Leveraging An Instructional Leadership Team To Support Educator Evaluation In A Rural Elementary School

Kimberly Roberts-Morandi

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LEVERAGING AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM TO SUPPORT EDUCATOR EVALUATION IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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LEVERAGING AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM TO SUPPORT
EDUCATOR EVALUATION IN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Abstract

A principal may struggle to provide the depth and breadth of expertise required to adequately address the educational leadership demands, particularly in a rural system where oftentimes the principal and staff carry out responsibilities outside their contracted roles. How would a shared-leadership approach promote the staff’s acceptance of the high-stakes, state-mandated educator evaluation system and would the rural context be a significant factor? This dissertation study investigated key actions and supports related to the functions of an Instructional Leadership Team’s (ILT) implementation of the Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation, referred to in the study as the Educator Evaluation System (EES). This study employed document review, individual and group interviews, and participatory observations to analyze the processes and procedures that supported the ILT’s work integrating the EES in the rural setting. Data were explored through the social capital lens, demonstrating that collective action facilitated the ILT’s agenda. This research suggests that the sense of group responsibility, accountability, and cohesiveness emerged as a driving force for the ILT’s success and will play a sustainable role in the future work of the group. The findings identified the power, benefit, and necessity of the district’s delegation of responsibility to the school’s shared-leadership model. Future transformative work will require formalized support structures to integrate change efforts. This study demonstrated the power of shared-leadership in advancing the evaluation process and for expanding the influence of the collaborative model.
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Doctor of Education

Educational Leadership

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Sixty years after education leadership research introduced the benefits of shared-leadership: a workplace where multiple voices are represented in the decision-making process, it is still far less common than the traditional model of a principal-led, staff-as-followers operation. What if individuals with divergent roles were actively engaged in driving building improvement, student performance, teacher support, and addressing academic needs? It is suggested that the conventional top-down model may significantly impede progress when multiple mandates and tasks are involved because no single leader can bring all the expertise needed to improve schooling. Working in isolation, should a principal be expected to provide the depth and breadth of expertise required to adequately address the educational needs of all students through targeted staff development efforts, particularly in a rural system? By contrast, how might a shared-leadership approach support staff’s acceptance of a high-stakes state mandate intended to increase the readiness of teachers to meet the educational needs of all students in a resource limited rural system?

With so many academic and operational tasks under the purview of the principal, guiding instructional and/or operational change to improve student performance can no longer rest solely on one educational leader. Experts in the field of educational leadership maintain it is essential that many voices play an active part in the decision-making around transformational teacher practice and in strengthening the infrastructure (Fullan, 2005; Hallinger, 2003). Structuring a collaborative approach to address a defined educational focus has the potential to move the organization forward purposefully and intentionally (Bennis & Nanus, 2007; Jackson, 2009; Sagor, 1992). One method to strategically and collaboratively address change in schools is to
enable teachers to be a part of the decision-making infrastructure. This empowerment gives voice to those who are at the classroom level and allows for change to occur from the ground up as well as from the top down as illustrated in Figure 1.

![Flow of communication diagram](image)

*Figure 1. Flow of communication*

As a transformational model, Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT$s$), represent a methodology of shared-leadership in which teachers, coaches, and other educational personnel serve as a collective decision-making entity, supporting the academically focused work of the school and district improvement efforts (Garrett, 2010; Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010; Richardson, 2003). ILTs operate similarly to other collaborative teams: professional learning communities, data teams, shared-leadership teams, and critical friends groups in that educators problem-solve through a joint approach grounded in the power of collective voice. While ILTs may blend aspects of each of the aforementioned entities, the focus is on learning outcomes (Haberman, 2004) and instructional practices, hence, the addition of instruction to the title. In this study, the connection of teaching and learning as a driving force for change led to the district administration's selecting the ILT model to support the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (ESE) mandated Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation (see Evaluation of Educators, 603 CMR 35.00: M.G.L. c.69, §1B; c.71, §38) as well as the existing

The establishment of a leadership team was initially in response to the principal’s beliefs that radical and transformational adjustments were needed to address academic performance deficiencies and staff accountability issues (personal communication, August 20, 2013). A review of the site’s 2013 Conditions for School Effectiveness (CSE) self-evaluation indicated that teachers were more likely to be engaged in traditional instructional methods and typical models of operation, such as a weekly grade-level meeting, the principal as decision-maker, and little opportunity for teacher voice in school change initiatives. Furthermore, the CSE results noted that teachers did not feel there was an opportunity for input regarding the choice of professional development offered by the district to address expectations of the ESE mandates from year to year. District principals acknowledged a history of teacher resistance to change and a lack of strong vertical communication as additional contributing factors to sustainable change opposition. Moreover, the CSE clearly demonstrated that the teachers endorsed a lack of voice in decision-making and a lack of communication around infusing change initiatives as being responsible for a breakdown of staff confidence in district-driven initiatives.

Therefore, the school principals, faced with mandated program and practice adoptions, worked to improve the professional culture through the building of trust in school and district-level leadership. School leadership sought to influence staff actions and practice by creating opportunities for personal empowerment and voice (Anderson & Herr, 2007; Barth, 2013; Bennis & Nanus, 2007; Luft, 2012) in decision-making related to instruction and learning.

The study site integrated a more democratic process that lent itself to building capacity and fostering a collective sense of ownership of change. The Team’s approach, and its collective
creativity was instituted for the possibilities shared learning and decision-making presented (Anderson & Herr, 2007; Hannah, Walumba & Fry, 2011; Hord, 2003) and its perceived ability to operate despite the tight confines of financial and educational resource limitations. The District and School Assistance Center (DSAC), an external capacity-building partner agency, worked with the site on academic performance improvement efforts. Through a combination of coaching, modeling, and professional development, the DSAC collaborated with school leadership to plan targeted assistance for the adoption of mandated programs. During the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years an additional external partner, the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), provided training on their processes and protocols to the district’s schools. This training was designed to provide foundational skills that addressed:

- protocol development and baseline goals for ILT roles;
- district and school leaders’ roles in the ILT adoption process;
- use of protocols that encourage team-level collaboration (n.d.).

The district and school administrators’ efforts to migrate toward a collaborative leadership model began with the agreement to combine the expertise of CCE with the resources of the DSAC. External partners identified positive changes already in place as well as challenges specific to the site and leveraged strengths to address areas of need. The use of a self-assessment measure, focus groups, observations, and available data relevant to the desired change provided a continuous improvement cycle framework. Through participatory action research, this study sought to identify the actions and supports used by the ILT members in their efforts to facilitate teacher support towards full implementation of the Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation, known at the site as the Educator Evaluation System (EES) in a small, resource-limited rural school system.
Guiding Questions

Focused information gathering was guided by asking an essential question regarding the ILT’s impact on teacher acceptance of the mandated evaluation system and two supporting questions that outlined external influences on the ILT. The three questions were:

1. How is the ILT leveraging its role in brokering the acceptance of the EES the staff must operationalize?

2. What district and school actions and supports are necessary for school-based leadership teams to undertake this change action within the school?

3. How do the limited financial and staffing resources and characteristics of the rural district influence the progress of the ILT?

Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded in social capital theory, reflecting the philosophy of the ILT to solve the group problems by brokering individual strengths. The social capital theory, typically applied to the business sector, viewed the ILT as an entity in itself, developed in the school to blend existing talents and resources. The definition that was applied in this study was social capital as “…networks of relationships [which] constitute, or lead to, resources that can be used for the good of the individual or the collective” (DeClercq & Arenius, 2004, paragraph 14). This theory is rooted in sociology and economics, and as such introduced a quasi-business-model lens to the study though it did not override the educational and sociological aspects of the work.

