of three years of experience in PLCs also applied to the subjects in the target population (Asiamah, Mensah, & Oteng-Abayie, 2017). Weston (2013) reported that, during the 2010-11 fiscal year, 54 of 464 elementary school districts, 12 of 69 high school districts, and 22 of 302

unified school districts met the qualifications for Coastal California Basic Aid funding (see Table 3.2). Weston also reported that Coastal California Basic Aid Schools are the most successful schools in California in terms of Average Performance Index (API) scores. The teachers and administrators of these reportedly “successful” schools comprise the sampling frame for this study.

Figure 3.1 Map of California Basic Aid Districts



Note: The most affluent districts in California are Basic Aid districts along the coast (Weston, 2013)

Table 3.2.

*Number of Districts by District Type and Basic Aid Status, 2010-11*

	<b>Revenue Limit</b>	<b>Basic Aid Coastal</b>
Elementary	464	54
High School	69	12
Unified	302	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>835</b>	<b>88</b>

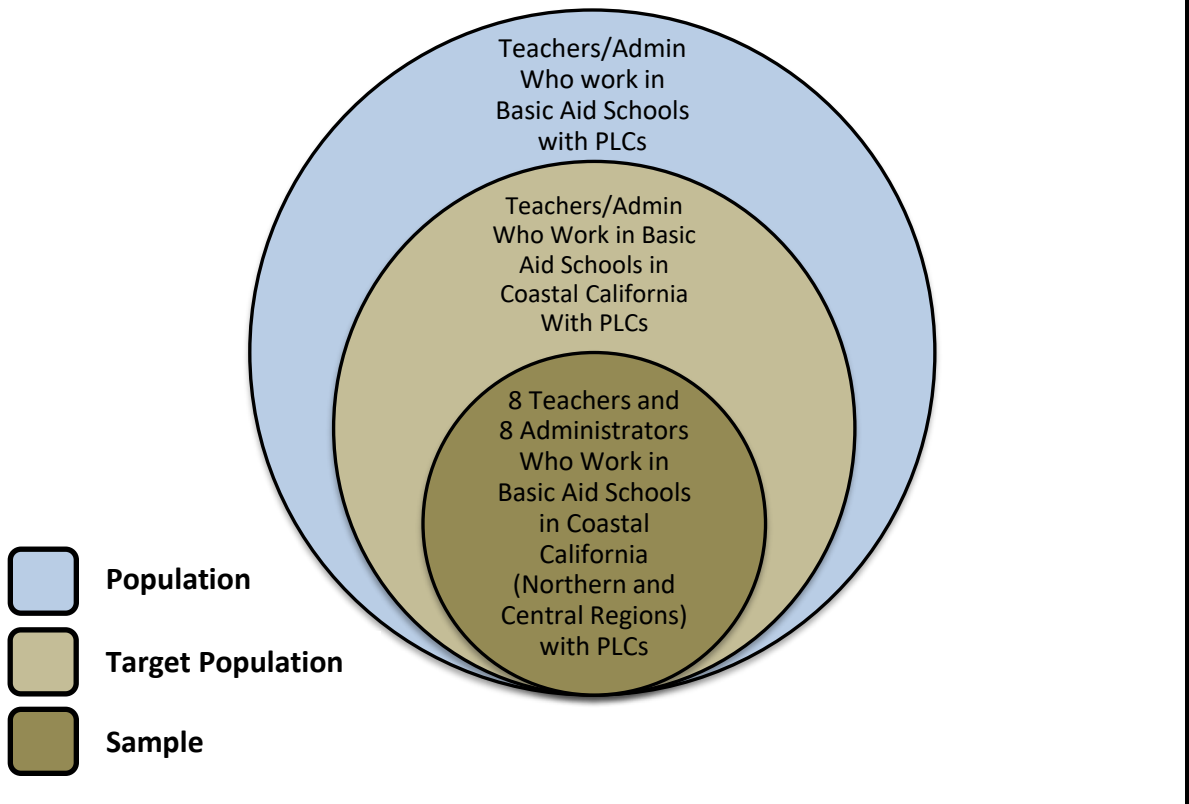
### Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined sample as the group of subjects that participate in the study. For purposes of convenience, the researcher narrowed the sample frame to teachers and administrators in Coastal California Basic Aid schools in Central and Northern California (see Figure 3.2). Patton (2015) explained that purposive

sampling involves the purposeful selection of “information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (p. 265). In phenomenological research, it is imperative that subjects in the sample have direct experience with the phenomenon in question. For this study, purposive sampling was used to secure subjects in notably successful schools that had direct experience working in or orchestrating PLC systems.

Snowball sampling refers to the process of chain referral in the securing of research subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) advises that to conduct a proper snowball sample, the researcher should start with a single or small number of information-rich cases and then ask them to refer other subjects who might provide confirming or refuting perspectives. This study utilized the snowball sampling technique to secure subjects who fit the profile of the population sample and who could provide relevant information. The initial contact for the snowball sample was an administrator in a Coastal California Basic Aid school district who had professional relationships with administrators in other similar districts. Teachers were referred by the administrators in the sample. Patten (2014) explained that saturation occurs when enough relevant information has been collected to reach a point of redundancy in the data—where the data no longer yield new information or new themes. Prior to the beginning of the chain sampling process, the researcher set a target of 16 interview subjects—eight teachers and eight administrators. The target was reached during the study (see Figure 3.2).

Figure 3.2 Population and Sample



### Instrumentation

Patton (2015) explained that in qualitative research, “The researcher is the instrument of inquiry” (p.3). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) expanded on this notion by describing how qualitative researchers seek direct interaction with “the settings, participants, and documents they are studying” (p. 322). Because qualitative researchers want to gain an in-depth understanding of the data they gather, proximity to the data is important (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) points out, however, that maintaining a nonjudgmental position of “empathic neutrality” (p. 59) is of paramount importance in qualitative research.

In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researcher served as the main instrument. Data was collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Phenomenological research requires that the subjects interviewed have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied—in this case the PLC (Honderich, 1995; Husserl 1931/2002; Patton, 2015). As mentioned, qualitative research protocol suggest that the researcher/instrument have “closeness” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 322) to the data. To meet both sets of conditions, the researcher in this study traveled to school sites in Central and Northern California where the researcher, as instrument, interviewed subjects who had experience working in notably successful schools that use PLC systems.

One problem that arises in qualitative research is investigator bias (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014; Patton, 2015). The researcher’s proximity to the data and subjective judgements about the data create challenges in regards to the reliability and validity of the research (Patton, 2015). For this reason, Patton (2015) emphasizes the imperative of mindfulness during the interview process. Mindfulness, Patton (2015) states, “creates the opening to empathy, and is intrinsically nonjudgmental” (p. 60). Through mindfulness, the researcher can attain the desired state of empathic neutrality when conducting research.

## **Interviews**

Mason (1996) stated, “The term ‘qualitative interviewing’ is usually intended to refer to in-depth, semi-structured or loosely structured forms of interviewing” (p. 38). Patton (2015) differentiated between several types of qualitative interviews. In describing the phenomenological interview, Patton (2015) emphasized that the purpose of the

phenomenological interview is to capture the “lived experience” (p. 433) relative to the phenomenon in question of the interviewee. Mason (1996) explained that in order to capture people’s experiences interviews need to be “flexible and sensitive to the specific dynamics of each interaction” (p. 40). One problem that arises when interviews lack an intentional structure, however, is that the potential for bias increases (Creswell, 2014; Mason, 1996). To mitigate bias, researchers often use a structured approach by standardizing interview questions and the processes by which those questions are administered (Mason, 1996). The semi-structured interview combines the structured approach with a looser more flexible approach

This study utilized a semi-structured approach to the interview process. A structured interview script was designed to draw out information pertinent to the purpose of the study and the research questions. The research questions, as well as the interview questions, were formulated around the PLC framework of DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008). Care was taken to ask the structured questions in a standardized way with no implication and no variation in tone. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that most qualitative interviews combine structured questions with unstructured questions. The unstructured questions give the interviewer more latitude to probe for responses and deepen understanding (Mason, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). It is important, however, that the interviewer remain in a position of empathic neutrality throughout the interview process (Patton, 2015).

### **Reliability**

Reliability in research refers to the ability of the research process to yield consistent results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Consistency is achieved through the standardization of procedures (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Although ensuring reliability is more important to quantitative research, Golafshani (2003) explained that reliability can enhance the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research as well. There are a variety of ways that qualitative researches can increase the trustworthiness of the data (Mason, 1995; Merriam, 1995; Patton, 2015).

**Triangulation.** Triangulation refers to the use of multiple types of data (Merriam, 1995). Patton (2015) outlined four specific types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and methodological triangulation. Of these, the qualitative researcher would be interested in data triangulation—“the use of a variety of data sources in a study” (p. 316). In this study, the data was triangulated through the use of multiple data sources. The researcher conducted interviews with 16 subjects at multiple sites. Additionally, artifacts and documents were gleaned to further triangulate the data.

**Intercoder reliability.** Intercoder agreement is when researchers use peer examination to check the plausibility of data interpretations as results begin to emerge (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1995). Creswell (2014) used the term “intercoder agreement” (p. 203) to describe the process of cross-checking data codes using multiple researchers. Intercoder agreement occurs when two or more data analysts agree on the codes used for the same passages of text—in this case, interview transcriptions and artifacts. In this study, the researcher, secured an external coder with a doctorate degree, experience in social science research, and familiarity with NVivo™ qualitative coding software to examine the data gleaned from the interviews and artifact collection. A .80 level of



reliability was set prior to coding (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004). The researcher used the NVivo™ software to extrapolate initial themes from the data. Through recursive analysis the researcher refined the themes until a list of codes was determined. Once the codes were determined the researcher initiated a training session with an external coder. Codes that revealed a .80 or higher level of reliability were used for pattern seeking once the intercoding process was completed (Creswell, 2014; McMillan and Schumacher, 2010).

**Audit trail.** An audit trail involves writing a detailed description of the data collection process to allow for easy replicability. The audit trail for this study is apparent in Chapters 3 and 4, which provide details about the methods used and the analytical procedures undertaken in the study.

The study utilized semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the means of data collection. Additionally, the researcher reviewed relevant artifacts to enhance triangulation. Member checking occurred during each of the interviews to verify responses and to offer participants opportunities to elaborate on and revise responses.

### **Validity**

Creswell (2014) explained that the concept of validity in qualitative research is much different than the concept of validity in quantitative research; additionally, that qualitative validity is not a companion of reliability or generalizability. Qualitative validity, according to Creswell (2014), “means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures” (p. 201). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) outlined strategies for enhancing qualitative validity. Among the strategies the

authors outlined were: participant language and verbatim accounts, low-inference descriptors, mechanically recorded data, and member checking.

Patton (2015) added that accuracy and objectivity can be enhanced during the data analysis phase of the research through the process of coding. Creswell (2014) defined coding as a process of chunking information into categories and labeling groups of information with terms based in the actual language, *in vivo* terminology, of the participants. The *in vivo* terms drawn from data analysis help to build a “framework for organizing and describing what has been collected during fieldwork” (p. 554). The themes extrapolated through the coding process can be cross-checked by other researchers to ensure consistency (Creswell, 2014).

**Field Test.** McMillan and Schumacher (2010) discussed how conducting a pilot test can also serve as a way to enhance the trustworthiness of the data collection. During a pilot test, the researcher rehearses the interview with subject who is not part of the actual study. The goal is to approximate the conditions of the actual interviews in order to get a sense of the timing and the quality of the data that might be obtained (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). For this study, the researcher conducted a pilot test prior to entering the field. A participant with experience as a teacher and as an administrator agreed to be the subject of the pilot interview. The researcher took care in choosing an interview participant who met the requirements of the study sample. An observer with experience in qualitative interviewing agreed to observe the pilot interview. During a debriefing session that took place after the pilot interview, both the interviewee and the observer were asked to provide feedback using field test interview feedback prompt that were

designed specifically for the pilot test (see Appendix C). The researcher used feedback from the pilot test to refine interview techniques prior to entering the field.

To enhance the validity of the research findings, this study utilized participant language, low inference descriptors, mechanically recorded data, and member checking. A thorough coding process, replete with reflexive analysis and intercoder agreement, was also utilized to improve accuracy. Participant language involves obtaining literal statements from interview subjects (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This was achieved through a combination of notetaking and transcription of recorded interviews. The researcher intentionally used low-inference descriptors during the notetaking process and data recording protocol recommended by Creswell (2014). Creswell (2014) suggested that researchers separate notes of description from notes of reflection when taking notes in the field. As an extra step to enhance validity, whenever a point of confusion arose during interviews, the researcher used the member checking approach to confirm accuracy of the notes. Additionally, the audio of each of the interviews in this study was recorded and subsequently transcribed. Transcriptions and the interview log comprised the data that examined during the process of coding and analysis. All data was coded and subjected to cross-checking to enhance reliability.

### **Data Collection**

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as a means for data collection. According to Patten (2014), the semi-structured interview is “by far the most widely used type of measure for collecting data for qualitative research” (p. 163). Mason (1996) discussed how semi-structured interviews, because they are more loosely structured than standardized interviews, allow the researcher to acquire the depth and roundedness

necessary for qualitative inquiries. At the same time, Mason (1996) asserted that semi-structured interviews have enough intentionally designed structure to help mitigate bias.

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the perceptions of teachers and administrators on the relationship between PLC practices and school success. The inquiry aimed to illuminate the meaning of school success, given a history of confusion about what constitutes success in schools (Lagemann, 2000). The inquiry also aimed at “capturing stories to understand people’s perspectives and experiences” (Patton, 2015, p. 13). Lastly, the inquiry aimed to elucidate how PLC systems function in the context of successful schools. In order to achieve these purposes, standardized, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Mason, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014). Because phenomenology requires the researcher to engage in the process of eidetic reduction as requisite to the interview process, the interviews for the study were conducted face-to-face.

### **Human Subjects Consideration**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Brandman University approved the design of the study, as well as the interview scripts before data collection was initiated. The IRB policies were put in place to protect human subjects in research, to confirm compliance with federal regulations, and to verify that ethical considerations have been attended to (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). After approval, the interview subjects were sent an e-mail to formally invite them to participate in the interview. The e-mail included a formal letter of invitation, a Participant’s Bill of Rights, and an informed consent document.

The e-mail communication included a background of the researcher with contact information, a study overview, an estimate of the time commitment being requested, a statement about the voluntary nature of the interviews, an informed consent form, and a consent form for audio recording of the interviews that included an option for the participant to review the interview transcription at a later date. All 16 participants consented to the audio recording of the interview and two requested to review the transcription. A copy of consent forms was supplied to the participants and the original forms were retained by the researcher and held in a secure location.

To further safeguard the privacy of the participants, the researcher secured all data after each interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Participant identities were kept private and known only by the researcher and the dissertation chair. Pseudonyms were used throughout the study to conceal names of participants, as well as affiliated institution. Audio files were kept secure along with other data and were destroyed after transcription.

### **Interview Procedures**

For phenomenological studies, the standardized, semi-structured, face-to-face interview format is recommended (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). This study utilized standardized, semi-structured, face-to-face interview format. Participants were sent an overview of the study, and consent documentation in advance of the interview. The consent documentation was completed and signed by the participants prior to the meetings.

All 16 participants consented to the interview and the audio recording of the interview. Thirteen of sixteen interviews took place on site at the schools where the

subjects were employed and where the subjects had direct experience working in a PLC, the phenomenon in question. Three interviews took place over the phone. The same standard procedure was used for each interview, as well as same structured interview questions. Each interview began with an introduction and a background statement about the researcher, a reiteration of the purpose of the study, followed by a review of the consent paperwork. Lastly, and prior to the commencement of the questioning, the researcher reminded participants of the voluntary nature of the interview. Subjects were informed that they could terminate the interview at any time and could pass on any questions to which they did not want to respond. The recording devices were then turned on and the question and answer session began.

The initial interview questions asked participants to share demographic information about the school, including students, teaching staff, and administrators. As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained, “Some researchers prefer to obtain this [demographic] data at the beginning of the interview to establish rapport and focus attention” (p. 359). The demographic questions were followed by questions pertaining to the background experience of the interview subjects in relation to PLCs. The remainder of the structured questions related to the DuFour PLC framework and the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the relationship between PLC practices and school success. Throughout each interview the researcher took opportunity to engage in “interview probes” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 358) that attempted to elicit further elaboration and detail on some responses. The interviews in this study ranged in time from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. At the close of all interviews, the researcher thanked subjects for their time and their willingness to contribute to the body of knowledge

around the efficacy of PLCs in K-12 education. The researcher offered all subjects a moment to add any final thoughts at the end of the interview.

After all the interviews were conducted, audio files were transcribed using a professional transcription service. Interview subjects who had requested a copy of the interview transcriptions were sent copies via e-mail. Subjects who wished to make changes to responses after reviewing transcriptions were allowed to do so. Creswell (2014) referred to the process of verification of qualitative findings with interview subjects as “member checking” (p. 201). Member checking, according to Creswell (2014) is one way to enhance the validity of qualitative findings. The analysis of the transcriptions in this study did not begin until all transcription documents were audited for accuracy by the researcher and through member checking.

**Artifacts and documentation.** To add to qualitative data collected in the study and to further triangulate procedures, artifacts and documentation were collected (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Creswell (2014) explained that artifacts—which include public documents such as meeting minutes or reports—can offer data that is in the language and words of participants. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) outlined three types of artifacts—personal documents, official documents, and objects. All three types of artifacts can offer a “noninteractive” (p. 360) way for researchers to obtain data pertinent to the inquiry. The artifacts used for the study included documentation related to PLCs and school success, the key variables of the study (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3.

*Artifacts Collection*

<b>Source</b>	<b>Artifacts</b>
<b>Teachers</b>	observation notes, meeting minutes, student outcome analysis documentation, intervention plans, evaluation documentation
<b>Administrators</b>	presentation material, meeting minutes, vision and mission statements, PLC reports, standardized assessment data, program evaluation documents

*Note:* The list of artifacts includes material that was requested. Responses to the artifact request differed at each site.

### **Data Analysis**

Patten (2014) pointed out that inductive analysis is characteristic of all qualitative research. Qualitative researchers “start with data and develop theories based on the data” (p. 169), whereas most quantitative researchers begin with theories and use deductive methods to test those theories. The process of inductive analysis involves reviewing data recursively and extrapolating themes from the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patten, 2014; Patton, 2015). Creswell (2014) explained that qualitative researchers use themes extrapolated through inductive analysis for multiple purposes, including: connecting themes to form a storyline, developing themes into a theoretical model, and comparing themes from one case to another. In phenomenological research, themes are “shaped into a general description” (p. 200). For this study, inductive analysis was used to examine the interview data—data which reflected the lived experiences of teachers and administrators in relation to the phenomenon of the PLCs in successful K-12 schools.

### **Collecting and Documenting Data**

In qualitative research, the data analysis process is fluid and can take place during multiple stages of data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Patton



(2015) emphasized that “field-based insights” (p. 474) can occur during and after interviews. Creswell (2014) explained that qualitative interpretation can take on many forms. Meaning can be derived from personal experiences, from the literature, or from action in the field. In many cases, the researcher, as the instrument in the study, will adapt interview questions as new meanings emerge (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). In this study, however, care was taken to apply as much standardization as possible to the otherwise fluid process of qualitative analysis in order to minimize bias and enhance validity (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The researcher in this study took further steps to enhance the trustworthiness of the data collection and analysis process, such as recording all interviews and having the interviews transcribed by an external agency. Editing and member checking were used to audit the transcription and to verify accuracy of the verbatim record of the interviews. During the interviews, the researcher took notes by hand using a notetaking protocol recommended by Creswell (2014). As recommended, descriptive notes were kept separate from reflective notes. By taking notes during the interviews, the researcher could refine probing questions, as well as document non-verbal cues that were observed (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The researcher also recorded additional notes during an hour long post-interview session of reflection that accompanied each interview. The totality of the data gleaned was recursively reviewed until enough themes emerged that a point of saturation was reached (Creswell, 2014).

### **Coding and Categorizing the Data**

After the transcribed data was vetted for accuracy and all revisions were completed, the researcher began the formal coding process. As mentioned, some

categorizing of data took place during data collection in order to determine a saturation point (Creswell, 2014). However, a formal coding process was initiated once all the data had been collected. McMillan and Schumacher explained that “some of the most detailed coding procedures for qualitative research are found in phenomenological studies” (p. 374). This is because the goal of phenomenological research is to uncover “shared meaning and consciousness” (p. 374). The coding process for this study began with an initial review of the data to identify segments, or units of relevant information—typically one to three sentences in length—that could stand alone (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The segments were then analyzed and themes were extrapolated. Selecting themes, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), represents the first level of induction in qualitative analysis because the researcher must use inferential reasoning to interpret meaning from data segments.