Limitations

The site was one of several schools in the district that engaged in the launching of an ILT to support school administration. Though similarities existed between each school, the differences in culture and personnel made it impossible to completely generalize findings as
much of the work was dependent upon the school principals being open to shared-leadership. The nature of qualitative studies raised the question of the reliability of self-reported data since the method was reliant upon, and subjected to, the participants’ perceptions.

The site’s rural location was identified as a boundary of the study as it restricted the ability to generalize results across all district/school communities. The time frame in which the study was conducted was another limitation. The study took place over eight months of a single school year, bracketing the results within the launch year of the EES initiative. The researcher’s engagement with the school as an external partner created potential bias so this concern was addressed with the participants at the commencement of the study and was considered throughout the duration of the research. Potential research bias was also addressed within the methods and findings in the study.

**Conclusion**

The focus of the site’s 2014-2015 ILT work was the integration of the EES requirements into teacher practice. The building principal arranged for the ILT members to meet in mid-August to begin the work of setting school-wide student learning and academic performance objectives. These targeted objectives, in turn, drove individual teacher professional goals, which were required per the EES. By documenting the ILTs work toward operationalizing the EES and the district and school administration’s role, then bracketing it within the rural school environment, the study aimed to identify systemization potentials for change initiative integration. The research on collaborative leadership (DuFour, 2004; Hon & Chan, 2012; Hord, 2003; Marks & Louis, 1999) and the impact of a rural environment’s inception of a mandated change initiative (Anderson, 2008; Clark & Wildy, 2011; Lamkin, 2006) guided the qualitative case study. When reviewed by other rural school systems or external consultants, the results may
guide the development of their shared-leadership approach, the design of processes and procedures, and may be utilized in projecting potential team challenges. The value to the site was evidenced in the reflection of the ILT on their administrative actions, both in what worked and what needed to be adjusted. The site leadership was able to capitalize on the identified ILT successes, recognize growth potential, and use the information to increase teacher empowerment and the school’s transformative work. The methods documented allow for the duplication of the approach with potential generalizability to other transformative processes. In addition, the study offers replication potential within non-rural and/or non-elementary settings. The following overview of the research includes the historical development of the shared-leadership model, its role in efforts to facilitate sustainable change and the impact of a rural environment.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Transforming any institution is a lofty challenge, and oftentimes not widely successful due to breakdowns in approach and systems (Bass & Riggio, 2008; Sagnak, 2010). Transforming a public school requires the navigation of federal and state regulations, contract adherence, addressing of student needs, school culture management, district mandate implementation and the balancing of community expectations. In Massachusetts, under the newly adopted accountability system, transforming schools must happen in conjunction with integrating new curriculum frameworks, the Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation, and the use of district measures to support yearly student achievement (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). The window for initial implementation of these complex organizational elements is rapidly closing, as all public schools must have established their evaluation system by the end of the 2014-2015 school year. If district leaders approached the mandated changes in an autocratic rather than collaborative manner, the likelihood for full implementation would be limited (Spillane, Diamond, & Jita, 2003). The acceptance of change and ensuring its sustainability is often a challenge that can be countered by involving many voices in all stages of the process (Kotter, 2012).

A sole leader may not be capable of addressing the wide scope of the tasks required to establish new programming or refine the programs already in place. The change efforts that have occurred in the last two decades in education are due in part to the “…trends in educational reform such as empowerment, shared-leadership, and organizational learning” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330). Therefore, it is proposed that more than ever before in education, transformative leaders who work effectively with teams are needed.
Six decades of research support the power and potential of shared-leadership. As a method that is dependent upon the input and talents of many within a setting, it is inherently transformative in its approach. Teacher efficacy and voice are raised through the sharing of leadership decisions, supporting of colleagues, and by teachers serving as a liaison between their colleagues and administration. Individuals become part of a democratic approach to the work of transformation when afforded the ability to make decisions that guide teaching, learning, and the establishment of school processes. In this study, the mandated change is implementing a high stakes evaluation process. The ILT’s actions and role in supporting that change for teachers throughout the integration of the district-adopted Educator Evaluation System (EES) and their efforts in supporting the needs that arose as a result of the new regulations motivated the educators towards engaging in the school-wide improvement effort. Transformative leadership requires the ability to challenge the status quo and the commitment to embrace change that will foster social justice by bringing voice to all, and not just a select few, in an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Burns, 1978; Kotter, 2012; Wheatley, 2006). Teacher empowerment and teachers’ ability to support their colleagues throughout the change process were at the heart of this study.

**Structuring Shared-Leadership**

Since the 1960s, collaborative decision-making has proven to be a legitimate approach to addressing the challenges of organizational change. Shared-leadership continued to appear, or more appropriately, to reappear throughout the next 30 years, being refined in both scope and operational framework. Senge (1990) and Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, and Fernandez (1993) wrote extensively about the possibilities that existed in educational institutions through the focus on the human system, and on the approach to growing capacity through supporting and encouraging collaborative inquiry. Kotter (1995 in Kotter, 2007; 2012) addressed the benefits
and risks of transformational efforts through the lens of eight detailed steps necessary to implement change and build collaboration and focus. Among Kotter’s steps to create acceptance of change within the organization were to build a sense of urgency and craft shared vision. These themes had been presented several years earlier in publications by Senge (1990) where vision was noted as a crucial step to beginning the strength-building of a team. Astuto, et al. (1993) defined the coming together of educators with the purpose of improving their practice as a "learning community". Without a sense of where people are and where they are headed it is difficult to build consensus and craft purposeful actions for leadership teams. Confusion and lack of direction may lead to questioning the legitimacy of the team and hence, a lack of impact of the team’s efforts.

In the late 1990s, Hord’s formal introduction of the term, “professional learning communities” (PLCs), strengthened the collaborative concept by reinforcing the high level of importance with the addition of the word, “professional” (1997). In 2003, Hord refined the definition of professional learning community expectations by reiterating the need for an atmosphere of collaboration with shared vision and expectations created by the team, for the team, and with an end-goal driving the work. Hord’s efforts informed publications by DuFour (2004), who expanded the sharing and expectations into a more formalized method. It is DuFour’s work that has been embraced by the study’s site as a cornerstone of their philosophy and approach. Years later, Hilliard (2009) and Hilliard & Jackson (2011) furthered the call for collaborative leadership and vision by extending it to include focus on impacting student and faculty improvement. While this research is not as widely read as earlier publications, it was a part of the foundational series of readings and discussions in the formation process of the ILT members. The foundational literature and protocols introduced in the collaborative teaming
training reinforced the necessity of developing guiding documents. The ILT’s focus and goals, when adhered to, guided the team in their internal work and in their assistance to colleagues by serving as a roadmap. When the ILT strayed from the acknowledged focus, the team struggled to remain organized and lost productivity.

Spillane, et al. (2003), further conceptualized distributed leadership by expanding the scope of what shared-leadership can accomplish by redefining what it means to lead in education. “If the challenges of scale and substance are to be solved at the school level, researchers need to reconsider their conceptions of school leadership” (p. 535). Spillane, et al. also used the term “collective learning” as a way to describe leaders collaborating on specific leadership activities (p. 538). Schools with leadership teams require individuals to work together, though not always on the same task. Rather, leadership teams may identify the large task and assign specific roles and expectations for team members. This approach capitalizes on collective strengths and talents and allows situational considerations to guide next steps. Leadership has become a melding of the leader’s skill in recognizing the team members’ individual and collective strengths as they apply to specific situations (Anderson & Herr, 2007; Poutiatine, 2009; Sagnak, 2010; Spillane, et al., 2003). This, too, is central to the success of an ILT, as it is likely to be a diverse group with unique talents and skills. Individual strengths that enhance the function of the ILT must be identified and capitalized on by the principal in order to further change (Fullan, 2001).