In the study, the researcher used NVivo™ qualitative coding software to arrange the data segments and determine themes. A frequency table was used to arrange the *in vivo* codes—the statements of participants—by thematic category. Once the themes were solidified and the data were quantified an external coder was trained and conducted a separate, independent coding of the data. Themes were verified using a .80 or higher level of reliability (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2004). In this study, review of the data aimed at discovering the essence of PLC systems in K-12 public schools. The identification of themes through the coding process occurred while the researcher attempted to “bracket” (Patton, 2015, p. 117) his assumptions about the PLC phenomenon in order to uncover its essence through intersubjective comparison (Husserl, 1931/2002; Patton, 2015).

**Coding software.** During the coding process, the researcher used NVivo™ qualitative coding software to facilitate the efforts at analysis. NVivo™ software allows researchers to extract statements from interview transcripts and easily organized the statements by category. According to McMillan and Schumacher, “categories represent major ideas that are used to describe the meaning of similarly coded data” (p. 376). As new categories (themes) emerge, extracted statements get filed under the categories with which they have been associated. The software easily allows the researcher to see which categories most commonly appear in the data. The coding process in this study identified 29 categories of responses for teacher interviews and 30 categories for administrative interviews.

**Theoretical framework.** McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that theoretical frameworks can help supply a logical connection between research questions and methodology. Because the qualitative research utilizes inductive processes to derive meaning, the process of identifying meaningful segments of data can be messy (Mason, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher in this study utilized the PLC framework of DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) to help provide structure for the analysis process. The key elements of this framework are: shared mission and vision, collaborative culture, collective inquiry into best practices, action orientation, commitment to improvement, and results orientation. The themes identified were filtered through the theoretical framework. The research questions pertaining to the purpose of the study were built around the DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) framework, as were the interview questions.

## **Identifying and Legitimizing Themes**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explain that once data segments have been extracted, categories have been selected, and the data have been coded by category, the researchers must look at the data again through multiple lenses of analysis to discover patterns amongst the categories. As the researcher attempts to identify patterns, or relationships among categories, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) asserted, he must shift between his own inductive “hunches” (p. 378) and a deductive analysis of the coded data. For this study, the circular process of pattern searching was extensive.

## **Depicting and Displaying Findings**

Because of the nature of the study, phenomenology, the findings of this study were presented mostly in the form of description. Patton (2015) explained that qualitative findings most often take the form of stories that emerge from the data. The stories include the details of time and place and enjoy “the richness of context and the fullness of thick description” (p. 87). The descriptions in this study, intentionally included direct language from the interview subjects to most accurately frame how the phenomenon of the PLC was experienced by the subjects. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that the narrative structure of phenomenological studies should emphasize the lived experiences of subjects experiencing the phenomenon in question. The narrative should also draw from the researcher’s background with respect to the phenomenon and his experience as the main instrument in the research. Lastly, the narrative should attempt to capture the “essence of the experience” (p. 383).

In addition to the narrative descriptions, the researcher provided a series of tables that offered visual depictions of various stages of data analysis. Themes, sub-themes,

codes, and frequency tables illustrate the process of data analysis and complement the narrative description.

### **Limitations**

Patton (2015) pointed out that validity and credibility in research rely heavily on the accuracy of instrumentation; because the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, credibility grows from the researcher's skill and the rigor with which he approached the research task. Although the researcher employed several strategies to enhance the validity and engender trustworthiness, the researcher acknowledges several factors that may limit the transferability of the research findings.

1. The research was limited by a necessarily small sample size, which prohibits generalizability of the findings (Patten, 2014; Patton, 2015).
2. The research was limited by the semi-structured interview format, which did not allow for adaptation and fluidity of process once the interviews commenced (Parron, 2015).
3. The research was limited by potential bias. Patton (2015) pointed out that the subjective nature of qualitative inquiry combined with the researcher's role as the primary instrument for data collection makes qualitative analysis much more prone to bias than quantitative analysis. Additionally, because the data in this study was extracted from face-to-face interviews, participant bias could also be a limiting factor (Patton, 2015).

In light of possible limitations inherent in this study, the following safeguards were included in the study's design:

1. The researcher utilized methods of intercoder reliability during the data coding process as a way to verify themes and frequency counts (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).
2. Member checking was used throughout the interview process to ensure accuracy of research noted and accuracy of the interview record (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
3. Participant language and low-inference descriptors were used during the note-taking and interview process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
4. A theoretical framework was used to provide structure to the data recording and analysis process, which, according to multiple sources, can lack direction and structure in phenomenological studies (Mason, 1996; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodology used for the study. The purpose statement and research questions were reiterated as a reminder to readers of the foundation of the study. Next, the research design was presented along with the population and sample for the study. The data collection and analysis procedures were then reviewed. Lastly, the limitations and safeguards were explained.

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have impacted the American education system for over two decades (Hord, 1997a). Since the advent of the PLC phenomenon in the 1980s, many American schools have implemented PLC systems as a means to improve student outcomes (Vescio, 2008). The research on PLCs suggests that PLCs are successful in this endeavor; however, in the arena of public education the concept of “success” is a murky one (Boser, 2014). Not only is there wide variation in how success has been operationally defined, but, in much of the research, other extraneous variables such as school funding or student demographics have not been controlled for (Boser, 2014; Siminski, 2000). Thus, as noted in the literature review, the ability for researchers to determine the relationship between PLC and the outcomes they are designed to enhance relies much on perception (Curry, 2010, Stamper, 2015). Add to this the differing perceptions between teachers and administrators on what constitutes a successful student outcome and the challenge to understand the relationship between PLC practices and school success becomes even more difficult (Vescio, 2008).

To explore perceptions about the relationship between PLC practices and school success, this study aimed to capture the lived experiences of teachers and administrators in successful Basic Aid school districts that are utilizing PLC structures to improve student outcomes. To address the central research questions and sub-questions the researcher conducted 16 interviews (8 teachers and 8 administrators) with subjects who had three or more years of experience working in PLCs at their site. Additionally, the researcher collected mission and vision statements and other PLC-related documents to round out the data collection and enhance triangulation. Chapter IV presents the research

findings. It begins by revisiting the purpose of the study, research questions, methodology, and the population and sample. The chapter then presents the data and analysis. Lastly, the findings pertinent to each research question are presented.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how high school teachers and administrators in Basic Aid funded school districts define success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices. A secondary purpose of this study was to explore the differences in perception between teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What do high school teachers perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

- a. How do high school teachers view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?
- b. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?
- c. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?
- d. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?
- e. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is a



commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?

- f. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?

RQ2: What do high school administrators perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

- a. How do high school administrators view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?
- b. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?
- c. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?
- d. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?
- e. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?
- f. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?

RQ3: Are their differences in perception between high school teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

### **Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures**

The study utilized qualitative research design in order to explore teacher and administrator perceptions in relation to PLC practices in Basic Aid high schools in Coastal California. Semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with the descriptive data used for analysis in this study. The phenomenological approach to qualitative research provided the means by which the researcher explored perceptions about the relationship between PLC systems and school success.

### **Population**

The general population of this study included teachers and administrators working at California Basic Aid public high schools that use PLC systems. The schools at which these teachers and administrators work have a reputations for successful student outcomes as defined by above average student performance on state standardized assessments. All of the subjects within the general population have had at least three years of experience working in PLCs. According to the California Department Education, Basic Aid high schools are unique in that they receive more funding, via excess property tax money, than the majority of California's public high schools ("2017-18 Advance Apportionment ADA: Section 75.70.," 2017). These schools also have a reputation for achieving higher student scores on state standardized assessments (Weston, 2013).

## **Target Population**

Asiamah, Mensah, and Oteng-Abayie (2017) defined the target population as a refinement or narrowing of the general population. Creswell (2013) explained that the target population includes all units from which a population sample is drawn. The target population for this study fit both of these definitions. The study's target population was comprised of teachers and administrators working in Basic Aid funded schools in Central and Northern Coastal California that utilize PLC systems. The teachers and administrators in the target population were required to have three years of experience working in or managing PLCs. Weston (2013) reported that Coastal California Basic Aid schools are the most successful schools in California in terms of Average Performance Index (API) scores. Twelve of 69 high school districts met the qualifications for Coastal California Basic Aid (Weston, 2013). The sample of teachers and administrators was drawn from these 12 high school districts.

## **Sample**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined the term sample as "the group of subjects from whom the data are collected" (p. 490). For this study the researcher used purposive sampling to select eight teachers and eight administrators from Basic Aid high schools in Coastal California. The teachers and administrators who participated in the study had direct experience working in or orchestrating PLC systems for 3 years or more. All of the subjects were currently involved in PLC work at their sites.

## **Demographic Data**

Patten (2014) defined demographics as "the background characteristics of the participants in research, such as gender, age and income" (p. 63). This researcher in this

study collected demographic information from each of the 16 participants. Participants were first asked to provide the basic demographic information of age, gender, and ethnicity (see Table 4.01 and 4.02). They were then asked to supply demographic information related to education and work experience that was more specific to the topic of the study (see Table 4.03 and 4.04) .

Table 4.01

*Age, Gender, Ethnicity and Education Level of Teacher Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest Degree Earned
1	45	Male	Caucasian	Bachelors
2	37	Male	Caucasian	Masters
3	38	Male	Caucasian	Masters
4	60	Male	Caucasian	Masters
5	57	Male	Caucasian	Masters
6	40	Female	Caucasian	Masters
7	40	Female	Caucasian	Bachelors
8	38	Male	Caucasian	Masters

Table 4.02

*Age, Gender, Ethnicity, and Education Level of Administrative Participants*

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest Degree Earned
1	48	Male	Caucasian	Masters
2	57	Male	Native American	Masters
3	61	Male	Caucasian	Masters
4	57	Male	Caucasian	Masters
5	32	Male	Caucasian	Masters
6	50	Male	Caucasian	Masters
7	41	Male	Caucasian	Masters
8	45	Male	Caucasian	Masters

Table 4.03

*Professional Roles and Years of Service of Teacher Participants*

Participant	Teaching Role	Years in Current Role	Years in Education	Years in PLCs
1	Social Science/PE	17	20	3
2	Special Education	4	12	5
3	Science	4	12	4
4	Mathematics	7	11	3
5	English	25	30	12
6	English	15	16	3
7	Activities/AVID	2	16	10
8	Librarian	4	7	4

Table 4.04

*Professional Roles and Years of Service of Administrative Participants*

Participant	Teaching Role	Years in Current Role	Years in Education	Years in PLCs
1	Vice Principal	5	24	3
2	Principal	9	28	15
3	Principal	6	39	21
4	Principal	10	35	7
5	Vice Principal	3	8	6
6	Principal	5	20	4
7	Vice Principal	3	17	3
8	Vice Principal	3	22	14

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The findings in this section are the result of 16 hours of interviews and artifact collection at five Basic Aid schools in Coastal California. The data collection took place during a span of two months from December 2017 to February 2018. This portion of the study presents the major themes that have emerged from the analysis of the data in alignment with the research questions and sub-questions. Because this study involved a comparison of perceptions between teachers and administrators, the two groups were

analyzed separately and then, in order to address Research Question 3 (RQ3), the results of these independent analyses were compared. In this section, findings from the teacher data are presented first, followed by administrator data, followed by a comparison of results. Information from artifacts was coded together with the interview transcriptions to help triangulate the data.

### **Research Question 1**

*What do high school teachers perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?*

Responses to RQ1 were broken down into three essential elements pertinent to the question. These elements were: defining PLCs, defining success, and perceptual differences. Of these elements, the element defining PLCs yielded the highest frequency. Responses related to defining success had the second highest frequency, and responses related to perceptual differences had the third highest frequency. Together, responses categorized under the three essential elements helped the researcher derive RQ1 findings (see Table 4.05).

Table 4.05

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1*

Essential Element	Sources	Frequency
1. Defining PLCs	8	158
a. Collaboration	8	64
b. Results orientation	8	24
c. Systems management	6	16
2. Defining success	8	61
a. Students at the center	8	33
b. Image orientation	8	28
3. Perceptual differences	8	47
a. Image orientation	8	33
b. Positive outlook	6	12

*Note.* Highlighted frequencies indicate essential element totals.

Table 4.06

*Summary of Trends for RQ1 High Frequency Themes*

Essential Element	Themes
1. Defining PLCs	Collaboration Results orientation Systems management
2. Defining success	Students at the center Image orientation
3. Perceptual differences	Image orientation Positive view Role differences

**Defining PLCs.** The element of defining PLCs, which was essential to RQ1 was the most frequently discussed element in the teacher interviews. Comments about the definition of a PLC, what the acronym really means, were nearly double in frequency, when compared to all other elements in the analysis. Three major themes emerged under this element. These themes were collaboration, goal orientation, and systems management.

**Collaboration.** The theme of collaboration yielded the highest frequency of themes related to the essential element of defining PLCs (see Table 4.05). Findings related to the theme of collaboration are presented in the analysis of RQ1b below (see Tables 4.11 and 4.12). The analysis of the RQ1b identified three trends: 1) collaboration is viewed positively by teachers, 2) views about collaboration are mixed, and 3) collaboration is viewed negatively. The analysis of these trends led to the finding that opportunities for collaboration are viewed positively by teachers. This finding is supported by a number of statements made by the interview subjects. Teacher Respondent 8 stated:

I think collaboration is excellent because it shows students that each subject is not separate from one another, that to succeed actually involves a connection of all subjects and not just one subject at a time. Like, I'm doing math today for my laundry, or looking at history to finish a report for work.

Expressing similar sentiment, Teacher Respondent 7 remarked:

I mean it didn't make us stop doing it because we had had like this valuable experience, this collaborative experience that had made anything we made like better, because there were like two people working on it as opposed to one.

On the topic of collaboration, Teacher Respondent 6 also expressed enthusiasm about working with other teachers. Teacher Respondent 6 opined:

All of us have our tricks for how we do that, how we can get inside a kid's mind, and push those buttons and turn them on. The way we grow as teachers so often is stealing things from other people, working together. You've seen other teachers doing something, or hear about something else. Oh that's cool! I'm going to try that. You know?

**Results orientation.** The theme of results orientation yielded the second highest frequency of the responses related to the essential element of defining PLCs. Findings related to the theme of results orientation are presented in the analysis of RQ1f later in the analysis (see Tables 4.19 and 4.20). The analysis of the RQ1f identified three trends: 1) Results are hard to measure, 2) results orientation is apparent, and 3) results orientation is not apparent. The analysis of these trends led to the finding that teachers perceive their PLCs are not results oriented. Ambiguity in the meaning of the term “results” and subjectivity in how teachers interpret the term, in addition to other reasons, have led to a



lack of results orientation. This finding is supported by a number of statements made by the interview subjects. For instance, Teacher Respondent 3 explained:

Admin [sic] told us ‘We'd like to have a testable result.’ And everybody went, ‘Okay. That's hard.’ So I don't know if anyone really did have a testable result. Did we have a result that we can measure? No. But it seemed like admin [sic] knew they had to say that, and everyone knew that we weren't gonna [sic] be able to do it, and so it's weird that way.

In a similar vein, Teacher Respondent 1 stated:

Collaboration is supposed to be very positive and structured, right? But it gets messy and you try to take on too much and you try to keep your eyes on the prize to take care of this issue and see it through and maybe you'll maybe be able to assess whether or not it was effective or to what degree was. But then you move on to the next issue or next couple of them, even. Then you try to do too much or you just talk about it all and don't really get anything done, you know? Next thing you know you don't have any results.

Teacher Respondent 4 reinforced this finding, adding:

I'm not about data with kids. I'm about growth in them, in their reading, writing, and speaking abilities. That's not an easy thing to quantify necessarily. You can know it's happening, but not be able to produce data necessarily that proves it. But that's not our job. Our job is to teach and inspire... I had a very powerful experience when I was leaving Lingbo University after my year there. I had at least 20 of my 200 students come up to me individually, wanting to have coffee or talk to me. Every single one of them said the same thing. They said, ‘How do I

find my passion when we just give the answers on the test?’ To me, it’s all about that. It’s about inspiring kids. So just testing them like I’ve seen systems in Asia do. That’s death. I don’t care if they get the best test scores in the world. They’re not the ones we want to be like.

***Systems management.*** The theme of systems management yielded the lowest frequency of responses related to the essential element of defining PLCs (see Table 4.05). Six of eight respondents made statements that were categorized under this theme. However, due to the relatively low frequency of these statements, this theme was not considered as a major finding.

***Defining success.*** The element of defining success was the second most frequent element with respect to RQ1. The teacher responses pertinent to this element were clustered around two themes: 1) students at the center, and 2) image orientation.

***Students at the center.*** Eight of eight teacher interview subjects commented on the importance of placing students at the center when considering how PLC efforts relate to educational success. The theme of students at the center had the highest frequency of the two themes pertinent to the essential element of defining success (see Table 4.05). The theme students at the center is addressed later in the analysis of RQ1a that asked teachers about their views on how a shared mission, vision, values, and goals all focused on student learning relates to educational success. The findings pertinent to RQ1a revealed that student learning was the most prominent theme (see Table 4.09). In general, teachers tended to believe that the success of PLC practices is measured in terms of student learning. Comments about successful student learning outcomes revealed two

trends: 1) student learning is experiential and subjective, and 2) student learning can be measured objectively using assessment instruments (see Table 4.07).

Table 4.07

*Frequency and Sources of Trends for Student-Centered Theme*

Trend	Sources	Frequency
1. Student learning is experiential and subjective	7	29
2. Student learning is objective and measurable	5	10

*Student learning is experiential and subjective.* Seven of eight sources discussed how student growth is difficult to quantify. Respondents indicated that PLCs enable success in that they allow teachers to get a better feeling about student learning. Some commented about the difficulty they had experienced in attempting to quantify student learning. For example, Teacher Respondent 4 remarked:

There's a little twinkle in the eye of the administrator when they're showing you a graph of our English being the top in the county or whatever. To me, it's like, 'Who cares?' I mean, in general, any standardized test, to me, is just a bunch of baloney... I mean we all know the writing process is subjective. Sometimes I write something and it comes out well. Sometimes I don't.

Teacher Respondent 6 expressed a distrust of student outcomes data, explaining that teachers sometimes fabricate data. Teacher Respondent 6 stated:

That's where it's tricky. So I talked about in my team how I have two outliers. One of the outliers will be just kind of late with a lot of stuff, but I think, as far as I know, will still do it. The other one blatantly fabricates the numbers. Am I 100% sure? Have I seen that person doing it? No. But I'm pretty sure it's happening.

*Student learning is objective and measurable.* Five of eight teacher respondents noted that specific and measurable student results were a hallmark of PLC success and essential to the cycle of inquiry outlined by the PLC framework. This finding is supported by a number interview responses. Teacher Respondent 6, for example, stated:

Well, one thing I think that didn't come up that I would say relates to this question is I think our GPAs have actually increased, and not just because of the PLC work per se but I think we've moved in the direction of more of mastery learning and giving time for rewrites and that sort of thing. In the older model we probably covered more curriculum but we weren't as clear that everybody was getting it and we didn't have data that showed if the students were learning.

Teacher respondent 6 expressed a similar view, adding:

When we did the standards-based, the skills checks in geometry, we basically took the Ds, made them Cs, Cs made them Bs, some of the Bs to As. So we saw, with the same common assessments we'd had the year before, we saw the grades go up.

***Image orientation.*** Eight of eight teacher interview subjects expressed concern about how disingenuous PLC practices—focusing on image rather than substance—serve to inhibit educational success. Four of eight teacher subjects commented specifically on administrative image orientation and the element of school success in relation to student learning (see Table 4.08). The theme of image orientation, along with the theme of students at the center comprised the major findings for the essential element of defining success (see Table 4.05). Teachers who remarked about image orientation, often held the opinion that administrators cared more about using data to maintain a positive school

image than they did about organic student learning. Several statements from teacher interview subjects support this notion. For example, Teacher Respondent 8 remarked that “Admin has more of an interest in data and statistics. [The data] are more of a vital part of their work in the district.” In a similar vein, Teacher Respondent 4 stated:

Success to an administrator is good test scores, good behavior of students in the classroom, not having too many discipline problems, and things like that. Success for a teacher is making that light bulb go on and having that child grow in their knowledge, whatever you're trying to teach them, you know?

Teacher Respondent 2 also expressed skepticism about the genuineness of the administrative view of student success. Respondent 2 added:

Are they really genuine and positive about the PLC work, about meeting with the teachers and saying, ‘Hey, is this really benefiting our school,’ regardless if they have to put it in a report or not. Sometimes I think they care about the reports than my students. I would like to see admin come to my PLCs and ask, ‘What are you guys doing? What are your successes?’

**Perceptual differences.** The element of perceptual differences between teachers and administrators was the third most frequent element with respect to RQ1. This element recorded two fewer frequency tallies than did the element defining success (see Table 4.05). The theme that had the highest frequency under this element was image orientation, a theme that also emerged under the element defining success. Image orientation surfaced more frequently in relation to perceptual differences than it did in relation to defining success (see Table 4.08). Positive outlook also emerged as a theme pertinent to the essential element of perceptual differences (see Table 4.05).

Table 4.08

*Comparison of Frequencies and Sources for the Image Orientation Theme*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Image orientation classified under perceptual differences	8	22
2. Image orientation classified under defining success	4	6

***Image orientation.*** In discussing perceptual differences between teachers and administrators, eight of eight teacher interview subjects commented on the administrative inclination to focus on school image more than on student learning. This theme emerged twice in the analysis, under two separate categories. The remarks in the two categories were slightly different. Whereas under the element defining success the image orientation remarks included commentary on student learning, under the element of perceptual differences, the remarks were broader and pertained to PLC practices in general. For example, Teacher Respondent 2 remarked:

I think admin really look at the numbers, they really look at the grades, [and] they look at the data more. I think if the data's good, they're happy and may not dive into see what's really going on in the classroom, how are the kids being taught, what are the strategies that are being taught to the kids.

Teacher Respondent 6 described that from a teacher's perspective administrators appear to prioritize their actions by placing image in front of needs. For example, Respondent 6 remarked:

When you get an email following up on a kid's grade it's never the kid with the tan, it's the kid whose parents have the time and effort to contact the school and

start talking about their lawyers, that's not the wheel that needs the grease. Your kid got a B plus.

*Positive outlook.* As secondary theme that emerged under the essential element of perceptual differences was positive outlook. Six of eight respondents made comments that expressed positive support of the administrative role in the PLC process. These six respondents expressed enthusiasm for either the PLC process as a whole or aspects of PLC work at their site. Teacher Respondent 4, a teacher who had strong opinions about the subjectivity of data and skepticism about standardized testing, stated:

Well the last few years, I feel like the administration is trying to empower our PLCs at the school by allowing pretty much our professional development time to be taken up by PLC work. To me, this is, I mean I'm telling you my opinion here, but PLCs are the best thing that have happened to education, I think.

Teacher Respondent 3 was similarly enthusiastic about PLC work. Respondent three remarked:

So we switched to that last year, and the administration just said, 'What would you like to work on? Get into a group, and work on that.' They said, 'We'd like to have measurable outcomes, but don't get too hung up on that.' It was amazing. It was just kinda like, 'Hey, what do you think is important, and go use your PLCs to talk about it and go see what you can do.' It was really unstructured, which was great.

Although respondents 3 and 5 had positive outlooks on the PLC process at their respective sites, their remarks suggested that they were involved in unconventional PLCs that disregarded essential elements of the PLC framework, such as results orientation and

the cycle of inquiry. Teacher Respondent 6 was part of a more conventional PLC and also expressed enthusiasm about PLC experiences. Respondent 6 remarked:

I think PLCs are great because they create buy-in, and when there's buy-in there tends to be follow-through, and when there's follow-through that's when you get the improvement. Because it's difficult to improve if you don't know what you're doing wrong, and if you're not willing to gather the data then you don't know what you're doing wrong and then it just falls apart.

### **Research Question 1a**

*How do high school teachers view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?*

In relation to RQ1a, five themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data and one theme emerged from a comparison of interview responses with collected artifacts. Teachers opined that: (1) student learning is a significant factor in determining educational success, (2) a goal orientation helps to enable success, (3) school vision had been clearly established and was integral to the achievement of student success, and (4) a lack of a clear organizational vision and/or administrative direction and unclear objectives impeded efforts to achieve success. Lastly, (5) teachers offered comments about organizational vision that did not align with data, such as school and district mission and vision statements and schoolwide learner outcomes (SLOs), that were available as artifacts. Themes 4 and 5 have been included in the data presentation, however, were not included in the analysis because there was a lack of sources and frequencies to render them pertinent to the question (see Table 4.09 and 4.10).



Table 4.09

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1a*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Student learning defines success	8	33
2. Goal orientation enables success	6	24
3. Positive outlook on the relationship between vision and educational success	6	13
4. Lack of clear vision is apparent	3	4
5. Vision comment not in line with artifact data	8	4

Table 4.10

*Summary of Trends for RQ1a High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Student learning defines success	Student performance Individual student improvement Teachers have student focus Social emotional improvement Eager students is success
2. Goal orientation enables success	Common goals Achieving goals
3. Positive outlook on the relationship between vision and educational success	Sense of direction Unity Students at the center Collaboration and togetherness Solution Tree training

**Student learning defines success.** When discussing the relationship between shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning and educational success, all eight teacher subjects replied with a comment about students being the centerpiece of school vision. Teacher Respondent 7, for example, remarked, “I think it’s really hard to resist a vision that is for the betterment of our students or for improved student outcomes. . . I think it becomes really hard to argue with like, ‘No, I’m

not going to do this. I don't want students to do well.” Comments about students as a central focus covered a range of topics, such as: student standardized test performance, social emotional growth, and enthusiasm about learning.

**Goal orientation enables success.** The theme of goal orientation recorded the second highest frequency for RQ1a. Six of eight interview subjects responded to RQ1a with a comment about goal orientation. When asked about the relationship between organizational vision and successful PLC practices, a majority of respondents saw the achievement of goals as synonymous with carrying out the organizational vision. In discussing the topic of vision, Teacher Respondent 8 remarked, “For our site, the PLC process helped to design a vision statement and give our departments more of a goal for all teachers to strive towards.”

**Positive outlook on the relationship between vision and educational success.** Six of eight interview subjects expressed a positive outlook with respect to the vision of the school and the relationship between this vision and successful student outcomes. Response trends included terms like unity and togetherness. Teacher Respondent 2 expressed a positive outlook on vision, stating: “I think vision's important because you need something to have a basis for what you're doing. You need the 'why' of what's being created, and once you have that 'why,' you get people to buy in.” Several respondents mentioned the Solution Tree training as a pivotal factor in providing a sense of vision to their PLCs. However, on four occasions positive comments about school vision were not in alignment with vision and mission statements included in the artifact analysis. For example, Teacher Respondent 3 explained that the “vision was just self-directed and there were groups that did really good things and others that were like, ‘Okay, we’re

going to check this box . . .” An analysis of artifacts revealed that Teacher 3’s perception of the school vision was not in line with the actual vision.

**Research Question 1b**

*From the perspective of the high school teacher, how does being a part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?*

The data pertinent to RQ1b yielded three themes. Teacher responses to RQ1b most frequently revealed positive experiences with collaboration and an appreciation for the collaborative culture of their respective school sites. A majority of respondents noted that collaboration experiences were not uniformly regarded as positive. Lastly, interview subjects discussed on a few occasions negative experiences with collaboration. Artifact analysis reinforced all findings pertinent to RQ1b (see Table 4.11 and 4.12).

Table 4.11

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1b*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Collaboration has a positive effect	8	28
2. There are mixed reviews about the value of collaboration	5	20
3. Collaboration has a negative effect	2	3

Table 4.12

*Summary of Trends for RQ1b High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Collaboration has a positive effect	Fosters growth Helps learning Increases consistency Builds awareness Helps “course alike” teams Provides affirmation
2. There are mixed reviews about the value of collaboration	Questions about yields Buy-in is key Staff is divided Must be organic

**Collaboration has a positive effect.** Eight of eight respondents discussed positive experiences with collaboration and this theme recorded the highest response frequency for RQ1b. The question asked respondents to examine how collaboration relates to educational success. Teacher Respondent 1 offered a statement that epitomized the perspective that collaboration has a positive effect. The respondent stated: “I think collaboration has a, [sic] in and of itself, regardless of PLCs or how that fits in in my opinion, have [sic] a huge effect, [sic] positive effect on the school. I feel that if the collaboration days are used wisely I think that a school can get a lot done and it's a great way to help the principal lead a school.” Other respondents answered by offering their own definitions of educational success. Some of these definitions of success included: the fostering of growth, helping learning, achieving instructional consistency, and providing affirmation for teaching practices. In all cases, teachers offered examples of positive outcomes—“educational successes”—enabled by the presence of a collaborative culture.

**Collaboration gets mixed reviews.** Despite the generally positive commentary around the topic of collaboration, five of eight respondents reported that the collaboration experience was not entirely positive. Teacher Respondent 6 stated, “Yeah [collaboration is] effective. But what I think is effective might be different from what somebody else thinks is effective.” Other respondents cited examples of staff disagreements regarding the value of collaboration. Most of the commentary about staff divisiveness over collaboration yields involved the issue of buy-in. Reinforcing this notion, Teacher Respondent 6 exclaimed, “Collaboration is awesome when everyone involved is there because they want to be involved and they have a common goal. If those pieces aren't there, then everyone's gonna be spinning their wheels.” According to the interview responses, most negative perceptions of collaboration sprang from situations where individuals were not afforded choice in the collaboration process.

### **Research Question 1c**

*From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?*

Three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data and artifact analysis pertinent to RQ1c. The most frequent theme involved collective inquiry being a goal at the school sites of the respondents, but not a reality. To explain why collective inquiry was not successfully occurring, respondents cited factors limiting the successful use of the cycle of inquiry. Despite a pattern in the research that suggested an under-utilization of the cycle of inquiry, there were occasions when respondents pointed out examples of success. Artifact analysis reinforced findings in this area of the study (see Tables 4.13 and 4.14).

Table 4.13

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1c*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Collective inquiry is a goal—not a reality	7	15
2. There are factors limiting the successful use of the cycle of inquiry	6	10
3. Collective inquiry is happening	2	7

Table 4.14

*Summary of Trends for RQ1c High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Collective inquiry is a goal—not a reality	Partial Use Lack of time Accountability
2. There are factors limiting the successful use of the cycle of inquiry	Buy-in Trust
3. Collective inquiry is happening	Academic coaches Mixed results Google docs Alternative evaluations

**Collective inquiry is a goal.** Seven of eight respondents discussed the notion that collective inquiry was not happening in its fullest sense at their sites. This finding was the most frequent of three findings pertinent to RQ1c. The data trends indicated that respondents felt there were reasons why full use of the cycle of inquiry was not happening at their sites. Some respondents cited partial use of the cycle of inquiry. Lack of teacher-to-teacher observations was a common missing component for those reporting partial use. For example, Teacher Respondent 7 described that “observation is a wish list item.” The respondent explained, “It feels like there aren’t constraints [to observing other

teachers] because the administration is supportive, but then there are just things that make it difficult.” Other reasons for lack of full use of the cycle of inquiry included lack of time and accountability issues.

**Limiting factors.** Six of eight respondents discussed factors that limited successful use of collective inquiry. Respondents cited lack of trust as one reason why collective inquiry was either not happening or was happening in a limited way. For example, Teacher Subject 7, in explaining the challenges of collective inquiry stated, “‘safe’ isn’t the right word, but more like you’re not willing to be exposed, or be judged.” Respondents pointed to lack of accountability as another limiting factor in relation to collective inquiry.

**Collective inquiry is happening.** Two of eight respondents offered success stories in regards to the way collective inquiry was working at their sites. Although both respondents mentioned “mixed results” amongst staff in efforts to employ the full cycle of inquiry, they did discuss ways in which collective inquiry was genuinely occurring. Teacher Respondent 3 remarked, “I was involved in a PLC that was genuine. We were really looking at student work, student data, identify[ing] students that were failing, and then coming up with interventions to help them be successful.” Both subjects who described successful use of collective inquiry mentioned that the alternative evaluation protocol at their sites incorporated a peer-to-peer evaluation process. One respondent mentioned that their district had hired instructional coaches to facilitate efforts at using collective inquiry.

## Research Question 1d

*From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?*

Three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data and artifact analysis pertinent to RQ1d. The most frequent theme related to this question was “talk, no action” an abbreviated way to say that teachers did not feel there was an action orientation at their site. The second most common theme was factors that influence action. Action requires structure and action thwarters had the same frequency; however, five sources mentioned that action requires structure, whereas four sources discussed ways in which action gets thwarted (see Table 4.15 and 4.16). Artifact analysis supported all findings in relation to RQ1d.

Table 4.15

### *Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1d*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Action Thwarters	8	20
2. Factors that influence action	7	10
3. Action requires structure	5	5



Table 4.16

*Summary of Trends for RQ1d High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Action thwarters	Talk Fear Accountability
2. Factors that influence action	Cost Buy-in Modeling Solution Tree Frustration from no action Action as a motivator
3. Action requires structure	SMART goals No system Intentionality

**Action thwarters.** All eight interview respondents made comments about how action gets thwarted for various reasons at their respective sites. With a frequency of 20, this was the highest ranking theme pertaining to RQ1d. The reasons that teachers pointed to when explaining why action gets thwarted at their sites were classified into three main trends: talk, fear, and accountability. Respondents commented that collaboration often involved teachers talking about possible reform but never taking action. For example, Teacher Respondent 6 remarked, “In my experience in terms of the way that the classroom teacher approaches teaching I think that it's a double edged sword. Because on one hand the focus on PLC and equity is important and it's a good reminder but I also feel that because it's long term work and it's really slow that people start to feel like it's a lot of talk and not as much action.” Fear of taking action was also a trend that emerged in relation to the theme of action thwarters. Reinforcing this notion, Teacher Respondent 1 stated, “We talk and talk and talk and talk and we never change anything. They're afraid

of what parents are gonna say.” The issue of accountability also arose as a trend in the responses to RQ1d. Respondents explained that without accountability measures set in place by administration, action rarely occurred.

**Factors influencing action.** Seven of eight teacher respondents discussed factors that either promote or prevent action from occurring within PLCs. There was a wide variety of factors that the respondents described. Although there were a total of 10 data segments relating to this theme, the researcher noted 6 trends. Because the trend value was very near to the frequency value, the trends served the purpose of helping to categorize the various factors that teachers pointed to that influence PLC action orientation. The factors were multifold. Teacher Respondent 6 described how the Solution Tree Inc. training helped to inspire action amongst staff who had received the training, stating: “[A]s a PLC lead I will say that the buy-in is pretty significantly different between people who went to the conference and people who didn't go to the conference.” Teacher Respondent 4 discussed how taking the action of implementing a mastery learning program in the math department yielded positive student results, which, in turn, served as a catalyst for further action. Other reasons that respondents identified that influenced action orientation included: money as a motivator, buy-in as a critical influencer, modeling as a motivator, and lack of progress as a demoralizing force.

**Action requires structure.** Five of eight teacher sources offered commentary related to the theme action requires structure. Teachers discussed the necessity for an organized structure to facilitate action. Teacher Respondent 2 explained that a lack of structure and accountability at the administrative level inhibited action at the teacher level. Teacher Respondent 2 exclaimed, “I feel like the accountability piece needs to

come back into play where admin's really looking at each department, showing up to each department, and saying, ‘What are you guys doing with your SMART goals, how are you guys being productive, have you been meeting your goals, is there anything I can do to help you meet your goals?’” Teacher Respondent 4 discussed the need for a system to guide action. The respondent stated, “PLCs just help [action] happen basically by getting teachers together and giving them a formal framework.” Other responses pointed out that a lack of management systems led to a lack of action.

### **Research Question 1e**

*From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?*

Three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data and artifact analysis pertinent to RQ1e. Factors that impede commitment was the most frequent theme related to this question. The second most common theme was disingenuous commitment. The final theme was factors that enhance the commitment to improvement. Artifact analysis supported all findings in this section (see Table 4.17 and 4.18).

Table 4.17

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1e*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Factors that impede commitment	7	30
2. Disingenuous commitment	6	14
3. Factors that enhance commitment	7	12

Table 4.18

*Summary of Trends for RQ1e High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Factors that impede commitment	Already good attitude Time Accountability
2. Disingenuous commitment	Complacency Disingenuous goals
3. Factors that enhance commitment	Clear standards Seeing improvement in others Modeling

**Factors that impede commitment.** Seven of eight respondents offered commentary on factors that impede the commitment to improvement. This finding had the highest frequency of all findings pertinent to RQ1e. According to the teachers, the factors that impede commitment to improvement fall into three categories: the perception that the school in which they work is already good, time constraints, and loose accountability. A high frequency of responses described the perception that the Basic Aid high school in which respondents worked already had good student outcomes. This attitude engendered a lack of commitment to improvement. For example, Teacher Respondent 7 remarked, “I mean that's a really difficult question to answer because the reality is this was a, from an outside numbers perspective, this was a good school before. It's a good school now.” Other respondents discussed how lack of time was an obstacle to commitment. Teacher Respondent 3 explained, “So like you wanted to work on this, here is two hours a month, which is pretty much all we have, I think. Give it three hours a month, whatever. Like here's no time for something that's really important” (emphasis added). The lack of time made available for PLC work, according to Respondent 3,

undermined true commitment. Lastly, accountability problems were the final contributor to lack of commitment. Exemplifying the ways in which lack of accountability leads to lack of commitment, Teacher Respondent 3 noted, “There wasn't really any accountability [in the PLC] and just like a lot of things in education it was like. If you want put in the extra time there you can, and if you don't, well that's okay too.”

**Disingenuous commitment.** Six of eight sources offered commentary about the lack of genuine commitment to improvement at their sites. This finding had the second highest frequency of all findings pertinent to RQ1e. Responses revealed two trends in relation to this theme: complacency and unrealistic goals. Comments about complacency tended to describe lack of buy-in by teachers to the PLC agenda set forth by administration. For example Teacher Respondent 3 explained that for “the people that aren't committed” the PLC collaboration time was time for them to “check the box and say, ‘Look, we did something,’ and there was even one group that made it sound like, ‘We are gonna [sic] try and not do anything.’” Other remarks about disingenuous commitment tended to cluster around the topic of disingenuous goals. Teacher Respondent 2, for example, stated, “I can say that for our department. Sometimes we kind of get complacent and well, we'll just do the same goal next year because we got [sic] different students.” Teacher Respondent 7 replied with a similar response, stating, “You want to do well and you want PLCs do well, but sometimes it can be put on the back burner, so you create something that looks like you're going through the proper motions, and the steps, and being successful with it. But are you really pushing or really asking something of your students that's going to be productive and produce fruit?” Overall, the combination of complacency and disingenuous goals that became apparent in the analysis

of the data led to the finding that teacher commitment to the PLC effort is often disingenuous.

**Factors that enhance commitment.** When prompted to speak on the topic of continuous improvement, seven of eight respondents described factors that enhance commitment. The suggestions given revealed three trends: clear standards, seeing improvement in others, and modeling. Teachers that spoke about clear standards perceived that lack of commitment was a result of unclear standards. Teacher Respondent 6 remarked, “I think is one of the differences between really robust successful [PLCs] and ones that are kinda really just more collaboration is that idea of having standards and expectations and coming together and making actual clear goals that are SMART goals that are measurable.” Other respondents pointed to seeing improvement in others as the motivational force that stimulates commitment. For instance, Teacher Respondent 5 remarked, “Well I think if [PLCs] are done right, they can push you to improve just because you're seeing what other people are doing. If other people are improving and you're not, it can be kind of... almost shaming.” The last trend related to the theme of continuous improvement was modeling. When teachers saw other teachers or administrators modeling best practices, it was perceived that improvement would follow. Teacher Respondent 5 reinforced this notion by explaining: “The way we grow as teachers so often is stealing things from other people. You've seen other teachers doing something, or hear about something else. Oh that's cool! I'm going to try that.” According to the teacher respondents, clear standards, seeing improvement in others, and modeling best practices all played key roles in fostering a commitment to improvement.

## Research Question 1f

*From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?*

Three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data and artifact analysis pertinent to RQ1f. The most frequent theme pertinent to this question was results are hard to measure. The second most common theme was lack of results orientation, or results orientation is not apparent. The final theme indicated the opposite—that a results orientation was apparent (see Table 4.19 and 4.20). Artifact analysis supported all findings in this section.