DuFour (2004) addresses leadership tasks and advances the team approach of PLCs with the identification of specific areas of caution and the recommendation of foundational practices. These practices need to become part of the culture of a PLC if it is to avoid being wrought with implementation problems. DuFour cautions that PLCs could just as easily be another abandoned
educational change approach and maintains that structure and expectations are essential to alleviate that likelihood. To that end, DuFour (2004) identified the power of a cycle of continuously gathering evidence, reflecting, questioning, and seeking answers, a hallmark of action research, as the model to support a team’s action. DuFour’s cycle and focus on the central problems can therefore be used as a risk-reducer for momentum as all are engaged in a continual process of learning and reflection. Kotter espoused a process of work with the concerns around central problems as needing to be “timely…based on interventions rather than remediation…and directive rather than invitational” (2004, p. 7) and that all of this must be done in a collaborative atmosphere. DuFour’s premise is that structure and expectations provide intensification to the work undertaken and drive its forward motion; when appropriately supported by administration, change becomes embedded in school culture. DuFour’s work serves as a primary source for collaborative approaches in education and specifically, in the work that was foundational to this study’s ILT. The ILT engaged in training with the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), an external partner that provided the basis for the development of the ILT as a PLC. CCE taught the ILT specific protocols designed to build collegiality and trust and to enhance the transparency of the ILT’s work within the school. During the months of the study, the CCE’s focus was on the creation of a collaborative leadership model.

In 2006, Stoll, Bolman, McMahon, Wallace and Thomas published an extensive review of PLC literature. The overview of the PLC movement stretches from the practice-based tenet of Dewey’s 1929 work involving collaborative approaches to education decision-making through the use of collaboration as a relationship-building practice. This literature was a primary reference for the site’s ILT members to understand their role and potential. The ILT needed to focus on building relationships among staff at a more granular level and used the theoretical and
philosophical concepts of PLCs to strengthen their work (Hipp & Huffman; Jackson & Temperley as quoted in Stoll, et al., 2006). The ILT’s experience and understanding of teacher support needs grew through the integration of the PLC model. The ILT’s purpose was grounded in the advancement of student learning by reviewing generated student work and data. The concept of PLCs as a forum for teachers to critically look at student work and to respond purposefully (Astuto, et al., 1993; Hord, 1997; Senge, 1990) guided ILT collaboration by highlighting the benefit of respectful, proactive working relationships among the participants.

Garrett’s 2010 work outlining the three key elements of a PLC, “a focus on learning, professional collaboration, and a focus on results” (p. 5), provided a culmination of the guidance for the ILT and for the participatory action researcher. Garrett’s outlining of the collaborative work expectations and placing of it within the context of the multitude of reform initiatives rounded out the foundational awareness of the ILT role. This study sought to extend Garrett’s work by examining how a collaborative environment impacts the acceptance of a high-stakes evaluation system. The “deeper dive” into a reform initiative focused on a single directive (evaluation) within a multi-mandate occurrence. The application of the PLC conceptual framework to assist the site’s integration of the state-mandated EES supported the focus of the ILT during the research period. The process became transformative as the site’s shared-leadership approach sought to empower all teachers with a vehicle for voice and agency.

**Transformative Practice**

The foundational researchers who study shared-leadership participate, whether purposefully or not, in transformative practices by challenging the autocratic systems and detailing the empowerment shared leadership offers to those at multiple levels of an organization (Barth, 2013; Bass & Riggio, 2008; Burns, 1978). If transformation is anchored in an overhaul of
the top-down leadership style to involve a collective voice in decisions, and a lifting of organizational learning to new heights by recognizing the value in all members (Bass & Riggio, 2008; Burns, 1978; Marks & Louis, 1999), leadership teams represent transformative practice. Transformative practice is the concept and leadership teams become the mechanism for delivering desired change.

Substantial change efforts are not always embraced readily by everyone in an organization and, as such, are not easy for leaders to impart. Poutiatine (2009) identifies early conversion work in 2000 by Mezirow as essential for its creation of frames to guide the understanding and accepting of change through existing experiences, by crafting new structures for learning, or by transforming beliefs. In this study, the change is viewed as high-stakes as it is directly correlated to the acceptance of a new teacher evaluation protocol. The ILT provided the structure of middle-level management by combining guidance via the crafting of school goals and the supporting of related initiatives. The ILT developed the frame for teachers to address their evaluation requirements and then served as a coaching mechanism, supporting the teachers in their actions toward the stated objectives and initiatives.

In this study, the ILT meets the research criteria to be described as a transformative change agent. The site focused on integrating new mandates, crafting change actions and building urgency around the change itself. Fullan regards the need for a high sense of urgency as a positive because it “helps enormously in completing all the stages of a transformation process” (2001, p. 170). Urgency must be constructed carefully, as it must be a driver of change and not of fear. The ILT’s goals and actions and communication had to parallel and support the school and district improvement plans and focus on teacher growth within the mandated protocols.
Kotter cautions, “It is impossible to overstate the severity of the challenges caused by an inadequate or unaligned sense of urgency” (2012, viii). Kotter’s words guided ILT planning and work supporting the transformation and operationalizing of the new EES. Empowerment cannot occur in untrusting, fearful conditions. Again, the ILT served as the bridge between the teachers and the school and district administration. In turn, the principal worked to strategically advance the abilities and capabilities of the ILT members, furthering the transformative nature of the shared-leadership model. It was crucial for the ILT to be supported by school and district administration in order for transformative practices to take hold.

The ILT directly supported the principal who fostered the advancement and capacity of the ILT members. Mullen & Jones acknowledged the key responsibility of the principal in their claim that, “This leadership role extends well beyond the readiness of principals to prepare their staff for the challenges of accountability-driven systems. We see democratically accountable leadership as a dynamic force that shapes the social justice agendas of organizational leaders” (2008, p. 329). This viewpoint, embraced by the principal, had an immediate and profound effect on the acceptance of the ILT by the site’s educational community. The principal espoused the value of leadership by empowering the ILT members, and the members worked to carry the voice of the teachers throughout the EES mandate adoption, resulting in the transformation becoming a natural extension of the teachers’ work. More plainly, the ILT increased the capacity of teachers by collaboratively exploring techniques and research, utilizing peer resources to advance theory and practice, and embedding the change tenets into the culture of the school. Communicating such change expectations was essential to the acceptance of the shared-leadership model as it enhanced and helped to build trusting relationships between ILT members and their colleagues.
Expanding the Scope of Teams

When the concept of shared-leadership was further refined through constructs and expectations, experts in this field of research next focused on the importance of strengthening respectful interpersonal relationships and building commonality (Lieberman & Miller, 2011; Luft, 2012; Whitaker, 1997). In the instance of this ILT, the relationships and commonality existed through the members’ construction of a school-wide focus around the academic performance advancement of students and the supporting of the teachers’ integration of the new evaluation system.

Research demonstrated that effective leaders have a “powerful influence on the effectiveness of the school and on the achievement of students” (Leithwood & Jantzi in Harris, 2004). To have such impact though, an ILT must involve the multiple teaching and learning styles of the members and use individual skills to leverage change (Harris, 2004). Balancing skills is not the only need however; an ILT has to blend the skills with personalities and approach. Therefore, as leaders in the school, the ILT must function cohesively if the members are to remain positioned to support others. Leaders must be strong and secure enough in their collective knowledge to competently impart it to those they are engaging (Luft, 2012).