Table 4.19

### *Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ1f*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Results are hard to measure	7	29
2. Results orientation not apparent	6	16
3. Results orientation apparent	5	10

Table 4.20

### *Summary of Trends for RQ1f High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Results are hard to measure	Interventions regarded as results Subjectivity
2. Results orientation not apparent	In process Variation across departments Can't quantify
3. Results orientation apparent	Math leading the way Test scores Grades

**Results are hard to measure.** Seven of eight teacher interview subjects responded in ways that indicated there was difficulty measuring results. These responses fell in two categories. First, some respondents offered examples of specific and measurable results that the PLC framework would not regard as specific and measurable. For example, a number of respondents, in discussing results orientation, mistook interventions for results. Teacher Respondent 4, in explaining the results orientation of a PLC, stated: “We got a new book, we changed the order of the calculus curriculum, [and] physics, delayed some things. The stress level is much lower, and I think the kids are actually learning more.” The actions of using a new text and re-ordering the curriculum, were in this case, mistaken for PLC results—no specific and measurable student results were mentioned. Second, respondents commented on the subjectivity involved in measuring results, especially in non-math-and-science fields. Teacher Respondent 5 epitomized this point by stating, “I mean that is always a problem of trying to standardize anything like English. You got to [sic] take some subjective angle at some point in it, because writing is subjective.”

**Results orientation not apparent.** Six of eight respondents offered commentary on how targeted results were not occurring at their sites. Some of the responses associated with this theme explained that the PLCs had taken actions and were waiting to examine how those actions impacted student outcomes; but the outcomes were not yet available. For instance, Teacher Respondent 1 stated, “We're actually kind of evaluating right now the social emotional [assessment]. [Our administrator] [h]asn't really showed us results yet but we're working on results right now.” Other commentary from teacher interview subjects pointed to the fact that there was wide variation across departments in terms of



results orientation. Some departments were using student outcomes effectively as part of the cycle of inquiry, while other departments languished in inactivity. Teacher Respondent 2, for instance, stated, “I feel that some, not all, of the departments do take PLCs seriously and came up with a good SMART goal. They came up with times to meet because they wanted the students to do well. But some departments don’t even meet.” One final reason, according to the data analysis, that results are not happening at some schools in the sample group is that the results are difficult to quantify. As Teacher Respondent 3 put it, “I work with my best friends and you can't say that doesn't make me a better teacher. I have no way to measure that.”

**Results orientation is apparent.** Five of eight respondents offered positive stories about how targeted results are being achieved at their sites. These respondents were able to point out ways in which specific and measureable student outcomes were helping inform the cycle of inquiry in their PLCs. The trends for this theme fell into three categories: math leading the way, test scores and grades. Of the comments related to success stories about results orientation, a majority mentioned growth in student math outcomes. One teacher, Respondent 4, described a mastery learning intervention that a math PLC initiated with much success. This teacher explained, “[Students] have to pass. [Students] have to pass perfectly. And [they] can relearn and redo as many times as [they] need to, but [they] need to pass those [skills checks].” Teacher Respondents 2 and 8 also discussed how math PLCs had made specific and measurable progress at their respective sites. One way in which teacher respondents described success stories with respect to results orientation was by mentioning test scores. Teacher Respondent 1 stated, “Yeah, we have super high S.A.T. scores and like 98% go to college.” The same respondents

described grade improvements as a result of PLC efforts and how the site “got rid of plusses and minuses” as part of a social/emotional intervention that was designed to reduce student stress levels. In summary, math improvements, Test score improvements, and grade improvements are three ways that Basic Aid schools in Coastal California have demonstrated a results orientation.

## **Research Question 2**

*What do high school administrators perceive as success in relation to professional learning community practices?*

Similar to the analysis of RQ1, responses to RQ2 were broken down into three essential elements pertinent to the question. These elements were: defining PLCs, defining success, and perceptual differences. Frequency value comparisons for each of these elements mirrored results of the teacher data. Defining PLCs yielded the highest frequency. Defining success had the second highest frequency, and perceptual differences had the third highest frequency (see Tables 4.21 and 4.22). An analysis of the responses categorized under the three essential elements helped the researcher derive RQ2 findings.

Table 4.21

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2*

Essential Element	Sources	Frequency
1. Defining PLCs	8	162
a. Results orientation	8	69
b. Collaboration	8	58
c. Systems management	6	16
2. Defining success	8	54
a. Students at the center	8	32
b. GAP/Equity	4	10
c. Workplace relationships	6	9
3. Perceptual differences	8	36
a. Reasons for lack of agreement	7	17
b. Role differences	4	12

*Note.* Highlighted frequencies indicate essential element totals.

Table 4.22

*Summary of Trends for RQ2 High Frequency Themes*

Essential Element	Themes
1. Defining PLCs	Results orientation
	Collaboration
	Systems management
2. Defining success	Students at the center
	GAP/Equity
	Workplace relationships
3. Perceptual differences	Reasons for lack of agreement
	Role differences

**Defining PLCs.** Eight of eight administrative respondents made comments relating to defining PLCs an essential element of RQ2. This element recorded the highest response frequency of the three essential elements of the research question. Three themes emerged from the analysis of responses categorized under this element: results orientation, collaboration, and systems management.

**Results orientation.** The theme of results orientation yielded the highest frequency of themes related to defining PLCs (see Table 4.21). Findings related to the theme of results orientation are presented in the analysis of RQ2f below (see Tables 4.33 and 4.34). The analysis of the RQ2f identified three trends: 1) results orientation is apparent happening, 2) results are hard to measure, and 3) results orientation is not apparent. The analysis of these trends led to the finding that administrators perceive that a results orientation is critical to the successful PLC practices. This finding is supported by a number of statements made by the interview subjects. Administrator Respondent 6, for example, remarked:

I mean that's really the strength of [the PLC], that's the heart of it. And when you get a bunch of professionals together and they start... You know you get teachers together and they get geeked out and they start talking about things, and they start figuring out ways to make things better and they see the results of it, they jump on it.

Also commenting on the topic of results orientation, Administrator Respondent 4, said, “And all the PLC is ... It goes back to ‘How do you assess where we are?’ How do you get good results so you can assess where you are by looking at quarter grades and so forth.”

Administrator Respondent 2 added to the comments about results orientation, claiming:

And so I think a lot of tangible results that have happened from all of the movements of PLC and standards-based instruction have led to opportunities, and the PLC work brings in the common assessment, which is the low-hanging fruit of the PLC that was the major work years ago.

***Collaboration.*** Eight of eight administrative respondents discussed collaboration as essential to successful PLC practices. This theme recorded the second highest frequency result under the essential element defining PLCs. Findings related to the theme of collaboration were presented in the analysis of RQ2b (see Tables 4.25 and 4.26). Three trends arose in the data about collaboration: 1) collaboration as a positive, 2) mixed reviews about collaboration, and 3) collaboration as a negative. An analysis of these trends led to the finding that administrators view collaboration positively. In discussing the theme of collaboration, administrators often remarked about the connection between teacher collaboration and successful PLC practices. For example, Administrator Respondent 8 stated, “We’ve been successful with collaboration and the impact on student achievement’s been tremendous.” Expressing similar enthusiasm about the topic of collaboration, Administrator Respondent 6 explained, “We’re looking for teachers who are gonna collaborate or want to collaborate and are demonstrating that. And if you’re not, you don’t need to be here.” Adding more positive commentary about collaboration Administrator Respondent 3 stated, “I think [collaboration] is critical. Before I got here, there was a very strong culture of collaboration on this campus. And it’s carried on since I’ve been here.”

***Systems management.*** In the administrator interviews, the theme of systems management yielded the lowest frequency of responses related to the essential element of defining PLCs (see Table 4.21). Six of eight respondents made statements that were categorized under this theme. However, due to the relatively low frequency of these statements, this theme was not considered as a major finding.

**Defining success.** Eight out of eight administrator respondents made comments relating to defining success, an essential element of RQ2. This element had the second highest frequency of the three essential elements of the question. Three themes emerged from an analysis of the statements pertaining to the topic of defining success: students at the center, learning gaps and equity, and workplace relationships.

*Students at the center.* The theme of students at the center was the most frequently occurring of the three themes that emerged under the defining success element of RQ2 (see Table 4.21). Administrator data and teacher data yielded similar findings in relation to perceptions about defining success of PLCs. Both groups prioritized students first when considering how to measure the success in terms of PLC practice. Statements from administrators on the topic reinforced this finding. For example, Administrator Respondent 8, opined:

We're all here to do the best for them together, for each individual child, working with the kid, that we share the vision of success, helping a child and making them the best they can be...And we're there for kids. When you start to step back further from one kid to 20, to 200 to 2,000, you start to see some issues and some differences of success might be defined differently.

Administrator Respondent 7 also shared a student-centered vision of PLC success. Respondent 7 stated, "I would say [PLC success] a group of teachers working together to improve student learning in layman's terms."

Finally, Administrator Respondent 3 added, "To me I think educational success is adding value. Finding a way to add value to a young person's life is what's most important to me."

*The learning gap and equity.* The learning gap and equity theme emerged in the administrator commentaries about PLC success. Four respondents discussed how identifying targeted groups of students and developing measurably successful interventions to help them improve has become a hallmark of success at their sites. This theme had the second highest frequency of the three themes under the essential element of defining success (see Table 4.21). This theme did not surface in the teacher responses. Comments made by four of the eight administrator respondents reinforced this theme. Administrator Respondent 3 epitomized the commentary on learning gaps and equity by remarking:

In our district there's been a big push about college and AP and that kind of thing. But we realized that really alienates a lot of folks. And that's not a level of success. And so, part of our equity work is starting to define what it means to be successful?

Administrator Respondent 1 followed up with a similar comment, stating:

I think there could be a lot of ways to define success, where one kid could be the valedictorian and going to Harvard and you've got a special ed kid that's just slightly on the spectrum and he's going to a four-year university, and that's awesome.

*Workplace relationships.* The workplace relationship theme surfaced in six of eight administrator interviews and was not identified as a significant theme in the teacher interviews. This theme had a slightly lower frequency than the learning gap and equity theme, but 25% more sources made comments about the importance of workplace

relationships. The comments generally highlighted the importance of collegiality within PLCs. Administrator Respondent 8, for example, stated:

I think [success in PLCs] is about human nature and personalities. If you put your finger on it, you can have different personalities in different departments. But it's about people. It's about working together and understanding personality differences.

Administrator Respondent 6 added:

I gotta say, bringing it down to one word is pretty tough. I think in my altruistic way I would say community. If I had a community here that was caring and supporting that would feel successful to me. I'll stay with that. I'll stick with community.

Overall, the administrator interview subjects reflected more on the topic of interpersonal relationships than the teacher subjects.

**Perceptual differences.** Eight of eight administrator respondents commented on the essential element of perceptual differences. Of the three essential elements related to RQ2, this element recorded the lowest frequency values (see Table 4.21). Interview responses involving perceptual differences between administrators and teachers revealed two themes: 1) reasons for lack of agreement and 2) role differences.

***Reasons for lack of agreement.*** Seven of eight administrator respondents assumed that teachers and administrators had differing perceptions on PLC success and proceeded to describe reasons for such differences. The theme of reasons for lack of agreement recorded the highest frequency of themes related to the element of perceptual differences. The reasons that administrators gave have wide variation. For example,



Administrative Respondent 8 explained that teachers sometimes “feel resentment” and “don’t agree with the value of [PLC collaboration]” because they don’t “see the big picture”; whereas Administrator Respondent 3 noted that teachers have different priorities. Respondent 3 offered an example, stating:

But there are times they don't [share the same perspective]. I think back to my days as an English teacher. Goodness. There were plenty of times where I probably would have felt more like finishing off that last stack of essays versus sitting down with my team and really looking over data.

***Role differences.*** Four of eight administrator interview subjects opined that differences between administrators and teachers regarding PLC and educational success stem from the differing roles they play in the school. Most administrators commenting on this issue noted the need for administrators to see the “big picture” or evaluate outcomes in terms of larger numbers. Exemplifying this viewpoint, Administrator Respondent 4 commented:

Someone on the assembly line in the Ford plant has a different perspective than the driver of the car. And it has to be that way. That's why it's so important for an administrator to have been in the classroom, so he can go ‘I remember how I felt.’ The teacher’s thinking, ‘I'm gonna throw a Koosh ball around as a questioning technique.’ And the principal, who comes at it from a whole different perspective, says, ‘Whoa. Someone can get their eye poked out.’

Administrator Respondent 3 further described the different roles administrators and teachers play, remarking:

For me as a classroom teachers when I had 150 kids, I was worried about all of them graduating my class and moving on to the next or graduating from school and getting on. As an administrator, I look at 1,354 kids and making sure that they're able to move on and transition to the next step in their life. So, I think at the core, it's pretty much the same but I think as you become an administrator and you start to oversee larger numbers of teachers and students.

Most comments made in relation to this theme expressed a positive outlook on the necessary differences in perspective between teachers and administrators.

### **Research Question 2a**

*How do high school administrators view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?*

In relation to RQ2a, three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data. Similar to the teacher respondents, administrators expressed that student learning was the most influential factor in determining educational success. The data trend of student learning had the highest frequency. The next most frequent trend was positive outlook on vision. Finally, a trend worth mentioning but that was not included in the analysis due to low frequency was barriers to vision (see Table 4.23 and 4.24). Artifact data supported all findings with respect to this question. Administrative comments about vision were in line with school vision statements (or, in one case, lack thereof), as well as district mission statements.

Table 4.23

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2a*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Student learning defines success	8	45
2. Positive outlook on vision	5	11
3. Barriers to vision	2	3

Table 4.24

*Summary of Trends for RQ2a High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Student learning defines success	Students centered vision Student learning defines success
2. Positive outlook on vision	Vision creates unity Alignment and consistency
3. Barriers to vision	Not goal driven Already good school Accountability

**Student learning defines success.** When discussing the relationship between shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning and educational success, all eight administrator subjects commented about the importance of placing students at the center of the school’s vision. This theme had the highest frequency of the RQ2a themes. The theme student learning defines success occurred over four times more often than the any other theme pertinent to RQ2a. Several responses by administrators led to the finding that students, according to administrators, should be the central focus of school vision. Administrator Respondent 4, for example, remarked, “The vision helps guide the ship toward the North Star. You never actually reach it, but you are constantly trying to sail in that direction. And you’re constantly asking, ‘Are we making

our kids academically successful?’” Comments about students at the center of the school vision ranged in topic from “identify[ing] improvement opportunities” for students, to “using data to support students,” to helping students “become better neighbors.”

**Positive outlook on vision.** Six of eight interview subjects offered commentary that was categorized under this theme. Administrator subjects expressed a generally positive outlook regarding the importance of school vision being student-centered and enabling educational success. Administrator Respondent 8 commented on how school vision helps to provide a structure for organizational thinking. This respondent stated, “what’s really cool is we have alignment between our district plan, our strategic plan at the district, our WASC plan with our action plan from the WASC, and the school vision.” Reinforcing the positive outlook on vision, Administrator Respondent 2 remarked that “vision provides the foundation for expectations.”

**Barriers to vision.** Two of eight respondents made comments describing barriers to a successful vision orientation at their site. These comments noted barriers, such as lack of staff awareness of vision and, in one case, lack of understanding of how the organizational vision relates to the PLC process. Due to low frequency, this theme was excluded in the final analysis.

## **Research Question 2b**

*From the perspective of the high school administrator, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?*

In relation to RQ2b, three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data. Analysis of the administrator responses to RQ2b yielded findings very similar to the findings from teacher responses to the same question. Like the teachers, administrators

viewed collaboration as a positive, as evidenced by this theme’s high frequency. Also similar to the findings of the teacher interviews, the theme with the second highest frequency for administrators was mixed reviews on collaboration (see Table 4.25). Collaboration as a negative was also a theme that emerged in the responses to RQ2b. However, due to the fact that only two sources had comments in relation to this theme and due to low frequency, it was not considered in the analysis. Artifact data supported all findings with respect to this question.

Table 4.25

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2b*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Collaboration as a positive	8	29
2. Mixed reviews on collaboration	6	13
3. Collaboration as a negative	2	5

Table 4.26

Summary of Trends for RQ2b High Frequency Themes

Theme	Trends
1. Collaboration as a positive	Fosters growth and learning Increases consistency Spreads positivity
2. Mixed reviews on collaboration	Trust gets in the way Buy-in is key
3. Collaboration as a negative	Mostly talking Accountability is a problem

**Collaboration as a positive.** Eight of eight sources made comments that expressed a positive outlook on the topic of collaborative culture as it relates to educational success. This theme had the highest frequency of all the themes related to

RQ2b. Three trends pertinent to the theme of collaborative culture emerged during the analysis: collaboration fosters growth and learning, collaboration increases consistency, and collaboration spreads positivity. Administrator Respondent 7 explained how collaboration enhanced professional growth. This respondent stated, “I think it's created a better environment overall, because I think a lot more teachers work together now and have a lot more conversations about students and about teaching.” Other administrators expressed similar enthusiasm about collaboration at their respective sites.

**Mixed reviews on collaboration.** Six of eight respondents made comments that reflected an overall positive outlook on collaboration, but with mention of inconsistency and some negativity. The theme of mixed reviews had the second highest frequency of themes related to RQ2b. It is important to note that all six respondents held a positive outlook on collaboration, but their responses were categorized under the theme of mixed reviews because the comments pointed out some negativity. An example of a statement that was categorized under mixed reviews came from Administrator Respondent 6 who stated:

I get really excited because I'm a department liaison to English, and I get excited listening to what they're doing. I go, ‘God I wish I could collaborate like that when I was a teacher.’ Our English teams are really good. Our Social Studies department is probably one of the best overall. And we also have some teams that are totally dysfunctional, and they don't like each other.

**Collaboration as a negative.** Two of eight respondents made comments that expressed negative views about collaboration. These comments involved a perception that staff had not bought into the collaboration effort at their respective sites. As the

finding indicated, however, collaboration was regarded positively by administrators. The theme of collaboration as a negative will not be included in the final analysis.

### **Research Question 2c**

*From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?*

Three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data and artifact analysis pertinent to RQ2c. The themes are the same themes that emerged from the teacher data, however, the frequency values were different. Whereas the teachers spoke more frequently about collective inquiry being a goal and not a reality the most, administrators spoke more frequently about factors limiting the more widespread use of the cycle of inquiry. However, both teachers and administrators did cite examples where the cycle of inquiry was being effectively employed at their schools. For both groups the theme collective inquiry is happening had the third highest frequency (see Tables 4.27 and 4.28) Artifact analysis reinforced findings in this area of the study.

Table 4.27

#### *Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2c*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. There are factors limiting the successful use of the cycle of inquiry	5	21
2. Collective inquiry is a goal—not a reality	6	10
3. Collective inquiry is happening	2	7

Table 4.28

*Summary of Trends for RQ2c High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. There are factors limiting the successful use of the cycle of inquiry	Time Trust Passive resistance
2. Collective inquiry is a goal— not a reality	Lack of follow through Lack of observation
3. Collective inquiry is happening	Small scale Coaching Alternative evaluation

**Limiting factors.** Five of eight administrator respondents discussed factors that limit the full functional use of the cycle of inquiry at their school sites. This was the most prominent theme that emerged in relation the RQ2c. Comments categorized under this theme revealed three basic trends. Time was the limiting factor most commonly referred to. Trust issues recorded the second highest frequency of the trend data, and passive resistance had the lowest frequency of the trends. In regard to time as a limiting factor, Administrator Respondent 6 explained, “Well actually I think once you get involved in this process, and if you're doing it and doing it well...people are like, ‘We don't have enough time to do this.’ And we [administrators] are like, ‘Well, how do we get you more time?’” Speaking on the issue of trust, Administrator Respondent 1 stated, “But there are a few departments where there's mistrust and they have a lot of work to do. Especially if all the members of the department are permanent employees. They're not going anywhere.” Passive resistance was also mentioned in the administrator responses, but the frequency of statements pertaining to this trend was minimal.



**Collective inquiry is a goal.** Six of eight respondents discussed the notion that collective inquiry was not happening in its fullest sense at their sites. This finding was the second most frequent of three findings pertinent to RQ2c. The data trends indicated that respondents felt there were reasons why full use of the cycle of inquiry was not being effectively employed at their sites. Those reasons comprise the most common theme pertinent to RQ2c, limiting factors (outlined above). Lack of follow through was a trend under the theme collective inquiry is a goal—not a reality. Exemplifying this trend, Administrator Respondent 8 remarked, “Yeah, the common story is, ‘The offer is out there.’ And in most cases, everybody has the intention. They just don't have the follow-through to make it happen.” Lack of teacher-to-teacher observation was another trend revealed by the data that helped to explain why the full use of the cycle of inquiry was not happening.