District administrators and principals need to recognize in their teachers the skills identified as assets for shared-leadership. More importantly, they then need to afford meaningful and relevant shared-leadership work for people with such identified talents. Creating a successful team begins with developing a group that recognizes and honors individual talents and contributions, and harnesses those attributes to strategically address areas of need (Bolman & Deal, 2008). As mentioned previously, district and school leadership must be purposeful in their claims, commitments, and actions in order to fully demonstrate support and understanding of
ILT functioning to the full school community. If teams accept a student-centered environment, rich in collaboration and inquiry, and dedicated to hard work and proven practices, the likelihood of team development intensifies as the ILT is united by common goals. The principal must be continuously engaged in assessment of the team's accomplishments and struggles and be prepared to guide when necessary (Higgins, Young, Weiner, & Wlodarczyk, 2010; Singh, 2011) around the common pursuits.

The composition of the ILT in the study provided a diverse assemblage of experience and background, encompassing all core subjects, the arts, and special education. The diversity met expectations of collective representation. The training for, and supervision of, the wide scope of strengths and weaknesses was designed to engage all ILT members irrespective of their previous experience. The strength of the diversity and representation of the ILT assisted in confronting the obstacles faced by the school due to the complexity of the site's rural environment.

**Operating Within a Rural Education Setting**

The educational environments of schools and districts each have unique qualities, as does the setting and region in which the district is located. The challenges faced by urban, suburban, or rural districts are at times similar as in the need to adopt new curriculum standards or an educator evaluation system. However, the reality and challenges existing within an area that is geographically disconnected from urban hubs, that lacks technology-based industry, and that does not attract young families to settle, must often be faced by rural environments (Broton, Mueller, Scholtz & Gaona, 2009; Williams & Nierengarten, 2011). The study site had been previously termed a “rural economic center” defined by Massachusetts census data as being a “historic manufacturing and commercial community with moderate levels of economic activity” (Massachusetts Board of Education, 2003, p. 71). The rural economic center definition is highly
applicable to, and descriptive of, the site’s location. The rural impact is further compounded by the fact that longevity data indicates little likelihood of additional industry development or population expansion within the community (Williams & Nierengarten, 2011). Furthermore, rural environments have exhibited a long-standing history of emotionally-charged resistance to change (Lamkin, 2006). Consequently, though the EES is a mandate, the ILT had to be prepared for some hesitation to accept the new process. The ILT employed the external partners to assist with combating resistance through the use of PLC protocols; however, addressing the demographical and philosophical challenges had to come through their role as leaders.

These aforementioned realities of rural districts directly impact school systems as there is a lack of a base from which to draw partnerships, mentors, and financial resources (Miller, 1993). Additionally, there is a great deal of pressure to ensure little to no change in tax revenues so as to minimize a financial effect on the constituents. Again, this economic pressure influences districts as employee growth potential can be stymied and resources must be spread thinly across the many programs, departments, and needs.

Attracting new staff to such an environment can be a challenge for rural school systems (Bryant, 2007; Williams & Nierengarten, 2011). A lower pay structure, minimalized opportunity for advancement due to a smaller management configuration, and the common practice of one person serving in multiple roles may reduce the interest in developing a career in such a work environment. Rural school systems report relatively scarce resources from which to cultivate new staff with diverse or specialized backgrounds (Anderson, 2008). The promise of teaching in an environment that affords the opportunity to embrace diverse skill sets is often overshadowed by the fact that there are minimal tracts for career growth that are also financially beneficial.
Leadership in a rural environment is unique as well. The principal, in his or her role, is more than the building leader. Because the rural principal’s role must strike a balance between the needs of the stakeholders, the role is often representative of the socioeconomic and philosophic realities of the community (Williams & Nierengarten, 2011). An ILT can assist with balancing the multiple expectations of the education realm with the demands of the community and region much more readily than a single administrator.

The superintendent of a rural district maintains a balance between the work of the school system and the politics of the community (Broton, Mueller, Scholtz & Gaona, 2009). Much like the school building administrator’s role, the superintendent navigates using understanding, reflecting, and respect. When the role of the superintendent is viewed by the rural community as a civic manager of personnel and funding, it becomes difficult to assume an equitable role as the instructional leader of the district. These tensions can result in struggles to set priorities, create conflicts in maintaining commitments, and limit time to address competing agenda expectations. In a study on challenges faced by rural districts, a common finding was that superintendents in these settings identified significant frustration with being managers rather than leaders (Lamkin, 2006). Having to juggle the wide range of district-level tasks along with serving as curriculum director, transportation agent, and public relations specialist (amongst other roles) left little time for the direct support of school-based initiatives. Along with the multiple tasks, the superintendent must also recognize the district administrator/cabinet’s capacity to build and sustain change and then allocate resources where and when needed (Terry, 2010). Without the targeted and active support from the superintendent, major initiatives, such as shared-leadership and mandate adoption are likely to falter, if such work manages to get off the ground at all.

Limited personnel, challenges with adequate funding measures, populations that are too small to
qualify for the full range of grant initiatives, and communities entrenched in resisting change pose substantial challenges to rural districts. The lack of business partnerships and often mixed support from a local government highly responsive to constituents create a situation where the school district is often used as leverage between stakeholder groups. Implementing federal and state mandates typically falls upon a single superintendent who must grapple with the shift in structures, funding, and personnel necessary to ensure effective rollouts and support for continuance. Simply stated, this can often be too great a lift for a single individual to handle.

**Leveraging the Team Approach to Advance Mandates**

This study focused on the impact an ILT in a financially and resource-strapped rural elementary school had, and specifically on the ability to support the state-mandated EES. The team is in the initial stages of functioning as a decision-making body, assisting the principal in addressing the teaching and learning needs of the school to advance academic performance. In the state of Massachusetts there are a series of mandates with required implementation by the end of the 2014-2015 school year. The mandate focused on within this study - the implementation of the EES - is a high-stakes, highly-resisted process intended to assist in the development of strong and well-prepared instructors in all classrooms. The regulations, which apply to administrators, teachers, and all individuals required to be licensed in their role, are designed to:

- Promote growth and development amongst leaders and teachers;
- Place student learning at the center, using multiple measures of student learning, growth, and achievement;
- Recognize excellence in teaching and leading;
- Set a high bar for professional teaching status, and;
Shorten timelines for improvement (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011).

The principal commissioned the ILT to assist teachers in addressing specific actions required to meet proficiency levels on the EES standards. The belief was that the school would be more able to adapt to, and adopt, the tenets of the new EES framework by instituting the ILT. In order for the administration to adequately support the ILT, structures that allow the teachers time, training, and reflection must also be present (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Dencev & Collister, 2011; Wheelan, Davidson & Tilin, 2003). The site’s ILT was not expected to be confident and cohesive immediately, and as such, coaching from the principal and the external partners was arranged. The gradual release model that was applied was far more realistic than simply providing stand-and-deliver training and allowing the teams to self-develop. No gradual-release training and operation schedule for the ILT had been set by the completion of the study.

During the course of the study, particular attention was paid to the ILT initiatives and activities that addressed the evaluation expectations. As a participant in the study, the researcher documented administration’s attempts to empower the ILT to support the EES. Though much of the mandate’s adoption and integration process was dependent on district-level directives, the site’s district and school administration assigned and expected the ILT to integrate the mandate. The functioning level of the ILT, the district and school administration’s surrendering of power to reflect a more democratic decision-making process, and the strides toward social justice were the goals of transformative leadership and as such, were focal points of the research.

**District and School Support for Change**

In order for the ILT to gain traction and be positioned to lead among the staff, the change efforts needed the endorsement of the district and school administration. The principal showed
school-level support and confidence by providing time for the ILT to meet and work collaboratively around their goals and to design a pathway to advance their work. However, it was much more complex than a series of meetings. In order for the ILT to function with fidelity, the group had to feel empowered to make decisions and then carry out the work. This level of success is based on the principal’s ability to surrender some of the decision-making power and entrust team members to work with their colleagues (Spillane, et al., 2003). The ILT can only function at the level to which it is empowered.

School leadership depends on district leadership to provide the essential strategies that enable change to take place through supporting principals and efforts (Clarke & Wildy, 2011). If the district is not fully committed to the change efforts or to providing the backing school leadership requires, the potential for failure increases. This commitment must be present from the start-up through the point where the initiative has become a part of the fabric of the institution (Crose, 2009). If district administration waivers in backing initiatives then work completion and the ILT’s desire to engage in further efforts could be jeopardized. Lending support must be in word as well as action. In 2011, Clarke and Wildy (quoting Anderson, 2003) posited that the district administration must be purposeful and strategic in their approach to initiative-backing in order for the school-level work to be accepted as important and supported. This requires consistent and enduring statements and committed actions from the district-level leaders indicating the recognized value of the ILT work. During the study, particular attention was paid to the impact of district leadership action on the process of site-based leadership and the school administrator’s response. The district administration’s support of the ILT efforts was crucial due to the sheer volume of work surrounding the mandates.
Conceptual Framework

The unique case study was driven largely by the work of DuFour and Spillane in their continuance of transformational leadership methods. DuFour’s (2004) work defining leadership team expectations around advancing student learning and in setting goals, working within structures and norms, and in its dedication to transparency aligned to the work of the external partners. Spillane’s shared-leadership could only have succeeded with the principal philosophically and structurally positioned and ready to relinquish an autocratic approach in favor of group decision-making. The findings of Spillane et al. (2003), guided the theoretical development of the study’s exploration of the district and school leadership’s role in the process. Without a school leader embracing the belief that empowering teachers would advance the school’s curricular and instructional work, the ILT would remain an entity assigned management tasks rather than leadership opportunities. The ILT concept, the need for principal support of shared-leadership, and the application of the social capital theory allowed the study to focus on dimensions that embraced trust, shared values, and collective efficacy to advance the organization (Qureshi, 2011). The social capital theory and a focus on social partnerships as a way to advance teacher efficacy provided the philosophical construct from which to approach the organizational goals (Seddon, Billett, & Clemans, 2007) and the EES implementation. A diagram of the conceptual framework can be found in Appendix C.

Conclusion

The transformative work of the ILT must go beyond existence within a framework to achieve the aforementioned level of compliance and implementation. Curry (2008) writes of the power of Critical Friends Groups for advancing improvements in education. Curry’s attaching of the research literature and scope of the collaborative work to school reform supported the study
and the site’s approach to the EES by reinforcing the power in collegial study. There was value in the ILT understanding the context in which different types of groups (e.g., critical friends, teacher professionalism, PLCs) existed, so parallels could be drawn to the constructs of an ILT. The ILT, as a group, must always seek to operate where it can be considered embedded. This requires functioning in a constant cycle of questioning, examining, and responding if it is to flourish and advance the work with which it is charged. The ILT is engaged in work that involves a long and fluid process because it is transformative, and as such, is never-ending (Dencev & Collister, 2011).

The use of qualitative data to carefully document the ILT’s work with respect to integrating the EES, as well as the examination of the role the school and district administration played in providing leadership guided the study and the reporting of the findings. The final boundary of the study was the placement within a rural district and the exploration of a resource-limited region impact. It was within the aforementioned constructs that the data collection and reporting processes were developed, and hence, told the story.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The increasing focus on accountability within PK-12 education has led to the development of the new Massachusetts Framework for Educator Evaluation (see Evaluation of Educators, 603 CMR 35.00: M.G.L. c.69, §1B; c.71, §38), whereby all educators engage in a process of goal identification, strategy, and a joint review by the educator and principal. That goal planning includes establishing student learning and professional objectives. Educator rating determinations are the result of the student and professional growth objectives being met. The evaluation standards are a mandate from the state with districts required to be at full implementation by the 2014-2015 school year (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). It was the intent of this study to investigate key actions, supports, research, and findings related to the functions of an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) on a small, rural district’s implementation of the evaluation system, referred to at the site as the Educator Evaluation System (EES). To this end, the study sought to characterize the actions that were taken by the ILT, the district administration, and the school principal in support of the ILT efforts. The primary focus of the study was to document the aforementioned parties’ specific efforts that resulted in the greatest impact on the integration of the EES. Last, there was a record of the influence that limited resources had on this small, rural school as it implemented a collaborative approach to leadership.

Theoretical Approach

Approaching the study qualitatively presented an opportunity to explore and detail the actions taken by the district administrators, school principal, ILT members, and the building’s teachers to integrate the EES. The guiding questions were created to elicit responses reflective of
individual and group experiences. With no predetermined expectations or hypothesis to prove, these open-ended questions were expected to shed light on the integration of the evaluation process which could then be juxtaposed with the potential impact of the rural environment.

The qualitative research method was selected for its potential to provide a flexible design that would facilitate gathering evidence of the organization’s engagement in processes towards integrating the EES (Merriam, 2009; Richards & Morse, 2007; Roberts, 2010). As the EES is a new system for Massachusetts, the use of a leadership team to assimilate it within the context of a rural system is an unexplored concept and therefore a phenomenological understanding was justified. Sharing the story of the progression of the EES integration, and the subsequent meaning that was derived from the experience (Merriam, 2009), provided contextual learning opportunities. Engaging with the site through participatory observation allowed for the documenting of the experience for the benefit of future consideration toward change agency. In order to create a replicable model, careful attention to the detail of participants’ actions and responses was necessary (Creswell, 2013).

The goal of qualitative research is the discovery of meaning through capturing the participants’ experiences. The study’s open-ended questions were designed to be vague enough to preclude pre-determined outcomes (Creswell, 2013) yet there was enough direction to keep responses focused on particular topics. As a participatory action research study of transformative work, the research sought to advance social justice through the identification of ways to address barriers to full participation of all parties within an organization (O’Neill, Woods, & Webster, 2005, p. 76). The value in choosing case study research was the recognition that learning by doing was more likely to produce results than a simple study of theory (Fox, 2009).
Grounding the study in the social capital theory meant crafting questions that would expose the roles of group dynamics and organizational growth through individual empowerment for the collective good (Yuan, Gay, & Hembrooke, 2006). Documenting the social reciprocity experienced between the participants as individuals and as a collective whole added to the literature of change efforts in shared-leadership within rural settings. The following questions guided the study:

1. How is the ILT leveraging its role in brokering the acceptance of the EES the staff must operationalize?
2. What district and school actions and supports are necessary for school-based leadership teams to undertake this change action within the school?
3. How do the limited financial and staffing resources and characteristics of the rural district influence the progress of the ILT?

Site Description

The research took place at a mid-sized K-7 elementary/middle school with a community of approximately 40 teachers and 500 students. The school is part of a four-school district, with three K-7 buildings and a single 8-12 middle/high school. The district is located in a community classified as a “rural economic center” according to Massachusetts Census data (Massachusetts Board of Education, 2003). The exact wording of the classification has since changed; however, the interpretation has not. The current label translates to a community that is predominately rural but is a bit more densely populated; yet, there is a significantly limited economic base. The community population is approximately 14,000 (Massachusetts Census Data, 2013) and although an institution of higher education and the school system carries much of the weight of employment there are numerous privately-owned businesses, three minor manufacturing
operations, and a regional health care facility. The unemployment rate is 10.5% compared to the national average of 5.3% and persons living at, or below the poverty rate, is approximately 23% compared to the national average of 14.5% (Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, 2014; United States Census Bureau, n.d.).