**Collective inquiry is happening.** Two of seven administrative respondents offered examples of the full cycle of inquiry being effectively used at their sites. Although administrators more frequently spoke about occasions when the full cycle of inquiry was not being successfully used, at least two administrators stated the opposite. For example, Administrator Respondent 5 explained that after more than two years of struggling as a teacher and district curriculum coach to implement PLCs, Respondent 5 was finally able to do so once a teacher coalition was formed. Respondent 5 remarked:

“So in year two we started with a 40-day PLC challenge; working through the process, using resources and coming back during our professional learning day in October and reflecting on a really highly-structured, guided PLC cycle. It finally had some legs.”

## Research Question 2d

*From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?*

Two themes emerged in relation to RQ2d on action orientation. Administrators differed considerably from teachers in relation to their perceptions about action orientation at their sites. Unlike teachers, administrators tended to speak more positively about the PLC process and their responses indicated that they were enthusiastic about the actions that teachers were taking in their PLCs. The most prominent theme emerging in this section was examples of actions taken. Administrators also discussed factors that inhibit action, the second theme under RQ2d (see Table 4.29 and 4.30). Artifact analysis supported all findings in relation to RQ2d.

Table 4.29

### *Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2d*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Examples of actions taken	7	23
2. Factors that inhibit action	3	11

Table 4.30

### *Summary of Trends for RQ2d High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Examples of actions taken	Social emotional curriculum Schedule changes Curricular innovations
2. Factors that inhibit action	Buy-in Passive resistance Time Accountability challenges

**Examples of actions taken.** Seven of eight administrator interview subjects spoke enthusiastically about actions taken as a result of PLC work done at their sites. Responses pertaining to this theme reflected three basic trends in the data. These trends included: implementation of a social emotional curriculum, schedule changes, and curricular innovations (see Table 4.30). The theme of social emotional focus surfaced throughout the interview process as a whole—not just in response to RQ2d. Seven of eight principals included in this study commented on social emotional curriculum work being done at their sites. Administrator Respondent 5, for example, commented, “So we’re focusing on kids who need more intervention. Our freshman have a social emotional learning curriculum that takes up one of those [collaboration times] a week.” Other topics that administrators discussed in response to RQ2d included schedule changes and curricular innovations. Administrative Respondent 8 explained, “We changed how we did our block schedule, how we did our start and end times.” Administrative Respondent 5 described an innovation of the art department at Respondent 5’s site: “The art department can say ‘Well, what’s something in common that we could be doing?’ And so they came up with writing” (sic).

**Factors that inhibit action.** Three of eight respondents commented with relatively low frequency about factors that inhibit thorough action orientation at their sites. The factors they described had a wide topic range. Administrator Respondent 7 discussed challenges in keeping teachers accountable. Reinforcing this notion, Respondent 7 stated, “One group is just, they’re just doing what they want and they’re just working on stuff, but not necessarily following what we’ve kind of set as a standard or expectation.” Administrator Respondent 8, attempting to convey the difficulty

administrators face in promoting action orientation, sarcastically quoted one of the site’s PLC groups. Imitating a teacher, Respondent 8 remarked, "Yeah, I agreed to that last year but I changed my mind. I don't want to do that decision anymore. Oh, I don't want to have to actually go to those meetings or do anything. I don't want to have to be accountable to my colleagues." Discussing the inhibiting factor of time, Administrative Respondent 5 remarked, “So a lot of the action does come down to the PLCs... still trying to get the interventions together, kid by kid, skill by skill. But coordination is the hardest part because we only have two forty minute flex times in the week.”

**Research Question 2e**

*From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?*

Two themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data and artifact analysis pertinent to RQ2e. Administrators, once again, differed from teachers in the interview responses pertinent to RQ2e. In general, administrators were more positive about the commitments to improvement that they were seeing, whereas teachers saw lack of commitment and disingenuous commitment. Factors that enhance commitment was the most frequent theme related to the administrator responses to this question. The second most common theme was factors that impede commitment (see Tables 4.31 and 4.32). Artifact analysis supported all findings in this section.

Table 4.31

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2e*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Factors that enhance commitment	6	15
2. Factors that impede commitment	6	12

Table 4.32

*Summary of Trends for RQ2e High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Factors that enhance commitment	Unconventional approach Solution Tree Buy-in
2. Factors that impede commitment	Already a good school Accountability is a challenge Inconsistency

**Factors that enhance commitment.** Six of eight administrator interview subjects responded with comments that addressed factors that enhance commitment to improvement. These responses expressed an attitude of satisfaction regarding the levels of commitment administrators were observing in their teachers. Comments categorized under this theme offered explanations as to why there was a satisfactory level of commitment to the PLC process from all or most staff. Several administrators talked about ways that they had adapted the conventional PLC approach to fit the needs of the teaching and learning culture of their respective sites. For example, Administrative Respondent 2, remarked: “I think my ideas are a little rogue from a true PLC definition anymore, and I'm okay with that... We're giving the teachers choice.” The administrators also commented on the positive value of the Solution Tree training. In four of eight interviews, administrators made positive comments about Solution Tree. Administrator Respondent 5 explained how the Solution Tree training has assisted in bringing about buy-in from teachers. Respondent 5 remarked:

“I have been to the [Solution Tree] conference four times. The instructional counsel have all been to solution training and have buy-in and are leads

themselves and are kind of the ones evangelizing the process and building larger systems of support out of it.”

**Factors that impede commitment.** Six of eight administrator interview subjects responded to interview questions by discussing factors that impede commitment to improvement. In all cases, Administrators reported that commitment to improvement is inconsistent; some teachers and PLCs are thriving, while others are stagnating. According to the administrators, the reasons for the inconsistency vary. Some administrators point to accountability as the problem. Others commented on the complacent attitude that results from teaching in an “already good school.” Administrator Respondent 8 summarized this sentiment by reflecting:

We're in a unique situation here at [Generic Name High School], being such a high achieving school. There isn't [sic] as many conversations around best practices, because so many teachers end up with great measurements from their students. From the outside looking in, you have all these great measurements... But I think there isn't that urgency amongst our staff to go see other teachers who are really successful or to even improve their own craft by working with one another through the observation and the PLC process.

### **Research Question 2f**

*From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?*

Three themes emerged from an analysis of the interview data and artifact analysis pertinent to RQ2f. The most frequent theme pertinent to this question was results orientation is apparent, a finding that contrasted with findings from the teacher

interviews. This theme had the lowest frequency in the teacher interviews. The second most common theme emerging from the administrator interviews pertinent to RQ2f was results are hard to measure. The final theme was results orientation is not apparent (see Table 4.33 and 4.34). Artifact analysis supported all findings in this section.

Table 4.33

*Frequency of Sources and Themes for RQ2f*

Theme	Sources	Frequency
1. Results orientation is apparent	6	31
2. Results are difficult to measure	6	16
3. Results orientation is not apparent	3	5

Table 4.34

*Summary of Trends for RQ2f High Frequency Themes*

Theme	Trends
1. Results orientation is apparent	Statistics given Use on instrumentation
2. Results are hard to measure	Interventions regarded as results Subjectivity
3. Results orientation is not apparent	Perceptions and emotions

**Results orientation is apparent.** Six of eight administrator interview subjects responded to questions by commenting on specific and measurable results that were occurring at their sites. The relatively high frequency led to the finding that administrators are more results oriented than teachers. Comments about specific and measurable results, tended to focus on data figures and the instruments used to gather

data. Administrative Respondent 8, for example, mentioned an impressive increase in college attendance after high school. Respondent 8 stated:

“We looked at how we could increase the awareness around college-going culture within the high school, ultimately leading towards acceptance rates. Really looking at schools that traditionally, 30% of the kids go to college, and within a matter of two to three years, we've been able to flip that to 60 to 65% of kids.”

Administrator Respondent 6 discussed an assessment instrument being used by the math department to ensure mastery of skills. Respondent 6 commented, “[The math department] started this thing called skill checks. And these are... I'm going to make up a number, but the 10 most important skills you need in geometry to say you know geometry and you're ready to go Algebra 2.”

**Results are hard to measure.** Six of eight administrator subjects made comments that indicated that—despite attempts to be results oriented—results are hard to measure. Most often, comments were categorized under this theme because administrators had reported an action taken by a PLC as a result. For example, Administrator Respondent 2 reported the action of making classes more uniform through sharing of best practice. In the words of Respondent 2: “I think a big tangible result of that is that a student's experience. At your school success shouldn't be based upon the teacher you get. It should be some level of a common experience.” Administrators also replied to questions about tangible results by citing perceived emotions as results. For example, Administrator Respondent 7 commented, “I think staff is happier. I don't think things are perfect, but I think one result is with as far as with PLCs, I think they're happy. For the most part, I think they're pretty happy.”



**Results orientation is not apparent.** Three of eight administrators discussed how specific and measureable results were not uniformly being achieved in the PLCs at their respective sites. Comments categorized under this trend were minimal and typically pointed out situations where PLCs were not functioning properly. Because the source and frequency values for this theme were low, it was not included in the final analysis.

### **Research Question 3**

*Are there differences in perception between high school teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?*

The analysis of RQ1 presented findings pertinent to teachers' perceptions of success in relation to PLC practices. The analysis of RQ2 presented findings pertinent to administrators' perceptions of success in relation to PLC practices. RQ1 and RQ2 were each accompanied by sub-questions that reflected elements of the PLC framework. Table 4.35 lists the top themes for each of the sub-questions, as generated by teacher interviews and administrative interviews. For sub-questions 1a and 2a—which focused on mission, vision, and goals—findings between the two groups were identical. For sub-questions 1b and 2b on collaboration findings between the two groups were identical. For sub-questions 1c and 2c on collective inquiry findings were similar; although the top frequency themes were not identical, the second most frequent theme for administrators matched the top theme of teachers. Additionally, both groups reported challenges in their ability to fully implement the cycle of inquiry throughout all PLCs at their sites (see Tables 4.13 and 4.27). Differing perceptions between teachers and administrators became apparent in the comparative analysis of RQ1d and RQ2d. Top themes for these questions

revealed contrasting perceptions about action orientation between teachers and administrators. Teachers spoke of barriers to action, whereas administrators cited examples of actions taken. Differences between the two groups were also apparent with respect to sub-questions 1e and 2e on the topic of commitment to improvement. Teachers noted factors that impede commitment, whereas administrators noted factors that enhance commitment. Lastly, the two groups once again exhibited differing perspectives in relation to sub-questions 1f and 2f on the topic of results orientation. Teachers spoke of the difficulties they confronted in achieving and measuring results, whereas administrators reported that a results orientation was apparent (see Table 4.35).

Table 4.35

*Summary of Top Themes per Sub-question*

RQ	Teachers	RQ	Admin
1a	Student learning	2a	Student learning
1b	Collaboration as a positive	2b	Collaboration as a positive
1c	Cycle of inquiry is a goal—not a reality	2c	There are factors limiting the successful use of the cycle of inquiry
1d	Action thwarters	2d	Actions taken
1e	Factors that impede commitment	2e	Factors that enhance commitment
1f	Results are hard to measure	2f	Results orientation is apparent

**Action orientation.** Teacher and administrators differed in their perceptions about action orientation at their sites. Teachers reported that there were limitations inhibiting progress toward action orientation. Among these factors were a tendency to use collaboration as talking time rather than moving toward action, fear about the responsibilities that accompany taking action, and lack of accountability (see Table 4.16).

Administrators reported positively about action orientation, often listing actions taken by their staff. However, the second most frequent theme for administrators with respect to RQ2d was factors that inhibit action. Trends listed in relation to these inhibiting factors include: lack of buy-in amongst the staff, passive resistance, time constraints, and accountability challenges (see Table 4.30). Based on these findings, it is apparent that administrators in the sample are aware that action orientation can, in most cases, be improved and that implementing stronger accountability systems and allowing more time for structured collaboration would help this cause.

**Commitment to improvement.** An analysis of the top frequency themes for RQ1e and RQ2e revealed that teachers and administrators differed sharply in their responses to questions about commitment to improvement. Teachers noted factors that impede commitment and spoke of disingenuous commitment. Among the factors that impede commitment, according to the teachers, are: 1) an attitude that the school at which they work is already good, 2) lack of time, and 3) accountability issues (see Table 4.18). Administrators responded to questions about commitment to improvement more positively. For the administrators the top frequency theme was factors that enhance commitment. The administrators did, however, acknowledge that they saw factors that impede commitment as well, for factors that impede commitment was the theme with second highest frequency. With respect to factors that impede commitment, the administrator data revealed three trends: 1) an attitude that the school at which they work is already good, 2) accountability issues, and 3) inconsistency in commitment across departments. So despite differing perceptions regarding commitment to improvement in general, teachers and administrators were in agreement with respect to their explanations

about lack of commitment. The “already a good school” perception was common in both groups. And both groups saw accountability as a problem.

**Results orientation.** Teachers and administrators again differed in their perceptions about results orientation at their sites, as evidenced by the analysis of responses to RQ1f and RQ2f (see Tables 4.19 and 4.33). Teachers were more inclined to report negatively about results. The highest frequency theme for teachers was results are difficult to measure. The second highest was results orientation is not apparent. Conversely, administrators reported that results orientation is apparent, a finding reflecting the top theme for RQ2f. Administrators also reported, however, that results are difficult to measure. The theme second in frequency for administrators matched the top frequency theme for the teacher responses to questions about results orientation. Moreover, the trends pertinent to the results are hard to measure theme were identical for both groups. Teachers and administrators, alike, spoke about the subjectivity of many of the results they had observed. Additionally, both groups tended to conflate actions and results.

**Essential elements.** Based on an analysis of top frequency themes, teachers and administrators had differing perceptions with respect to two of three essential elements in the research questions. Teachers and administrators had differing views about defining PLCs. They shared similar views in regard to defining success. Lastly, they once again diverged in their explanations to questions about differing perceptions (see Table 4.36).

Table 4.36

*Summary of Top Themes per Essential Elements*

<b>Essential Element</b>	<b>Top Frequency Teacher Theme</b>	<b>Top Frequency Administrator Theme</b>
Defining PLCs	Collaboration	Results orientation
Defining Success	Students at the center	Students at the center
Perceptual Differences	Image orientation for administrators	Reasons for lack of agreement

*Defining PLCs.* When sorting the data according to top frequency themes, the researcher saw that teachers and administrators differed in their perceptions about the key elements of a PLC. Teachers perceived that collaboration is the most important element of a PLC, whereas administrators perceived that a results orientation is the most important. Teacher comments about the value of collaboration tended to focus on the positive feelings they experienced as a result of collaboration. For example, Teacher Respondent 7 remarked:

And one of the weird things about teaching is that you're often times on an island, and for me I enjoy being on a team. Even forced collaboration, I think, is good collaboration, 'cause it helps you not feel like you're not on an island.

Unlike the teachers, the administrators did not describe positive feelings they experienced through PLC work, rather, they described results. For example, Administrator Respondent 8 remarked, “We took 15 action items. We narrowed it down to our top 10, then we prioritized those and we started really hammering away at those over the last two years.”

*Defining success.* An analysis of the high frequency themes revealed that teachers and administrators shared similar opinions on the notion of defining success. The data clearly indicated that both groups prioritized student growth as the most important factor in determining educational success. Administrator Respondent 2 summed up the importance of placing students at the center of the definition of educational success, stating, “All I care about is people working together to improve student outcomes and be aware, to institutionalize the ability to see the need and strategically and intentionally address them” (sic). Teacher Respondent 2 similarly pointed to the importance making the improvement of student outcomes part of a school’s definition for success. Respondent 2 remarked, “I think just creating a community where people can come together and feel supported, get feedback, and come up with ideas for student success.”

*Perceptual differences.* The frequency data revealed differing viewpoints between teachers and administrators on the topic of perceptual differences regarding PLCs and educational success. Multiple teachers expressed the opinion that administrators seemed preoccupied with school image. Teacher Respondent 3, for instance, stated:

Honestly, I feel like an administrator is gonna feel successful when parents and boards aren't complaining, which is kind of a sad way to look at things, but I think if there's nobody breathing down their necks, then they're successful 'cause the school is successful.

Administrators, on the other hand, tended to offer reasons explaining the perceptual divide between teachers and administrators. Administrator Respondent 3 provided words

of wisdom on the topic based on decades of experience as a teacher and as an administrator. Respondent 3 explained:

As much as you will always want to have that teacher perception of kids and classrooms and education and where you want to go, over time, you do lose a little bit of touch with it. And you bring in a different perspective. You begin to look at success through a lens you've acquired as an administrator versus an experience as a teacher...So, I think there's always going to be a different perception a perspective that people bring. It's just finding a way to utilize both of those for a common goal.

### **Summary**

Chapter IV began with a reiteration of the purpose statement, research questions, followed by a review of the methodology and data collection procedures, as well as the population and sample for the study. The demographics of the sample were then delineated and the analysis of data presented. The analysis was organized around the three research questions and accompanying sub-questions. The analysis of sub-questions was presented in advance of the analysis of main questions in order to show a progression of logic in the exploration of the perceptions of teachers and administrators on the relationship between PLC practices and school success.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have played an integral role in transforming the public education system in America for over two decades (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Hord, 1997a; Muhammad, 2009). Research has pointed to an array of successful outcomes yielded by PLC processes (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013; Vescio, 2008). Researchers, however, have struggled to determine what actually constitutes the achievement of “success” in public education; therefore, the association between PLCs and school success, as the research points out, is largely a matter of perception (Stamper, 2015; Tuttle, 2015; Watson, 2014). Teachers and administrators, two groups who have historically held differing perceptions about school success (Labaree, 2005), also view PLC processes through different perceptual lenses; but there is a paucity of research that explores the nature of these differing perceptions. This study fills the gap in the literature by examining the differing perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the association between PLC practices and school success. This chapter begins with a restatement of the study’s purpose the research questions, followed by a description of the methodology, including the population and sample. The major findings of the study are presented along with unexpected findings. The researcher then presents the conclusions that are drawn from the findings and discusses implications for action. Next, the researcher recommends topics for further research based on the findings and conclusions presented. Lastly, the researcher offers reflections and concluding remarks.



## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how high school teachers and administrators in Basic Aid funded school districts define success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices. A secondary purpose of this study was to explore the differences in perception between teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices.

## **Research Questions**

RQ1: What do high school teachers perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

- a. How do high school teachers view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?
- b. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?
- c. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?
- d. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?
- e. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?
- f. From the perspective of the high school teacher, how important is focusing on

tangible results to the attainment of educational success?

RQ2: What do high school administrators perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

- a. How do high school administrators view the importance of a shared mission, vision, values, and goals that are focused on student learning in relation to educational success?
- b. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how does being part of a collaborative culture relate to the achievement of educational success?
- c. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is it for teachers to share best practices and inquire collectively about students' levels of learning?
- d. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is innovation and attempting new strategies to the attainment of success?
- e. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is a commitment to continuous improvement to the attainment of educational success?
- f. From the perspective of the high school administrator, how important is focusing on tangible results to the attainment of educational success?

RQ3: Are there differences in perception between high school teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?

## **Methodology**

This qualitative research study used the phenomenological approach to explore the perceptions of teachers and administrators on the relationship between professional learning community practices and school success. Data collection involved 16 semi-structured interviews, as well as an examination of artifacts collected from each of the interview sites. An interview script was prepared and pilot-tested prior to the interviews to enhance consistency in the data collection process (see Appendix B). The script contained 10 structured questions addressing essential elements of the research questions and the theoretical framework for the study, which was presented in Chapter II. Additional probing questions were included in the script to allow for flexibility in the dialogue and sensitivity to the dynamics of each interaction.

The research design for the study, including the interview script and research questions was approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB) on December 2, 2017 (see Appendix D). Interview participants were sent invitation letters via e-mail asking them to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Subjects who agreed to participate were presented with the Research Participant's Bill of Rights and required to sign informed consent and audio recording paperwork prior to the commencement of the interviews. The researcher secured all interview and artifact data after each interview. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and each school site to keep information private. Audio files were kept in a secure location and destroyed after the verification of accurate transcription. Transcription services were provided by Rev.com, a third party professional transcription service. All transcriptions were reviewed and compared with the original audio files to ensure accuracy. Two of 16

interview subjects requested to review their transcription documents prior to the commencement of data analysis. No changes to the transcriptions were requested.

This study used inductive analysis, a type of analysis that is characteristic of all qualitative research (Patten, 2014). The researcher began by conducting an initial review of the data to identify segments, units of relevant information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The segments were then assigned codes, which were written in the margins of the transcriptions and recorded separately in a code book. A total of 294 codes were recorded upon initial review of the interview transcriptions and artifacts. After eliminating repeated codes 243 codes remained for categorization (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Themes were chosen based on relevance to the theoretical framework for the study. A total of eight themes were selected. NVivo qualitative coding software was then used to rearrange data segments thematically. A structure for organizing the data segments into grandparent, parent, and child nodes was created, and the data was recoded using the software. This time teacher data and administrator data were coded separately. Both data sets included eight thematic categories and one “wastebasket” category for irrelevant but high frequency data. The results of the analysis were presented in Chapter IV of the study.

### **Population and Sample**

The general population of this study consisted of teachers and administrators working at California Basic Aid public high schools that use PLC systems. Basic Aid high schools, according to Weston (2013), are among the most successful schools in California based on an analysis of average performance index (API) scores. All of the subjects in the general population worked at these notably successful schools and also

had at least three years of experience working in PLCs at their sites. Research indicates that the presence of PLC systems correlates with successful outcomes in schools (DuFour, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013).

The target population, as defined by Asiamah, Mensah, and Oteng-Abayie (2017), is a refinement of the general population. The target population also includes all units from which a population sample is drawn (Creswell, 2013). The study's target population, which meets the aforementioned requirements, consisted of teachers and administrators in Basic Aid high schools in Central and Northern Coastal California that utilize PLC systems. Twelve of 69 high school districts met the qualifications for Central and Northern Coastal California Basic Aid (Weston, 2013). The sample of teachers and administrators was drawn from these 12 high school districts. Only subjects who worked in schools with PLC systems and who had three years of experience participating in or managing PLCs were included in the study.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) a sample is "the group of subjects from whom the data are collected" (p. 490). Purposive sampling was employed in this study to select eight teachers and eight administrators from the target population. The subjects participating in the study had worked in or managed PLCs for 3 or more years, and all were currently involved in PLC work at their sites.

## **Major Findings**

### **Research Question 1**

*What do high school teachers perceive as success in relation to professional learning community practices?*

**Major Finding 1.** High school teachers perceived that administrators often prioritize maintaining a positive school image over genuine concerns about student learning. The theme of image orientation had a source frequency of 100% and appeared in two separate thematic categories in the research: perceptual differences and defining success. Teachers perceived that, in terms of perceptual differences, administrators tend to look at student learning through a macroscopic lens, focusing more on big data trends and schoolwide results. Teachers also perceived that the administrative definition of success relies more on the maintenance of a positive school image than a genuine concern for student learning.

This finding is supported by the literature in Chapter II of this study. Research on administrative perceptions in education points to a longstanding perceptual divide between teachers and administrators. Administrators focus more on system-level needs like centralization, governance and reform, whereas teachers focus more closely on student learning (Labaree, 2005; Mondale & Patton, 2001; Walberg & Geneva, 1990). Further research suggests that the negative perception teachers hold toward administrators results from the differing roles they play within their social settings. As outlined by Zimbardo (2007), situational forces, especially those involving power differences, have a large influence on attitudes and behavior. It is not uncommon for subordinate groups to resist power use by superiors (Fairholm, 2009). Opposition, Fairholm (2009) explained, occurs most often when groups disagree about goals and methods.

## Research Question 2

*What do high school administrators perceive as success in relation to professional learning community practices?*

**Major Finding 2.** High school administrators perceived that results orientation is the most essential factor linking PLC work and school success. Of the six elements of the study's theoretical framework, administrators remarked about the element results orientation the most, indicating that achieving results is an administrative priority. Teachers, on the other hand, placed the element collaborative culture with a focus on learning as a top priority of PLC work.

This finding is supported by the literature in Chapter II of this study. As was the case with Major Finding 1, the finding that administrators prioritize results orientation in front of other aspects of PLC work points to a longstanding perceptual divide between teachers and administrators. Tyack (1974) explained that, from as far back as the Progressive Era, school administrators have been responsible for enforcing adherence to the system, a role that requires the utilization of positional power to direct teacher behavior. The phrase "factory model" was used to describe the approach to school management during this time period because management systems in schools were being modeled after the systems used in factories (Mondale & Patton, 2001; Ravitch, 2016). Bowles and Gintis (1976) claimed that the factory model approach laid the foundation for modern practice, explaining that administrators have always taken a macroscopic perspective when aiming for successful outcomes. Coupled with the increased focus on accountability that accompanied the standards and outcomes-based movement, which sprang up in the wake *A Nation at Risk (ANAR)* in 1983, the tendency for administrators

to care about the numbers and to prioritize *en masse* results accords with findings in the literature (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Maduakolam, 2016).

### **Research Question 3**

*Are there differences in perception between high school teachers and administrators with regard to defining success in relation to professional learning community practices?*

**Major Finding 3.** High school teachers and administrators share the same perspective that results of PLC work are often subjective and difficult to measure; one prominent reason is that both groups have a tendency to conflate actions and results. This finding had high frequency values for both interview groups and shared identical data trends. In addition to the struggles both groups reported in trying to use objective to assess results, many of the results that were reported would have been better classified as actions.

This finding is supported by the literature in Chapter II of the study, particularly the literature on outcomes-based education. In explaining the distinction between standards and outcomes Porter (1994) noted difficulties that system administrators have faced in keeping track of outcomes in the midst of superabundant and constantly shifting standards. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) explained that the “lack of clarity on intended results” (p. 65) has consistently plagued educational reform efforts. Often, ambiguity of results stems from lack of clearly articulated standards (Spady, 1994).

### **Unexpected Findings**

The three research questions for this study yielded three major findings that were supported by the analysis of data, as well as by the review of literature. Major Finding



(MF1) revealed that teachers perceive that administrators prioritize school image over student learning. This finding was reinforced in the literature outlining the differing roles that teachers and administrators serve in schools (Labaree, 2005; Mondale & Patton, 2001; Zimbardo, 2007). Major Finding 2 (MF2) revealed that administrators place high emphasis on results when considering PLC work and school success. Literature on the history of scientific management and accountability pressure in schools reinforced this finding (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Ravitch, 2014; Tyack, 1974). Major Finding 3 (MF3) revealed that teachers and administrators share the perception that results are difficult to measure and often conflated with actions. Research on outcomes-based education supported this finding (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Porter, 1994; Spady, 1994). In addition to these three major findings, there were three unexpected findings that surfaced during the course of the study.

### **Unexpected Finding 1**

It was unexpected to find that teachers and administrators in Basic Aid high schools perceived that their students need more social emotional support due to high rates of depression and teen suicide clusters in their communities. This finding had no relation to the research questions or the theoretical framework for the study; however, six of eight teachers and seven of eight administrators commented on the topic of social emotional needs the PLCs were attempting to address at their sites. Interview subjects at all five research sites mentioned problems in their student bodies with depression and suicide. Based on the data, three of the five research sites used in the study were part of a notable suicide cluster. Comments made by teachers and administrators reinforce this finding. For example, Administrator Respondent 6 stated:

Oh yeah, we're doing lots of social emotional work. We have a big mental health team but it's not enough. I don't think you've heard about all the stuff [in a nearby district]. They've had a huge suicide cluster that has happened in that area. And there's been studies and researches and lots going on there [sic], and they've tried a bunch of different approaches. We haven't had that suicide cluster fortunately. We have kids though that, I bet 51-50 a lot of kids. We have kids who have breakdowns because they got an A-. Some kids will thrive under having 12 AP classes. But we have really said we really need to look at some of those things and how are we contributing to that level of stress.

Teacher Respondent 7, who was from a different site, also commented on social emotional needs and suicide problems. Respondent 7 remarked:

We had I don't know how many speakers that have come for parent nights to talk teen stress. I can't remember the woman who was from Stanford who talked about over-scheduling your kids. She talked about the suicide cluster in [unnamed town], and we like have that history here, which is kind of sad.

Administrator Respondent 5 also mentioned the phrase suicide cluster when discussing PLC work Site 5. Respondent 5 commented:

We had a suicide cluster here. Then the board and everybody basically made a big committee and said 'We need a K12 SEL curriculum, and so that is in our schedule while we are in two flex periods. Right now there's only 9th grade, but it was supposed to have been in all grades.

The theme social emotional needs ranked amongst the highest in terms of frequency values. Most comments spoke to need to limit student stress levels due to high student

reporting of feelings of depression. And, as noted, some of these comments directly mentioned suicide clusters. This unexpected finding is supported by outside research. Koplewicz, Gurian, and Williams (2009) used the term “affluenza” to metaphorically refer to an illness that strikes teenagers growing up in privileged environments. Luther and Barkin (2012) studied high school students in affluent environments and found they were at greater risk for maladjustment. Indicators of maladjustment included substance abuse, depression, suicidality, and feelings of isolation.

### **Unexpected Finding 2**

It was unexpected to find that Administrators in Basic Aid high schools were adapting the PLC process to conduct organizational change work at their sites. The change work being done, in most cases, did not have a direct connection to classroom learning. Five of eight Administrator Respondents attested that they were employing an unconventional PLC process at their sites. This finding had the highest frequency value of 11 themes that were recorded as unrelated to the research questions. When probed about how the PLC were unconventional, respondents described a need to use PLCs for site-wide work. Comments from administrators and teachers reinforced this unexpected finding. For example, Administrator Respondent two stated, “I think my ideas are a little rogue from a true PLC definition anymore, and I'm okay with that... We're giving the teachers choice.”

Administrator Respondent 5 also discussed an unconventional approach to PLC work, stating:

The NGSS is like an engine, and then the PLC process is the gap that actually makes the parts drive and work. So a lot of it had been probably not been 100%

by the book Solution Tree PLC because we have to try to turn it more into a design focus process.

Teacher Respondent 3 described an unconventional PLC from the teacher's point of view, stating:

Oh yeah. [The PLC groups] were all over the place. I mean like, 'How do we help students evaluate each other's work? How do we design a maker space?' It was all over the board what people were doing. And then when you ask. 'What is effective mean?' We had groups, they shared what they did and they all said, 'Here's something we did.' And so that someone can check a box and say it was effective.

Overall, the data revealed that PLC practices in Basic Aid high schools deviated from the conventional practices. Most often the adjustment made to the standard practice served to address organizational needs or to satisfy teacher desires. This unexpected finding is supported by literature from DuFour and DuFour (2007). The authors responded to questions about how to define PLC practices and emphasized the importance of differentiating between PLCs, collaborative teams, and task forces.

### **Unexpected Finding 3**

It was unexpected to find that teachers and administrators in Coastal California Basic Aid high schools hold the opinion that they work in schools that are already successful. Research has indicated that the notion of success in education is subjective and the result of reification. Lagemann (2000) explained that educational success was once based on "abstract values" and "theological beliefs" (p. 23). Even when more objective measures of success were developed, with the rise of empiricism, experts still

questioned whether assessment instruments could sufficiently measure intellectual growth (Englund, 2000). More modern educational research has indicated that operationalization of the term success has seen wide variation (Hamilton, 2013; Vescio et al., 2008). Weston (2013) outlined the advantages that students in Coastal California Basic Aid schools have relative to the more common Revenue Limit schools—higher standardized test scores being among the indicators of success the author noted.

Despite the abstruseness of the concept of success, interview data revealed that teachers and administrators in Basic Aid districts regarded their schools as already successful. Comments from both groups support this unexpected finding. For example, Teacher Respondent 7 commented, “Our school looks successful because of test scores, and we are successful because we have an extremely high literacy rate. Successful statewide. Students go into college.”

Teacher Respondent 2 made a similar remark, claiming:

It can be tough when you're at a high-performing school. A lot of it is, the students are individually driven to do well, and you could almost have a teacher that could sit there and do nothing, and pass out the book, and all the kids could pass the test because they're just smart.

Offering an administrative perspective on the same issue, Administrator Respondent 8 stated:

You know, I think we're in a unique situation here at [Site 4], being such a high achieving school. There isn't [sic] as many conversations around best practices, because so many teachers end up with great measurements from their students. From the outside looking in, you have all these great measurements, and so many

teachers are doing a great job, and we are blessed. We have wonderful teachers here. But I think there isn't that urgency amongst our staff to go see other teachers who are really successful or even improve their own craft by working with one another through the observation process or an [inaudible 00:21:29] process.

Administrator Respondent 2, from another Basic Aid high school, shared a similar attitude:

...that's why we're a basic aid district that's why people come to live in this area, because education is a priority, and they want every advantage for their child that they could possibly have. So, I have one of the luxuries here that I haven't had in previous schools, and that is I don't have to worry about what my academic scores look like because they pretty much take care of themselves...

Staff at all sites shared the perception that their schools were already successful.

Comments on this topic pointed to the notion that with the perception of success comes an attitude of complacency, a feeling that reform is not urgent. This attitude is reinforced by the work of Kotter (2008) who claimed, "Complacency is almost always the product of success or perceived success. Complacency can live on long after great success has disappeared. Perceptions do not always have to be accurate" (p. 20). Perceived success and an accompanying attitude of complacency had a significant impact on the PLC practices examined in this study.

### **Conclusions**

The research findings outlined above were supported by the literature review contained in Chapter II of this study. The three major findings that stemmed from the research questions were, in a general sense, predicted by the existing body of literature on

topic of PLCs and school success. However, the three unexpected findings presented did not affirm the same type of symbiosis between past literature and current analysis.

Together, the major findings and unexpected findings provided insight into the differing perceptions of teacher and administrators on the relationship between professional learning community practices and school success. From those insights, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Teachers harbor inherent distrust of administrative motives regarding decisions around student learning. The combination of political power dynamics and the need for compliance with system mandates creates a friction between the two groups. Research on the longstanding perceptual divide between teachers and administrators supports this conclusion (Fairholm, 2009; Labaree, 2005).
2. Of the six essential elements of the PLC framework (1. Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals, 2. Collaborative Culture, 3. Collective Inquiry, 4. Action Orientation, 5. Commitment to Improvement, and 6. Results Orientation), administrators view results orientation as the highest priority item in managing their schools. One of the primary roles of the administrator is to help their schools maintain system conformity and to manage accountability. Research on the role of the administrator in public education explains why administrators may feel inclined to consider results first when making management decisions. It is possible that the administrative prioritization of results over other factors, however, contributes to the perception, on the part of teachers, that administrators are image oriented.
3. Teachers and administrators in Coastal California Basic Aid high schools are unclear about the results they aim to achieve and methods by which they intend to achieve

them, often conflating actions and outcomes. The literature on outcomes-based education acknowledges that educators—from the national level, the state level, to the district level, to the site level, to the classroom—have struggled to successfully link standards with outcomes. The finding that teachers and administrators think results are often subjective and that they reported actions as outcomes reflects widespread confusion about how to properly execute outcomes-based management models in the arena of public education.

4. Students in high performance districts experience higher than average levels of stress due to performance expectations and competitive school culture. Coastal California Basic Aid districts are amongst the highest performing districts in the state in terms of standardized test results (Weston, 2013). Dwyer (2014) explained that there is a growing trend of student anxiety—especially in schools where “high performance expectations” (para. 5) are part of the school culture. The literature suggests that this growing trend is not limited to students in high performance districts alone. Citing a report from the American Psychological Association, Brackett (2016) discussed how today’s teenagers are under more stress than prior generations; they have higher suicide rates, and “are among world leaders in violence, binge drinking, marijuana use, obesity, and unhappiness...”
5. There is an increasing need for teacher leadership in California public high schools. As the legislative pendulum has swung back in the direction of decentralization, the idea of “local control” is taking on a new shape. Under the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), schools are confronted with higher accountability and reporting demands (Education, 2015; Menefee-Libey & Taylor Kerchner, 2015; Webber et al.,



2014). Antiquated top-down management structures will not be sufficient in helping schools to meet these demands (Fullan, 2014; McKibben, 2015). The unexpected finding that administrators are using PLC models to conduct organizational change work speaks to the need for schools to build more leadership capacity (Fullan, 2011; Lambert, 1998).

6. The perception of success in Coastal California Basic Aid high schools, has led teachers and administrators to adopt complacent attitude about the need for reform. Teachers and administrators at schools with high student test scores do not feel a sense of urgency to improve through PLC work (Kotter, 2008). This conclusion is supported by the findings, as well as current literature.

### **Implications for Action**

The conclusions of this study imply actions that can be taken by formal and informal leaders in California public high schools to address issues related professional learning and school climate. Based on the review of literature and research findings, the following actions are recommended:

1. School leaders should take proactive steps to build leadership capacity among teaching staff to mitigate the "us versus them" mentality. Some suggestions include: building or expanding instructional coaching programs to allow teachers leaders to handle administration and reporting for PLCs, restructuring alternative evaluation protocol to include peer observations and evidence of use of the cycle of inquiry, highlighting specific student success stories in staff gatherings to showcase the administrative focus students--not just data-oriented results, and revisiting or revising school mission and vision statements (with full community input) to unify all

- stakeholders under a common purpose.
2. School administrators should broaden their conception of "student results" to include results not measured by standardized tests. Any actions that administrators can take to demonstrate and publicize their personal interest in how student learning is impacted by specific pedagogical strategies will to help engender staff buy-in.
  3. School leaders should take steps to expand organizational learning at their sites so that staff becomes more adept at using action research principles to identify student growth needs. Instrumentation for measuring the success of planned interventions should be developed internally by staff and should be tailored to fit specific research questions that arise from internal dialogue on topic of student learning.
  4. It is recommended that school leaders expand programs that attend to the social-emotional needs of students. Some suggestions include: hiring more counseling staff, adding peer counseling programs, building social-emotional learning into the curriculum, and auditing student homework loads and scheduling choices. These types of interventions should not be seen as solutions in and of themselves; rather they should be implemented strategically as part of an outcomes-oriented action research design.
  5. It is recommended that teacher credentialing programs blend school leadership curriculum into the existing course requirements. A secondary recommendation is that districts choosing to implement PLC processes clearly delineate systems, roles, and responsibilities used for standard classroom-based PLC work versus larger scale organizational change work. To facilitate a shift toward more de-centralized site leadership—which, in Fullan’s (2014) terms, would increase decisional capital—

- district leaders should consider reducing teaching loads to allow more time for teachers to participate in organizational learning and change.
6. It is recommended that school leaders use transformational change strategies to shift mindset from complacency to growth. Murphy and Dweck (2010) discussed how leaders can improve organizational culture through hiring practices that intentionally promote an incremental lay theory of intelligence amongst staff. Tan (2017) proposed that by valuing potential over accomplishments and hiring from within, leaders can improve organizational mindset and motivation. Through growth mindset practices and gap analysis training educators and school leaders can better learn to identify areas for potential growth and work together to improve outcomes for students.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

This study has explored the perceptions of teachers and administrators on the relationship between professional learning practices and educational success. To continue the exploration of this topic of study and to add to the body of literature, the researcher recommends investigation into the following areas of scholarly research:

1. This study investigated Basic Aid high schools on the Northern and Central Coast of California. It is recommended that similar studies be conducted in schools that, according to published research, have achieved successful outcomes.
2. This study found that teachers and administrators in Basic Aid high schools perceived that their students need more social emotional support due to high rates of depression and teen suicide clusters in their communities. It is recommended that more research be conducted that investigates the relationship between cultures of high performance and rates of student depression.

3. This study found that administrators have been using the PLC cycle of inquiry approach to pursue organizational change initiatives at their sites. This finding led to the conclusion that, in the current public education climate, there is a need for increased leadership capacity and expanded decisional capital. It is recommended that research be conducted regarding the efficacy of intentionally designed models of diffused leadership in public schools.
4. This study found that teachers and administrators in Basic Aid high schools in Northern and Central California perceived that their schools were already successful. It is recommended that further quantitative and qualitative research be conducted that explores the degree to which these schools are influencing the success, or lack thereof, of marginalized student populations.
5. Interview data suggested that older teaching staff tended to express more resistance to engaging in PLC work. Older staff also tended, more often, to have a negative perception on the role of the administrator. It is recommended that further research be conducted to examine if, how, and why older staff hold these opinions.
6. The State of California has recently implemented an accountability dashboard that provides a new means by which to display school and district results based on a five-by-five grid that produces 25 results. This new system aims to offer a more complete picture of the results schools are achieving. It is recommended that further research be conducted on the topic of PLC models and school success as determined by results published on the new state accountability dashboard.
7. The limited scope of this study did not allow for the researcher to demonstrate connections between interview subjects at the same site. It is recommended that this

- research topic be investigated using an in-depth case study approach in order to assess teacher and administrator perceptions as they pertain to a single school culture.
8. This study used the DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) PLC framework to guide the research and interview questions. This framework defines PLC's at the organizational level, which may explain why respondents commented frequently about organizational change work at their sites. It is recommended that this work be replicated using a framework that focuses on PLC success at the classroom level.