The district was selected for its location within an economically-restricted, geographically-isolated region which provided contextualization for the study’s focus. The selection of this school within the district was two-fold. First, the district administration was fully committed to supporting the change in educator evaluation and secondly, the leader had philosophically embraced the ILT model and was enthusiastic with regard to shared-leadership.

The research occurred in a school where there was a pre-existing professional relationship with the researcher. This prior relationship created a basis for trust and facilitated access to the site. The relationship with the principal was built on a mutual sense of respect and trust. The principal’s transparency and openness allowed virtually unlimited access to the building, staff, and applicable data. Connecting with teachers to build relationships beyond just the ILT-development work lent itself to ensuring participant cooperation (Coughlan & Brannick, 2005).

**Participants**

There were approximately 40 full-time equivalency (FTE) teachers at the site. The researcher had contact with 35 individual participants from whom study data was gathered. The ILT was comprised of nine members; the building principal, the district math coach, six teachers and the district Title I Director. The site’s principal had one prior year experience as a building leader and two as Dean of Students. The district math coach, Title I Director, and a Director of Teaching and Learning provided the ILT with student data and instructional training that could
be further shared with staff. District administration was a part of the larger scope of the study; however, the detailed research focused on the ILT and the building principal.

**Researcher Approach and Disclosure**

This case study was rooted in the knowledge gained from research that relationships based on trust and respect are essential (Coughlan & Brannick, 2005; Fullan, 2001). Social capital theory underscores the significance of collegiality and collaborative collective approaches to problem solving so as to benefit the institution through group advancement of the work efforts (Curry, 2008; Scheie, 2001). In this instance, the ILT focused on building staff capacity around data-driven outcomes in support of the mandated EES adoption process. The school benefitted from both the individual and collaborative work of shared leadership (Yuan, Gay, & Hembrooke, 2006). Utilizing Creswell’s (2013) description of an in-depth, single-bounded case presentation, the study was termed as having “unusual interest” as there was uniqueness to the parameters of the school and setting and the mandated adoption of an entirely new evaluation process. Therefore, this research evolved as an “intrinsic case” (p. 98). Interviews, observation, a survey, and document review provided the qualitative data. Quantitative data were examined in relation to the site’s accountability status, teacher employment satisfaction, and survey results identifying levels of empowerment and voice in decision-making. Despite this use, quantitative data did not have a strong or guiding presence in the study beyond informing the research. The richness and benefit of the story that qualitative data told was driven by the level of honesty and confidence the researcher promoted through collegiality and trust. Transparency and teacher confidence in the study’s tenets were continually addressed. The researcher’s role with the school was as an external partner. The researcher initially faced the teacher perception that the state was likely interested in evaluating operations through the study. That was not the case; the researcher’s
professional charge was to assist teaching and learning approaches and measurements. Changing the teacher perception required consistency in the messages regarding the research and through the actions of the researcher as observed by teachers. The actions showed a commitment to confidentiality and integrity around the information shared during interviews and observations.

A delineation between the professional and research responsibilities was made apparent when possible. Despite the boundaries of professional engagement, the researcher’s role can never be truly separated in qualitative research as there is no way to completely remove participant or researcher bias (Creswell, 2013).

**Data Collection**

This study focused on eight months of a single school year, documenting the efforts around collaborative approaches to integrating the EES mandate, the district and school administration’s role around such work, and the impact of the rural setting over a period of eight months. Data collection incorporated the following methods:

- A review of school and grade-level accountability data from state assessments to gain an awareness of the root of the ILT objectives for the school year. These objectives informed required grade-level teacher professional goals for the evaluation process. This quantitative data was not used within the study as a measurement tool; rather, it informed the researcher by providing background for an understanding of the ILT objectives and their development;

- A review of teacher responses on the TELL MASS survey (a mixed-methods survey focusing on school climate for the employees) that the state conducts every other year. Survey response data provided guidelines for further qualitative questioning as it broadened the researcher’s understanding of teacher impressions of leadership.
opportunities and the levels of district and school transparency and collaboration. In this manner, the quantitative survey was not implemented as a part of the study’s data collection; rather, it was a foundational document. Due to the sensitivity of the data and personally-identifiable information, the survey results were made available through discussion only and therefore unavailable for inclusion as a document in this study;

• Individual interviews and grade-level focus groups were conducted with district and school administration, ILT members, and teachers in order to gather information on the perceived impact of the ILT work with the educator evaluation goals as they related to school improvement (see questions, Appendix D). Data collection in these areas was via recording and transcription and/or researcher notes and “reflective notes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 169);

• The use of participant-observation;

• The review of ILT minutes, faculty notices, inter-departmental notes and notices (hard copy and electronic) for data in support of the school’s academic focus;

• A review of the minutes of grade-level meetings led by the ILT;

• The use of an open-ended survey to gather qualitative data via the sharing of teacher experiences with the ILT as they related to educator goals (see Appendices E, K);

• A review of the District and School Improvement Plans and the Literacy Plan, as they were updated and a continual exploration of their connection to the objectives of the ILT. As with other documents, these plans contain personally-identifiable information which precludes their inclusion as appendices;
Audio, video, and pictorial recordings of documents, interviews, and focus groups were used. Protection of confidentiality of the subjects occurred by seeking participant approval and through the researcher destroying audio files following transcription.

**Timeframe and procedures.** The data for this study was collected over eight months of a single school year. Beginning in August, 2014, the researcher collected and explored the accountability data and district/school/ILT objectives. The researcher conducted a review of records and examined baseline ILT work projections gathered through the interview process. The information was recorded, transcribed, sorted and coded. The ILT summer trainings provided time for observation of its planning process to target student performance improvement. The performance targets were shared with staff in September and the ILT guided grade-level and/or individual EES goal development based on the findings that emerged from the August data review and grade-level examination sessions. The ILT facilitated data comparisons between the summer data findings and teacher-identified performance patterns on the state-level assessment tests from grades three through seven. During August and September the TELL MASS self-study school climate survey data for qualitative comments on atmosphere and morale was reviewed, with a focus on teacher perception of the lending of their voice to decision-making. Archived climate survey data and school accountability performance data from 2012 were compared to the TELL MASS survey for commonalities in findings which expanded the researcher’s knowledge and understanding of the school’s culture. The researcher participated in ILT, grade-level, and monthly district administration meetings and relevant professional development trainings. By March, much of the EES required observation and feedback cycle had been applied and early results of the targeted objectives emerged (see Appendix G: Calendar of Research Activities).
**Ethical considerations.** The ethical considerations included the need for the researcher’s objectivity and efforts to remain non-evaluative despite any teacher impressions of an evaluative role as well as recognition of any researcher influence on the process. As a participatory observer the researcher was present in the study, but carefully bracketing the role ensured that the educator’s voice, and not the researcher’s, emerged. This required an understanding of ethically important moments, meaning they may have appeared benign or routine on the surface, but the situations had the potential for the researcher to make a decision to preserve the ethical integrity of the study (Guillemin & Gillam, as quoted in Kaiser, 2009). As this was a demographically small district it was crucial that confidentiality was ensured to maintain the trust between the researcher and participants and ensure validity of the study. Information that could have exposed particular individuals was protected to prevent potential repercussions if their identity was determined.

The bulk of the data was reported in the aggregate, alleviating concern over participant-identification. As with teacher data, the district and school data was cleaned to remove identifiers. The outlining of confidentiality processes occurred at the point of initial contact with the participants to ground the research and the study in confidence and trust (Crow, Wiles, Heath & Charles, 2006). The data that could identify specific individuals were left unpublished.