### **Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

The phenomenon of the professional learning community (PLC) has played a significant role transforming American public school since it first emerged as a viable means of school improvement in the mid-1990s. The research on PLC's is conclusive. Study after study describes how the presence of PLCs has helped schools improve results. From student test scores, to perceptions about school culture, to instructional practices, to student writing, to staff relations, the positive yields of PLCs run the gamut. But despite the breadth of literature linking PLCs to positive outcomes, there is still wide variation on what constitutes a significant outcome; moreover, determining how those outcomes relate to success remains a mystery. As Lagemann (2000) noted, research has struggled to understand the nature of success in the arena of public education. Success has remained an elusive concept whose meaning relies heavily on individual perception. Adding to the challenge of understanding the relationship between PLCs and school success is the amorphousness of the PLC itself. Watson (2014) warned of the "complacent and potentially damaging empirical consensus" (p. 19) that exists around PLCs. The author

went so far as to allege that PLCs and their outcomes are the result of reification, the socially constructed association between an abstract concept and material reality.

The design of this study sprang from the researcher's own struggle to feel secure in the definitions of school success and PLCs that prior research provided. The abstract nature of both concepts (success and the PLC) and the lack of consistent definitions for either made any attempt to scientifically associate them seem futile. This seed of skepticism led to researcher to pursue the method of phenomenology, a term that literally means "appearances of things." The phenomenological approach offered the researcher an opportunity to investigate the intersection between PLC practices and school success using a philosophical lens, by examining, through direct account, the perceptions of real people with real stories about the PLC experience. Through synthesis and eidetic reduction perceptions and experiences of interview subjects would come together to illuminate the "essence" of the PLC phenomenon and its association with school success.

To gain insight into this "essence," the researcher interviewed eight teachers and eight administrators working in some of the most successful schools in California—schools that also utilize PLC processes. Through the interviews, the researcher extracted rich descriptions about the relationship between PLCs and school success. These descriptions varied in their accounts. There were stories from both sides that touted the many ways in which PLCs help to improve student learning and other aspects of school culture. One teacher voiced the opinion that PLCs are "the best reform that has happened in education." Conversely, there were also accounts of disingenuous PLC practices and even a story about one group whose collaboration goal was to do nothing at all, just to spite administrative efforts at reform.

In grappling with the interview accounts and weighing them against the knowledge gleaned from an extensive review of literature on the topic, the researcher ultimately arrived at the belief that success in education— although it may be elusive in a quantifiable sense—is indeed attainable; those who have worked tirelessly to help shape the lives of students in positive ways know success by experience alone. And, for many of those who have experienced the feeling of success as an educator, the phenomenon of the professional learning community has been part of their story. As the interviews revealed, not all of the stories about PLCs and school success have happy endings. But where teachers and administrators engaged genuinely in the *process* of PLC work, success followed.

## REFERENCES

- About Smarter Balanced. (2017). Retrieved from  
<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/history/>
- Academic performance index. (2016, Tuesday, November 22). Retrieved from  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ap/>
- Accrediting Commission for Schools: Western Association of Schools and Colleges.  
(2016). Retrieved from <http://www.acswasc.org/>
- Achieve. (2013). *Closing the expectations gap: 2013 annual report on the alignment of state k-12 policies and practices with the demands of college and careers*. Retrieved from Washington, D.C.:  
<http://www.achieve.org/files/2013ClosingtheExpectationsGapReport.pdf>
- Alderson, A., & Martin, M. (2007). Outcomes based education: Where has it come from and where is it going? *Issues in Educational Research*, 17(2), 161-182.
- Allan, J. (1969). *The American public school*. San Francisco, CA: McGraw Hill.
- Alvoid, L., & Black, W. L. J. (2014). The changing role of the principal: How high-achieving districts are recalibrating school leadership. Retrieved August 20, 2017, from Center for American Progress  
<https://www.scribd.com/document/232000627/The-Changing-Role-of-the-Principal>
- Andersen, A. (2016). *An investigation of the relationship between professional learning communities and mathematics achievement by students*. (Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University, Ann Arbor). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Database. (UMI No. 10159192)



- Anyon, J. (1980). Social class and the hidden curriculum of work. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 162(1).
- Arbetter, E. B. (2008). *The relationship between the maturity level of professional learning communities (PLCs) and student achievement*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri - Saint Louis, Ann Arbor). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Database. (UMI No. 3341168)
- Archer, K. R. (2012). *The historical context and development of professional learning communities*. University of Kansas, Ann Arbor. Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Database. (UMI No. 3524335 Ed.D.)
- Asiamah, N., Mensah, H. K., & Oteng-Abayie, E. F. (2017). General, target, and accessible population: Demystifying the concepts for effective sampling. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(6), 16-17-1621.
- Astiz, M. F., Wiseman, A. W., & Baker, D. P. (2002). Slouching toward decentralization: Consequences of globalization for curricular control in national education systems. *Comparative Education Review*, 46(1), 66-88.
- Babbie, E. (1992). *The practice of social research* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Inc.
- Barton, P. E. (2009). *National education standards: Getting beneath the surface*. Retrieved from Princeton, NJ:  
<https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/PICNATEDSTAND.pdf>
- Berman, B. (1983). Business efficiency, American schooling, and the public school superintendency: A reconsideration of the Callahan thesis. *History of Education Quarterly*, 23(3), 297-321.

- Bidwell, A. (2014, March 6). The politics of Common Core; The controversial educational standards have political implications as well. *U.S. News and World Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/news/special-reports/a-guide-to-common-core/articles/2014/03/06/the-politics-of-common-core>
- Bleiburg, J., & West, D. (2014). In defense of the Common Core standards. Retrieved from Brookings Institution: [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Bleiberg\\_West\\_Common-Core-State-Standards.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Bleiberg_West_Common-Core-State-Standards.pdf)
- Bobbitt, F. (1920). The objectives of secondary education. *The School Review*, 28(10), 738-749. Retrieved from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1078496>
- Bonk, C. J., & Cunningham, D. J. (1998). Searching for learner-centered, constructivist, and sociocultural components of collaborative educational learning tools. *Electronic Collaborators: Learner Centered Technologies for Literacy, Apprenticeship, and Discourse*, 25, 25-50.
- Boser, U. (2012). *Race to the Top: What we have learned from the states so far?* Washington, D.C. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. ED535605)
- Boser, U. (2014). *Return on educational investment: 2014. A district-by-district evaluation of U.S. educational productivity*. Center for American Progress. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. ED561093)
- Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in capitalist America*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Brackett, M. (2016, June 22). Today's students may be emotionally unprepared. *New York Times*.

- Brandt, R. (1992). On outcomes-based education: A conversation with Bill Spady. *Educational Leadership*, 50(4), 66-70.
- Brooks, J. S., & Miles, M. (2006). From scientific management to social justice...and back again? pedagogical shifts in the study and practice of educational leadership. *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 10(21).
- Burgoon, J. K., Burgoon, M., Miller, G. R., & Sunnafrank, M. (1981). Learning theory approaches to persuasion. *Human Communication Research*, 7(2), 161. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. 61815816)
- Buschee, F., & Baron, M. A. (1994). OBE: Some answers for the uninitiated. *The Clearing House*(4), 193.
- Bush, G. H. W. (1989, September 28). Joint statement on the education summit with the nation's governors at Charlottesville, Virginia. Accessed at [http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public\\_papers.php?id=971&year=1989&month=all](http://bushlibrary.tamu.edu/research/public_papers.php?id=971&year=1989&month=all) on August, 11, 2017
- Cavanaugh, S. (2010). U.S. common standards push bares unsettled issues: Familiar themes emerge in resurgent debate. *Education Week*, 29(17), 5-6, 8-11.
- Charles, D. C. (1987). The emergence of educational psychology. In J. A. Glover, R. R. Ronning, J. A. Glover, & R. R. Ronning (Eds.), *Historical foundations of educational psychology*. (pp. 17-38). New York, NY, US: Plenum Press.
- Chicosky, C. L. (2015). Restructuring the modern education system in the United States: A look at the value of compulsory education laws. *Brigham Young Universtiy Education and Law Journal*, 2015(1).

- Civic Impulse. (2017) . H.R. 2460—102<sup>nd</sup> Congress: AMERICA 2000 Excellence in Education Act. Retrieved from:  
<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/102/hr2460>
- Cohrs, M. (2014). *An examination of the critical components and efficacy of professional learning communities*. (Doctoral dissertation, California State University, Fresno, Ann Arbor) Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Database. (UMI No. 3624848)
- Common Core State Standards*. (2016). Sacramento, CA: CDE Retrieved from  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/index.asp>.
- Corcoran, S. P. (2010). *Can teachers be evaluated by their students' test scores? Should they be? The use of value-added measures of teacher effectiveness in policy and practice*. Retrieved from Annenberg Institute for Reform at Brown University, New York, NY.
- Cranston, J. (2007). *Holding the reins of the professional learning community: Principals' perceptions of the normative imperative to develop schools as professional learning communities*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Manitoba, Canada). Available from ProQuest Doctoral and Theses Database (UMI No. NR36258)
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cubberley, E. P. (1919). *Public education in the United States: A study and interpretation of American educational history*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

- Curry, N. D. (2010). *The implementation of professional learning communities components and perceptions of self-efficacy by teachers and school administrators*. (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University-Commerce, TX). Available from ProQuest Doctoral and Theses Database (UMI No. 3430294)
- DeBray-Pelot, E., & McGuinn, P. (2009). The new politics of education: Analyzing the federal education policy landscape in the post-NCLB era. *Educational Policy*, 23(1), 15-42. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. 000262018600002)
- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a 'professional learning community'? *Educational Leadership*(8), 6. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. 000221311200002)
- Dufour, R. (2012). When districts function as professional learning communities. *Education Digest*, 77(9), 28-29.
- DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2007). What's the difference between a PLC, a collaborative team, and a task force. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.allthingsplc.info/blog/view/23/whatsquos-the-difference-between-a-plc-a-collaborative-team-and-a-task-force>
- DuFour, R., DuFour, R. B., & Eaker, R. E. (2008). *Revisiting professional learning communities at work : new insights for improving schools / Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker*: Bloomington : Solution Tree, c2008.
- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. E. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

- Dufour, R., & Marzano, R. J. (2011). *Leaders of learning: How district, school, and classroom leaders improve student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Dwyer, L. (2014, October 3). When anxiety hits at school. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/10/when-anxiety-hits-at-school/380622/>
- Education, C. D. o. (2015). *What are common core standards?* Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/tl/whatareccss.asp>
- Edwards, D. B. J., & DeMatthews, D. E. (2014). Historical trends in educational decentralization in the United States and developing countries: A periodization and comparison in the post WWII context. *Educational Policy and Analysis Archives*, 22(40).
- Englund, T. (2000). Rethinking democracy and education: towards an education of deliberative citizens. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 32(2), 305. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. 3958657)
- Farrace, B. (2002) *Building capacity to enhance learning*. interview with R. Elmore.
- Fairholm, G. W. (2009). *Organizational Power and Politics: Tactics in Organizational Leadership*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.
- Flipp, C. (Producer). (2014, March 10, 2016). Qualitative vs. quantitative. [Video] Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X-QSU6-hPU>
- Franklin, B. M. (1989). Progressivism and curriculum differentiation: Special classes in the Atlanta public schools, 1898-1923. *History of Education Quarterly*, 29(4).

- Friedman, T. L., & Mandelbaum, M. (2011). *That used to be us*. New York, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Fuhrman, S., & Lazerson, M. (2005). *The Public Schools*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fullan, M. (2011). *Change leader : learning to do what matters most / Michael Fullan*: San Francisco : Jossey-Bass/Wiley, c2011. 1st ed.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Fullan, M. (2014). *The principal: Three keys to maximizing impact*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Gamson, D. A., McDermott, K. A., & Reed, D. S. (2015). The Elementary and Secondary Education act at fifty: Aspirations, effects, and limitations. *The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Sciences*, 1(3), 1-29.
- Geib, G. W. (1985). The Land Ordinance of 1785: A bicentennial review. *Indiana Magazine of History*, 81(1), 1-13.
- Gherardi, S. (2001) From organizational learning to practice-based knowing, *Human Relations*, 54(1), 131-139.
- Gittell, M. (1972). Decentralization and citizen participation in education. *Public Administration Review*, 32 (Curriculum Essays on Citizens, Politics, and Administration in Urban Neighborhoods), 670-686.
- Glatthorn, A. A., Jailall, J. M., & Jailall, J. K. (2017). *The principal as curriculum leader: Shaping what is taught and tested* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Goals 2000 and ESEA. Retrieved from:

<https://clinton.presidentiallibraries.us/exhibits/show/education-reform/goals-esea>

Goals 2000: Educate America Act. (1994). Washington, D.C. Retrieved from

<https://www2.ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/intro.html>.

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding reliability and validity in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 8(4), 597-607.

Goodman, J. (1995). Change without difference: School restructuring in historical perspective. *Harvard Educational Review*, 65(1), 1. Goyette, C. M. (1995). *Goals 2000 and the evolution of outcome-based education: A transformational movement and its effect on school curriculum, the classroom teacher, and multicultural education*. (Doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University).

Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 9530544)

Gutek, G. L. (1995). *The history of the western educational experience* (2nd ed.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc.

Hamilton, J. L. (2013). *Professional learning communities impact on student achievement*. (Doctoral dissertation, Saint Mary's College of California).

Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 3568312)

Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2013). The power of professional capital. *Journal of Staff Development*, 34(3), 36-39.

Harrington, T. (2016). *California Smarter Balanced test results data*. Retrieved from Oakland, CA: <https://edsources.org/smarter-balanced-results/>

Harris, A., Jones, M. S., & Huffman, J. B. (2017). *Teachers leading educational reform: the power of professional learning communities*. New York, NY: Routledge.



- Hattie, J. (2015, June). What works best in education: the politics of collaborative expertise. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/corporate/global/pearson-dot-com/files/hattie/150526\\_ExpertiseWEB\\_V1.pdf](https://www.pearson.com/content/dam/corporate/global/pearson-dot-com/files/hattie/150526_ExpertiseWEB_V1.pdf)
- Henson, K. T. (1996). *Methods and strategies for teaching in secondary and middle schools*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers.
- Herman, J., & Lynn, R. (2013). *On the road to assessing deeper learning: The status of Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessment consortia*. Retrieved from Westwood, CA:
- Hill, S. D. (2009). *Leadership and sustainable change: The relationship between leadership practices of principals and reculturing schools as professional learning communities*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of North Texas)  
Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 3381953)
- The History of Goals 2000. (2017). Retrieved from Purcellville, VA:  
<http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000010/200209010.asp>
- Honderich, T. (1995). *Phenomenology* (T. Honderich Ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hood, J. (1993). The Failure of American Public Education: Why educational reforms have failed to improve public schools. *The Freeman*, 44-50.
- Hord, S. M. (1997a). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Retrieved from Austin, TX:  
<http://www.sedl.org/pubs/change34/plc-cha34.pdf>

- Hord, S. M. (1997b). Professional learning communities: What are they and why are they important. *Issues About Change*, 6(1).
- Hughes, J. (2011). The great land ordinances: Colonial America's thumbprint on history. In D. C. Klingman & R. K. Vedder (Eds.), *Essays on the Economy of the Old Northwest*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press.
- Hughes, T. A., & Kritsonis, W. A. (2006). A national perspective: An exploration of professional learning communities and the impact on school improvement efforts. *Online Submission*. Available at ERIC Database (Accession No. ED491997)
- Hunt, S. L., & Staton, A. Q. (1996). The communication of educational reform: "A Nation at Risk.". *Communication Education*, 45(4), 271-292. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. edsgcl.18985435)
- Husserl, E. (2002). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Iorio, S. H. (2011). *School reform: Past, present and future*. Retrieved from <http://webs.wichita.edu/depttools/depttoolsmemberfiles/COEdDEAN/School%20Reform%20Past%20Present%20and%20Future.pdf>
- Jeffrey, J. R. (1972). *Education for children of the poor: A study of the origins and implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. (Ph. D.), Rice University, Houston, TX. (72-26-429)
- Jochim, A., & McGuinn, P. (2016, Fall). The politics of the Common Core assessments. *Education Next*, 16(4). Retrieved from: <http://educationnext.org/the-politics-of-common-core-assessments-parcc-smarter-balanced/>

- Joseph Mayer Rice. (2013). Retrieved from Net Industries  
<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2370/Rice-Joseph-Mayer-1857-1934.html>
- Kenny, A. (1994). *The Oxford History of Western Philosophy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Kirst, M. W., & Wirt, F. M. (2009). *The political dynamics of American education, 4th ed.* Richmond, CA: McCutchan Publishing Corporation.
- Kivinen, O., & Ristela, P. (2003). From constructivism to a pragmatist conception of learning. *Oxford Review of Education*, 29(3), 363.  
doi:10.1080/0305498032000120300
- Klein, A. (2015). No Child Left Behind: An overview. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/no-child-left-behind-overview-definition-summary.html>
- Koplewicz, H. S., Gurian, A., & Williams, K. (2009). The era of affluence and its discontents. *American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 48(11), 1053-1055. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. RN259603946)
- Kotter, J. (2008). *A sense of urgency*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.
- Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Kozulin, A., Gindis, B., Ageyev, V. S., & Miller, S. M. (2003). *Vygotsky's Educational Theory in Cultural Context*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Kruse, S., Louis, K. S., & Bryk, A. (1994, Spring). Building professional community in schools. *Issues in Restructuring Schools* (Report No. 6), 3-6.

- Kuritz, H. (1972). *From order to economy: Education and order in Eighteenth Century America*. State University of New York, Albany, NY. (083081)
- Labaree, D. F. (2007). Limits on the impact of educational reform: The case of progressivism and U.S. Schools, 1900-1950. Paper presented at the The Century of the School: Continuity and Innovation During the First Half of the 20th Century, Ascona, Switzerland.  
[https://web.stanford.edu/~dlabaree/publications/Monte\\_Verita\\_Paper.pdf](https://web.stanford.edu/~dlabaree/publications/Monte_Verita_Paper.pdf)
- Labaree, D. F. (2005). Progressivism, schools and schools of education: An American romance. *Paedagogica Historica*, 41(1 & 2), 275-288. Retrieved from [https://web.stanford.edu/~dlabaree/publications/Progressivism\\_Schools\\_and\\_Schools\\_of\\_Ed.pdf](https://web.stanford.edu/~dlabaree/publications/Progressivism_Schools_and_Schools_of_Ed.pdf)
- Lagemann, E. C. (2000). *An elusive science: The troubling history of education research*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lambert, L. (1998). *Building leadership capacity in schools*. Alexandria , VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Law, G. F. (1982). *Vocational education in the 19th Century American academy*. Available at ERIC Database (Accession No. ED 226144)
- Lawson, M. J., & Askill-Williams, H. (2007). Outcomes-based education. *Associated Independent Schools of SA*. Retrieved from [https://www.ied.edu.hk/obl/files/pratical\\_guide\\_5.pdf](https://www.ied.edu.hk/obl/files/pratical_guide_5.pdf)
- Levine, D. (1995). Building a vision of curricular reform *Rethinking Schools* (pp. 52-60). New York, NY: The New Press.

- Lianides, J. W. (2006). *Following the money: The interrelationship of revenue, expenditures, equity, and student achievement in California public school districts*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley with San Francisco State University). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 3254255)
- Local Educational Agency Plan. (2017). California Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/nclb/sr/le/>
- Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2004). Practical Resources for Assessing and Reporting Intercoder Reliability in Content Analysis Research Projects. Retrieved from <http://www.temple.edu/sct/mmc/reliability/>
- Luthar, S. S., & Barkin, S. H. (2012). Are affluent youth truly 'at risk'? Vulnerability and resilience across three diverse samples. *Development and Psychopathology*, 24(2), 429-449. doi:10.1017/S0954579412000089
- Maduakolam, I. (2016). *Scientific Management Still Endures in Education*. Retrieved from Winston Salem, NC: Available from ERIC Database (Accession No. ED 566616)
- Marzano, R. J., Pinkering, D., & McTigh, J. (1993). *Assessing student outcomes: Performance assessment using the dimensions of learning model*. Retrieved from Alexandria, VA: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED461665.pdf>
- Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative researching*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Massey, K. J., Warrington, A. S., & Holmes, K. A. (2014). An overview on urban education: A brief history and contemporary issues. *Texas Education Review*, 2(2), 173-183.

- Matthews, R. S., Smith, B. L., & MacGregor, J. (2012). The evolution of learning communities: A retrospective. *New Directions for Teaching & Learning*, 2012(132), 99-111. doi:10.1002/tl.20039
- McClellan, E. B. (1992). *Schools and the shaping of character: Moral education in America, 1607-present*. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studie/Social Science Education.
- McGuinn, P. (2015). Schooling the state: ESEA and the evolution of the U.S. Department of Education. *Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 1(3), 77-94.
- McKibben, S. (2015). The principal as lead learner. *Education Update*, 57(7), 2.  
Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. 108771502)
- McLaughlin, M. W. (1975). *Evaluation and reform: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Title I*. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (7th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- McNeir, G. (1993). Outcomes-based education. *Research Roundup*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED379765.pdf>
- Meinig, D. W. (1993). *The shaping of America: A geographical perspective on 500 years of history* (Vol. 2). Binghampton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press.
- Menefee-Libey, D. J. d. p. e., & Taylor Kerchner, C. c. k. c. e. (2015). California's first year with local control finance and accountability. *El Primer Año de California con Control Local del Financiamiento y el Sistema de Responsabilidad Educativa.*, 23(20-24), 1-11. doi:10.14507/epaa.v23.2022

- Merriam, S. B. (1995). What can you tell from an N of 1?: Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, 4, 51-60.
- Moll, L. c. (1997). *Vygotsky and Education*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Mondale, S., & Patton, S. B. (2001). *School: The story of American public education*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Moore, T. (2010). *Professional learning communities: Do leadership practices impact implementation and sustainability and what is the relationship between a school's PLC and a school's climate?* (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina, Ann Arbor). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 3402809)
- Muhammad, A. (2009). *Transforming school culture; How to overcome staff division*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Mulcahy, D. G. (1994). *Goals 2000 and the role of the national education standards and improvement council*.
- Mulligan, D. G. (2016). *Teacher and School Administrator Perceptions of their Learning Community*. (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University, Ann Arbor). Available at ProQuest Dissertation Database (UMI no. 10103100)
- Murphy, M. S. (2012). *The Impact of Professional Learning Communities on Attitudes Toward Teaching Writing*. (Doctoral dissertation, Walden University, Ann Arbor). Available at ProQuest Dissertation Database (UMI no. 3544990)

- Murphy, M. C., & Dweck, C. S. (2010). A culture of genius: How an organization's lay theory shapes people's cognition, affect, and behavior. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin* 36(3), 283-296.
- Myers, D. G. (2014). *Psychology* (Vol. 2). New York, NY: Worth.
- A Nation at Risk. (1983). Retrieved from Washington, D.C.:  
<https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/recomm.html>
- Newmann, F. M., Wehlage, G. G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators*. Available at ERIC Database (Accession No. ED 387925)
- No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, P.L. 107-110 20 U.S.C § 6319 (2002). Washington, D.C.: United States Department of Education. Retrieved from  
<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/index.html>.
- Normore, A. H. (E.d.) (2008). *Leadership for Social Justice: Promoting Equity and Excellence Through Inquiry and Reflective Practice*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Onosko, J. (2011). Race to the Top leaves children and future citizens behind: The devastating effects of centralization, standardization, and high stakes accountability. *Democracy and Education*, 19(2).
- Patten, M. L. (2014). *Understanding research methods, 9th edition*. Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (V. Knight Ed. 4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.



- Phillips, G., & Garcia, A. N. (2015). *Aiming high: Setting performance standards for student success*. Washington, D.C.: Available at ERIC Database (Accession No. ED557628)
- Piefer, A. (1979). *A foundation's story: The first seventy-five years of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching*. Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.
- Peifer, A. (2014). *The purpose of public education and the role of the school board*. Retrieved from Alexandria, VA:  
[http://www.nsba.org/sites/default/files/The%20Purpose%20of%20Public%20Education%20and%20the%20Role%20of%20the%20School%20Board\\_National%20Connection.pdf](http://www.nsba.org/sites/default/files/The%20Purpose%20of%20Public%20Education%20and%20the%20Role%20of%20the%20School%20Board_National%20Connection.pdf)
- Perko, M. F. (2003). Education, socialization, and the development of national identity: The American common school and Israel defense forces in transitional perspective. *SHOFAR*, 21(2), 101-119.
- Phillips, G., & Garcia, A. N. (2015). *Aiming high: Setting performance standards for student success*. Retrieved from Washington, D.C.: Available from ERIC Database (Accession No. ED557628)
- Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008). *Improving school leadership: Policy and practice*. Retrieved from Paris, France:  
<https://www.oecd.org/edu/school/44374889.pdf>
- Porter, A. C. (1994). National standards and school improvement in the 1990s: Issues and promise, 102(4) p. 421-449. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/1085463?seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1085463?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents)

- Program improvement. (2017, April 3, 2017). Retrieved from  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/ti/programimprov.asp>
- Race to the Top Program Executive Summary*. (2020). (2009). Washington, D.C.:  
USDOE Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>.
- Ravitch, D. (1996). The case for national standards and assessments. *The Clearing House*, 69, 134.
- Ravitch, D. (2016). *The death and life of the great American school system*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ravitch, D. (2000). *Left back: A century of failed school reforms*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Ravitch, D. (1995). *National standards in American education: A citizen's guide*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.
- Reese, W. J. (2011). *America's public schools: From the common school to "No Child Left Behind"*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Reese, W. J. (2002). *Power and the promise of school reform: Grassroots movements during the progressive era*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Rentner, D. S., & Kober, N. (2014). *Common Core State Standards in 2014: District Implementation of Consortia-Developed Assessments*. Washington D.C.  
Available at ERIC Database (Accession No. ED555416)
- Rice, J. M. (1893). *The public school system of the United States*. New York, NY: Forum Publishing Company.

- Richard, C. J. (2009). *Greeks and Romans bearing gifts: How the ancients inspired the founding fathers*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Rogers, P. (2014). *Professional learning communities impact on student reading achievement for the bottom twenty-five percent of students*. (Doctoral dissertation, Northern Arizona University). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 3621135)
- Rosenholtz, S. J. (1989). *Teachers' workplace: the social organization of schools*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Rury, J. L. (2005). *Urban education in the United States*. New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2009). Promoting self-determined school engagement: Motivation, learning, and well-being. In K. R. Wenzel, A. Wigfield, K. R. Wenzel, & A. Wigfield (Eds.), *Handbook of motivation at school*. (pp. 171-195). New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.
- Sargrad, S. (2016, March 4). Building better tests, Opinion. *U.S. News and World Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/knowledge-bank/articles/2016-03-04/parcc-and-smarter-balanced-are-building-better-standardized-tests>
- Schlechty, P. C. (1990). *Schools for the Twenty-First Century: Leadership Imperatives for Educational Reform*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Samuels, A. (2016, April 25). The founding fathers weren't concerned with inequality. *Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/04/does-income-inequality-really-violate-us-principles/479577/>

- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. New York, NY: Currency Doubleday.
- Senge, P. M. (2006). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York, NY: Currency Doubleday.
- Siminski, R. J. (2000). *State funding, student performance, school effectiveness: A Massachusetts experience*. (Doctoral dissertation, Johnson & Wales University). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 9999557)
- Sims, R. L., & Penny, G. R. (2015). Examination of a Failed Professional Learning Community. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 3(1), 39-45.
- Skelcher, B. (2008). Promises of Brown: Desegregating Education in Delaware, 1950-1968. In B. J. Daugherty & C. C. Bolton (Eds.), *With All Deliberate Speed: Implementing Brown v. Board of Education*. Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press.
- Skinner, D. (2005). Advanced Placement for all: the simple-minded logic of Newsweek's high-school rankings. *The Weekly Standard*, 10, 14.
- Spady, W. G. (1994). *Outcomes-based education: Critical issues and answers*. Arlington, VA. Available at ERIC Database (Accession No. ED380910)
- Stamper, J. C. (2015). *A study of teacher and principal perceptions of professional learning communities*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, Ann Arbor). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 3731464)
- Stanton, M. P. (2009). *What are the factors of success for professional learning communities in high school?* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of New

- Mexico). Available from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Database (UMI No. 3359800)
- Stern, M. (2013). Bad teacher: What Race to the Top learned from the "race to the bottom". *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies (JCEPS)*, 11(3), 194-229. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. 91543319)
- Sternberg, R. J., & Wilson, J. F. (2004). *Psychology*. Belmont, CA: Thompson/Wadsworth.
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*(4). Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. edsgcl.155217811)
- Sundue, S. B. (2007). Confining the Poor to Ignorance: Eighteenth Century American Experiments with Charity Education. *History of Education Quarterly*, 47(2), 123-148. doi:10.1111/j.1748-5959.2007.00086.x
- Survey results: 2015 Smarter Balanced assessment teacher feedback*. (2015). Retrieved from:  
[https://www.oregoned.org/images/uploads/pages/OEA\\_SBASurvey\\_Report.pdf](https://www.oregoned.org/images/uploads/pages/OEA_SBASurvey_Report.pdf)
- Tan, S. (2017). From the classroom: A strategy for applying the growth mindset concept to your business. Retrieved from <https://www.business.com/articles/a-strategy-for-applying-the-growth-mindset-concept-to-your-business/>
- Taylor, M. (2014). *Analysis of education mandates*. Retrieved from Sacramento, CA: <http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2014/education/mandates/education-mandates-022614.pdf>

- Triche, C. W. I. (1992). *Changing patterns of centralization and decentralization in American school governance*. (Doctor of Philosophy dissertation), Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA. (9301110)
- Trust, T., Krutka, D. G., & Carpenter, J. P. (2016). "Together we are better": Professional learning networks for teachers. *Computers & Education, 102*, 15-34. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2016.06.007>
- Tuttle, C. W. (2015). *The impact of collaborative learning protocols on Professional Learning Communities: An action research study*. (Doctoral dissertation, Capella University). Available at ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Database (UMI No. 3737251)
- 2017-18 Advance Apportionment ADA: Section 75.70. (2017). California Department of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/aa/pa/ada75701718.asp>
- Tyack, D. B. (1974). *The one best system*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tyack, D. B., Benavot, A., & James, T. (1987). *Law and the shaping of public education, 1785-1954*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Tyack, D. B., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows of Harvard College.
- Tyack, D. B., & Tobin, W. (1994). The "grammar" of schooling: Why has it been so hard to change? *American Educational Research Journal, 31*(3), 453-479.
- Usher, A. (2011). *Public schools and the original federal land grant program*. Washington, D.C. Available at ERIC Database (Accession No. ED51388)

- Vallance, E. (1973). Hiding the curriculum: An interpretation of the language of justification in nineteenth-century educational reform. *Curriculum Theory Network*, 4(1), 5-21. doi:102307/1179123
- Vanblaere, B., & Devos, G. (2016). Relating school leadership to perceived professional learning community characteristics: A multilevel analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 57, 26-38. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2016.03.003
- Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80-91. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X07000066>
- Walberg, H. J., & Geneva, D. H. (1990). Educational Psychology's First Century. *APA Centennial: History of Educational Psychology*, 84(1), 6-19.
- Walker, T. (2016). Survey: 70 percent of educators say state assessments not developmentally appropriate. *NEA Today*. Retrieved from: <http://neatoday.org/2016/02/18/standardized-tests-not-developmentally-appropriate/>
- Watson, C. (2014). Effective professional learning communities? The possibilities for teachers as agents of change in schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 40(1), 18-29.
- Webber, A., Troppe, P., Milanowski, A., Gutmann, B., Reisner, E., Goertz, M., . . . Regional, A. (2014). *State implementation of reforms promoted under the Recovery Act. A report from charting the progress of education reform: An*

*evaluation of the Recovery Act's role. NCEE 2014-4011. Available at ERIC Database (Accession No. ED559930)*

West Ed, Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning. (2016). *California district leaders on Common Core: Professional learning gaps persist (Center View)*. San Francisco, CA: West Ed.

Weston, M. (2013). *Basic aid school districts*. Retrieved from San Francisco, CA: [http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R\\_913MWR.pdf](http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_913MWR.pdf)

What are Common Core Standards? (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/tl/whatareccss.asp>

Wolpert-Gawron, H. (2011). What is the Purpose of Public Education. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/heather-wolpertgawron/what-is-the-purpose-of-pu\\_b\\_774497.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/heather-wolpertgawron/what-is-the-purpose-of-pu_b_774497.html)

Ysseldyke, J., Thurlow, M., & Shin, H. (1995). *Opportunity to Learn Standards*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Retrieved from <https://nceo.info/Resources/publications/OnlinePubs/archive/Policy/Policy4.html>.

Zimbardo, P. G. (2007). Revisiting the Stanford Prison Experiment: a Lesson in the Power of Situation. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, B6-B7. Available at EBSCO Database (Accession No. 507966725)



## APPENDIX A

### Participant Invitation Letter

#### **Invitation Letter for Teachers and Administrators**

Date:

Dear *Potential Study Participant*,

My name is Lawrence L. Haggquist. I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University where I am pursuing my degree in Organizational Leadership. For my dissertation, I am researching teacher and administrator perceptions of PLC practices as they relate to school and student success. I have learned that your school fits the profile of my study's target population, and I am interested in interviewing teachers and/or administrators at your site. I am looking for individuals who have at least three years of experience participating in or managing PLCs.

The intent of this e-mail is to ask if you would be willing to participate in my study to offer your perspective on my research topic—the relationship between PLC practices and school success. Participation in the study would require a 30-60 minute interview at a time and location that is convenient for you. If you agree to participate, please know that the interview will be completely confidential. A coding system will be used so that no names will be attached to any notes, recordings, or transcripts from the interview. With your consent, the interview will be audio-recorded, and the audio-recording will be destroyed once the interview has been transcribed. All information will remain in locked files accessible only to the researcher and no other individuals will have access to interview information. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. I am available by email or phone to answer any questions you may have. My dissertation chairperson, Dr. Len Hightower, will also be available if you have questions or concerns. Dr. Hightower's contact information is:

Dr. Len Hightower

e-mail: XXXX

This research study is one of the high points in my educational career, and it would be an honor to hear about your experiences and perspective regarding the PLC phenomenon in public schools. I know that your time is valuable and I greatly appreciate your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Lawrence L. Haggquist

Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University

APPENDIX B  
Interview Script  
Brandman University

Researcher: Lawrence Haggquist

Case Site ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Hello (participant's name), my name is Larry Haggquist. Thank you for agreeing to this interview and for scheduling the time to meet with me. I know that your time is valuable, and I truly appreciate your willingness to be part of my research. I am a student at Brandman University in the program of doctorate in organizational leadership. Today's interview will be part of a study I am doing for my dissertation.

Before we begin the interview, I'd like to take care of some preliminary matters. Here is a copy of the informed consent form that was sent to you when we scheduled this interview. Were you able to review the document? Did you have any questions? I will need to obtain your informed consent prior to beginning the interview. Please understand that you may terminate the interview at any time. May I please have your written consent? (Obtain signature and collect form)

As indicated on the informed consent document, I will be digitally recording the interview for the purpose of obtaining an accurate record of our conversation. The recording will be transcribed and then erased once it has been transcribed. A pseudonym will replace your name in the transcript. I would now like to verbally request your permission to record the interview (turn on recorder and obtain verbal consent).

My dissertation explores the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the relationship between professional learning community practices and school success.

More specifically, I am focusing on Basic Aid schools on Coastal California because the research indicates that these schools are some of the most successful schools in the state.

Your input will hopefully help to illuminate what role PLCs play in school success.

Thank you again for agreeing to take part in this interview. Do you have any questions before begin?

Please remember, you may terminate this interview at any time. If you wish to pass on a question, please let me know and I will move on. If you would like clarification, please do not hesitate to interrupt me and ask for clarification. I will be taking notes during the interview in addition to the recording. If you would like to review my notes, I will gladly share them with you as well. Let's begin. I will start with some basic demographic questions that will help provide descriptive information about the sample I have selected for this study.

**Demographic Questions:**

What is your age?

What is your gender?

What is your ethnicity?

What is your highest level of education attained?

How many years have you professionally been involved in education?

What is your current professional role at this school?

How many years have you been a teacher/administrator?

How long have you been in your current role?

How many years have you worked in or managed PLCs?

How many years have you worked in or managed PLCs at this site?

*The following two questions are for interview subjects who are administrators:*

Were you a teacher prior to becoming an administrator?

If yes, for how many years?

*Thank you. I would now like to move on to some content questions:*

### ***Interview Questions***

#### **Question 1: Defining PLCs**

Imagine that you are talking with someone outside the industry about your experience working in PLCs. They ask you, “What is a PLC?” What would your response be?

Possible probe:

- From your perspective, what is the essential work of a PLC?

#### **Question 2: PLC Vision**

How would you describe the role that organizational vision plays in promoting effective PLC practices (at their school)?

Possible probe:

- Could you expand on how you think vision relates to success at your school?

- Are there aspects of school vision that you see as having the greatest impact on the success of the school?

### **Question 3: Collaborative Culture**

How would you describe the effect that collaboration in regard to PLC efforts has on the overall success of the school?

Possible probe:

- Do you think that all staff share similar views about collaboration in regard to PLC?

### **Question 4: Collective Inquiry Into Best Practices and Current Reality**

In what ways do staff at your site use PLCs to observe and provide feedback to each other in their teaching practices?

Possible Probe:

- Have you experienced any resistance to the idea of teachers observing and critiquing each other in their work? Can you describe instances when resistance has occurred?

### **Question 5: Action Orientation**

How would you describe the ability of PLCs at your school to turn collaboration (collective inquiry) into action? In other words, in what ways does collaboration at your site serve as a catalyst for growth and change?

Possible Probe:

- Can you describe any instances where collaboration does not produce action, and/or new learning?
- What are the attitudes of the staff in relation to using collective inquiry to spur action?

### **Question 6: Commitment to Continuous Improvement**

What role do PLCs play in staff making a commitment to continuous improvement?

Are there instances when a lack of commitment to improvement is apparent? (What impact do PLCs have on such instances?)

**Question 7: Results Orientation**

In what ways has the PLC work at your site lead to tangible results?

Possible Probe:

- Would you characterize the results of the PLC work done at your site as intentional? In what ways have the “tangible results” been the product of intentional effort by that administration or staff?

**Question 8: Perceptual Differences**

Do you think that teachers and administrators share the same outlook on the PLC work being done at this school? What are your perceptions as to why or why not?

Possible Probe:

- Do you think that one group tends to view PLC work more positively or negatively? Please explain.

**Question 9: PLCs and School Success**

Do you think teachers and administrators share the same definition of educational success? What are your perceptions as to why or why not?

Possible Probe:

- In your opinion, what are the factors that contribute to success in a school?
- Of the factors you mentioned, what would you say is the most important? Why?
- When considering the relationship between PLCs and school success, is student success a factor? How so?

**Question 10: Closing**

Before we wrap up this interview, is there anything else you would like to share regarding your perceptions of the PLC work being done at your site and how this work relates to the success of your school?

## Interview Alignment Table

Question	Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1	What do high school teachers perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
RQ2	What do high school administrators perceive as success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
RQ3	Are their differences in perception between high school teachers and administrators in regard to defining success in relation to Professional Learning Community practices?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Note: Questions 2-7 were designed to address elements of the theoretical framework, which has been linked with PLC success. Question 1, 8, and 9 address the key variables of PLC definitions, perceptual differences, and school success. Question 10 was designed as a follow-up asking subjects to reflect on the relationship between PLCs and school success.

## APPENDIX C

### Field Test Interview Feedback Prompts

#### **Gathering Feedback from Field Test Participant/Interviewee**

##### **Purpose:**

Conducting interviews is a learned skill set/experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants.

##### **Instructions for Researcher:**

While conducting the interview you should take notes of the participant's clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question(s). After you complete the interview, ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with your observer(s) and develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

##### **Feedback Prompts:**

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?
2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?
3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked? If so, can you tell me where in the interview things were unclear?
4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?
5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview... (I'm pretty new at this)?



## **Gathering Feedback from Field Test Interview Observer**

### **Instructions for Observer:**

Observe the interview, making note of the researcher's verbal and nonverbal queues. After the conclusion of the interview, the researcher will discuss the following questions with you. The researcher will be completing a self-reflection on these same prompts in order to facilitate productive conversation.

Please provide constructive, candid feedback based on your observation. This will provide the researcher with valuable information that can be used to improve prior to conducting interviews for actual data collection. Thank you for your valuable time and assistance!

### **Feedback Prompts:**

1. How long did the interview take? \_\_\_\_\_ Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did the researcher appear during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did the interviewer appear prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something s/he could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to suggest changes to any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

## **Gathering Self-Reflective Feedback from the Researcher**

### **Instructions for Researcher:**

At the conclusion of the field test interview, reflect on the following questions. You should also discuss the following reflection questions with your 'observer' after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your prospective as the interviewer. However, you can verbalize your thoughts with the observer and they can add valuable insight from their observation.

### **Feedback Prompts:**

1. How long did the interview take? \_\_\_\_\_ Did the time seem to be appropriate?
2. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?
3. Going into it, did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?
4. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?
5. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?
6. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?
7. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

## APPENDIX D

Figure A1. Screenshot of BUIRB Approval