Last, a separation of personal job responsibilities and research was considered to limit risk of teachers feeling exploited or judged through discussions and investigations into their work. As a qualitative research study, maintaining of credibility and dependability by the researcher was crucial. Triangulation of data to verify claims and beliefs was conducted. The
researcher was mindful of the need for transparency and sensitivity to the site and personal interaction (Roberts, 2010), and continually aware of the fact that the researcher is inherently embedded in the qualitative study (Creswell, 2013).

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was anchored in best practices of qualitative methodology. This involved cycling the data through several stages of examination and coding, looking at the evolution of connections and relationships (National Science Foundation [NSF], 1997, p. 2). Data were gathered, assessed, and interpreted via multiple rounds of exploration from August, 2014 through March, 2015. The qualitative research process focused on simultaneous data collection and analysis. Data reduction provided an opportunity to remove information not related to the study and not deemed necessary. The data were reduced and categorized through exploring notes and recordings and evaluated for applicability to the study’s purpose. Following the data reduction, the categorizing of themes occurred as they emerged from the document reviews, focus groups, interviews, and field notes. The determination of themes required open coding in the beginning to construct categories and to “…have a conversation with the data” (Merriam, 2009, p. 178).

This initial coding provided the most applicable option for a broad look at the data in its early stages (Saldana, 2013, p. 64). Assessing categories, restructuring, and sorting were ongoing throughout the first six months of the data-collection process. Second cycle coding for “pattern” and “focused coding” (Saldana, 2013, pp.209-213) occurred and Microsoft Word’s Word Frequency Software was used to identify emerging themes or to provide evidence in support of themes. Microsoft Word was used for transcription and Excel for coding and categorization.

In order to ensure accuracy, participants received a hard copy of the transcribed interview with a set time for review, comments, and return. The researcher secured a location at the site for
confidential records drop off and participants had direct access to the researcher through the school’s mail system, email, phone, and interpersonal exchanges. The use of peer debriefing by the researcher supported precision in the records management process and allowed for reflection and response to the processes if/when adjustments were required.

**Protecting the participants.** Data collection and interactions occurred at the participants’ work site. All data obtained as part of this study was transcribed and maintained solely by the researcher. The information regarding data management was included in the Consent for Participation in Research document (see Appendix B).

Any data being transferred was via secured systems. Electronic files were protected through encryption or a flash drive was supplied and collected by the researcher. Hard copy transfers were hand-delivered or placed into the individual’s mailbox in a sealed envelope.

Hard copies of documents that were kept for the required study period remain in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s private office. Electronic data, video and audio files awaiting transcription and accuracy verification were kept on the researcher’s laptop, with all documents encrypted. In addition, files on the backup drive were password-protected. The information regarding data security is included in the Consent for Participation in Research document (See Appendix B). Hard copy files, including consent forms, notes, and transcripts needing to be secured for the duration of three years beyond the completion of the study, in accordance with research policy, have been archived. Following the three-year time period for saving data, hard copy files will be cross-cut shredded and electronic files will be deleted.

The identity of the subjects was known only to the researcher and documented for record-keeping purposes. Beyond naming the state where the study was conducted and the economic status of the location, there were no personally-identifiable indicators included in the research.
Responses to interview data, or in meetings, were anonymous, with codes assigned to participants. Codes were maintained by the researcher for the purpose of data accuracy and validity and will be destroyed at the end of the study period with the rest of the information.

**Limitations**

The limitations of the study encompassed the timeline, the site, the researcher and the nature of qualitative research. The initial limitation was the time frame in which the study was conducted. The study occurred over the course of eight months within a single school year. This resulted in reporting only the initial ILT work and its impact. The findings may be challenged by results of a multi-year study documenting longitudinal effects of developing a shared-leadership process.

Since the researcher is engaged with the school as an external partner, there was the need to recognize and address potential bias. Data validity was carefully executed and cross-checked by peer review to minimize the influence of the pre-existing relationship between the site and the researcher. The credibility of the study was supported through careful attention to the self-identified limitations (Ioannidis in Brutus, Aguinis, & Wassner, 2013).

The site was one of several schools in the district using an ILT model to implement shared-leadership practices. Though a significant number of similarities existed between the schools, the differences in culture and personnel impacted the ability to completely generalize findings since so much of the work was dependent upon the school administrator’s openness to shared-leadership.

Another researcher concern was that participants would infer that any instances of failure to implement an ILT-supported practice might negatively impact their educator evaluation rating. This concern had the potential to affect responses provided during focus groups or individual
interviews. While no part of the study was related to a teacher’s evaluation, it was still an area of concern that deserved identification as a potential limitation and hence, received continual monitoring.

Last, the nature of qualitative research raised the question about self-reported data as it pertains to reliability of the participants’ perceptions. Brutus, Aguinis and Wassmer (2013), note the issues of accurate memory of occurrences, the desire to describe one’s actions in a positive light while assigning responsibility of negative experiences to others, and embellishment of personal impact on events to be more significant. This phenomenon was managed through data triangulation and comparing responses across time.

**Piloting of Questions**

The piloting of interview questions occurred in April, 2014, and identified items that would result in hesitation to respond, produce cautious replies, or that did not garner enough “rich” information. Questions were reframed to dig deeper into the aspect of the rural environment. As the study developed, the nature of some questions changed. There was less need to focus on the impact of external partnership training, nor on a broad scope of mandates. The adjusting of questions further streamlined the targeted data collection processes as it refined the breadth of inquiry (Merriam, 2009).

The examining of interview and focus group questions occurred in another elementary school within the district. Five members of the pilot site’s ILT participated in one of two focus group sessions designed to test research questions. The researcher met for 45 minutes prior to the school day in one instance, and for 45 minutes during the school day in another. The sessions were recorded and were transcribed by the researcher. Exploration of the transcripts focused on the applicability of the participant response to the data the questions were designed to elicit.
From there, questions were edited to reflect a more generally-worded format that would support the story-telling goal of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). Some questions required adjustment to ensure sufficient drilling down into the anticipated support from the ILT. The secondary effect of piloting the questions was the development of EES-specific inquiry that focused solely on the ILT impact on the evaluation process rather than on all mandates set to be implemented in the coming year.

The fact that both the site and the pilot school participated in the same trainings, had the same district goals, expectations, and data-gathering requirements, provided a legitimate comparison (Roberts, 2010; Taylor-Powell & Renner, 2003). The significant difference between the two locations was in population size with the study site having an additional 13 teachers and 250 students more than the pilot location. In addition, the principal at the pilot location had six years of leadership experience beyond the principal at the research site.

Conclusion

The selection of 35 participants, the development of questions to build a case study around the ILT’s work to integrate the EES, and the careful management of the research process provided a significant amount of information. During informal conversations the participants reported the process was not stressful once it was understood and/or experienced. The presence of a research study being conducted in the building was not discernible, according to site employees, beyond the individual or small group interviews.

Once the process of data collection was executed and information was gathered from the participants, the established guiding questions were used to analyze the data and interpret the findings. This elicited themes and supporting evidence that fleshed out the story at the site. Chapter four provides the detailed findings that resulted from the eight-month study.
Definitions

- *Center for Collaborative Education* – the organization seeks to create networks of schools that are deeply engaged in the work of continuous improvement by creating effective models of urban education, district redesign, and leadership development, providing onsite coaching, professional development, and networking opportunities for educators and conducting research that documents school progress and student results. Equity and excellence are fundamental to CCE’s mission and the group seeks to increase opportunity and justice for every student.

- *Changing demographic of rural classrooms* – Within the past 10 years schools typically considered rural have experienced an influx of a much more diverse population, including students who are English Language Learners and/or who are representative of many cultures. Additionally, rural schools are faced with the challenge of higher dropout rates, lower test scores, and extended high school completion rates (Center for Public Education, 2012).

- *District and School Assistance Center* – The DSAC is an outreach office through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The main purpose of the DSAC is to provide supports (assistance) to districts and schools considered amongst the lowest performing across the state (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014).

- *Educators* – Within this study, the term is used to describe the collective group of administrators, deans, teachers, counselors, and paraprofessionals.
• *Embedded in school culture* – In the context of this environment, the term is used to imply the team functions as a natural extension of all that occurs within the setting and is an expected aspect of the typical functioning of the building.

• *Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)* – Comprised of educators representing multiple roles within the school, the group is focused on collaboratively guiding the teaching and learning by working as a decision-making body and coaching colleagues.

• *Professional Learning Community/Critical Friends Group/Teacher Professionalism* – In education these terms are often used interchangeably. However, in this study, the Professional Learning Community train and function under DuFour’s (2004) characterization; a formalized group of educators operating collectively and within structures and practices to pool talents to address problems, concerns and the implementation of change (Stegall, 2011).

• *Rural Economic Centers* – Historic manufacturing and commercial communities with moderate levels of economic activity (Massachusetts Board of Education, 2003)

• *Shared-leadership/distributed leadership* – collective decision-making environment in which members are entrusted and empowered to participate in the selection and application of methods or choices with respect to the educational environment. Rather than having a single building leader making all of the decisions, collaborative leadership recognizes the abilities of others and recognizes the benefit of many voices.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this case study was to document the process a district, school, and Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) engaged in to support the integration of the state-mandated Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Regulations, CMR 35.00), known in the district as the Educator Evaluation System (EES). The study was further bracketed by conducting it within a rural, economically-challenged location in a district that lacks personnel and resources. The following questions guided the study:

1. How is the ILT leveraging its role in brokering the acceptance of the EES the staff must operationalize?

2. What district and school actions and supports are necessary for school-based leadership teams to undertake this change action within the school?

3. How do the limited financial and staffing resources and characteristics of the rural district influence the progress of the ILT?

Responses to the three guiding questions were sought through a combination of personal interviews, group interviews, an open-ended survey, and document review. Over the period of eight months, the 35 participants were observed and interviewed to document their experiences with interventions designed to operationalize the EES. This information was collected, aggregated, and assessed for themes. Data was then compared to the guiding questions in order to connect the indicators in the findings specific to the impact of district and school resources on the EES. Implications of the data, recommendations, and next steps in further research are reported in chapter five.
Analysis Methodology

Artifacts used for the study. Data for the study was extracted from three basic sources. As per the methods section, document review, individual and group interviews, and participant observation provided the bulk of evidence. Newspaper articles, committee meeting minutes, and casual conversations examined the goals of the district through the community lens.

Data collection. Data collection for this study focused on gathering EES-related information documenting the planning, actions, responses, and evaluation of interactions between the district and school decision-makers. The data was collected from district leadership, school leadership, and teachers. Reporting of the data occurred after removing personally-identifiable information and aggregating findings. Table 1 shows the distribution of staff available for the study and the role diversity of the 35 participants.

Table 1

*Distribution of staff available/participating*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee Assignment</th>
<th># of Available Staff</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District Administration</td>
<td>3.5*</td>
<td>3.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Administration</td>
<td>2.5*</td>
<td>2.5*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-School Coordinator</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1 Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 2 Teacher</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 5 Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 6 Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 7 Teacher</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Subjects Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title I Teacher/Coach</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Consultant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Denotes staff serving in combined district and school-level roles.
Collection methods. Data was collected across the span of eight months and through a multitude of methods. Initial data collection occurred through exploration of the 2014 school accountability data, released by the state after standardized tests had been analyzed. Data reports specific to the school’s Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment Test (MCAS) performance were reviewed in August to provide a foundation for goal-setting work. Active research began by observing seven members of the school while they worked identifying data trends across grades and subjects based on the summative test results from the MCAS. This unpacking of the strength and weakness patterns within MCAS results led to the development of the site’s data-based improvement planning. Other documents reviewed focused on district and school goals for the year, external partner agreements and goals, staff meeting agendas, the principal’s weekly updates, ILT project updates, professional development activities and feedback on individual professional goals and student learning goals (see Appendix H for a full listing of documents).

District-level individual interviews were conducted with the Superintendent, Director of Teaching and Learning, Title I Director, and District Math Director. School-level individual interviews were conducted with the Principal, two Special Educators, the School Adjustment Counselor, and the After-School Coordinator. All individual interviews occurred between September and November, 2014, and were conducted on site during scheduled work hours.

Group interviews were conducted between October and November, 2014. Group-level interviews transpired with teachers in grades one through seven, teachers of non-core subjects, and the Instructional Leadership Team and occurred during the school day or at collaborative staff meeting collaborative sessions (grade-level meeting time). Questions common to all interviews were:

• How did you become aware of your school’s Instructional Leadership Team?
• What was the process of being appointed to the ILT?
• With respect to state mandates regarding the educator evaluation process, please talk about the role the ILT is playing in supporting the school’s adoption.
• With respect to district-determined measures, please talk about the role the ILT is playing in supporting the school’s adoption.
• What aspect of the ILT is crucial to the successful infusion of the evaluation and district-determined measures mandates?
• Are there areas the ILT could be expanding its work? Please support your response with examples or reasons.
• How do you know what the ILT is doing?
• How does the ILT communicate and are the methods effective for you?
• Do you have ease of access to an ILT member?
• What do you feel challenges the ILT in their supporting of the school’s goals?
• What kind of information is presented to the staff from the ILT?

Discussions with ILT members during their meetings focused initially on training and preparation for the role. Questions for the ILT targeted district and external partner support and were drawn from the following:

• Please describe, in as much detail as you can recall, the training the ILT received, as a group, to prepare you for this role.
• Were you in attendance for any of the PLC trainings conducted by the external partner?
• Did you attend the on-site training for protocols conducted by the external partner and please describe the methods, support, and applicability to the ILT work.
• Have you utilized any of the trainings in your ILT role and if so, what; if not, why?

• Please describe the methods of training the district has provided the ILT.

• What, in your opinion, is needed by the ILT, with respect to training that either the school or district needs to supply?

• If you do not believe the district or school is able to continue to prepare the ILT to meet its challenges, what external training is required?

Interviews lasted between 10 and 40 minutes and were recorded on an iPhone using the iTalk or ClearRecord applications. Interviews were transcribed by the researcher and returned to all participants via hard copy or email and participants were asked to submit corrections or clarifications within two weeks. Two individuals submitted an additional detail each to statements made during their respective interviews. All transcribed documents were stored in file folders based on source origination, noted as one-to-one interviews, grade-level interviews, or staff meeting notes. This sorting was selected in order to create the possibility for word frequency pattern examination across data sources.

**Data coding.** Interviews and notes were initially stored as Word documents. All Word documents were hand-coded, as were the analytical notes, via the Open (or Descriptive) Coding method (Saldana, 2013).

Word documents were assessed through multiple coding processes. All codes were entered into an Excel document with a separate worksheet specific to the source of origin. The initial coding methods resulted in 177 separate field identifications. The 177 fields were then analyzed in Excel by sorting alphabetically, producing lists with similarities (e.g., “professional development” versus “professional development topics”) and duplicates which were combined
into a single code to simplify the process (see Appendix I). Second round coding narrowed the topics. Pattern Coding was used to identify the foremost concepts from interview documents. Round two coding for documents used Microsoft’s Word Count & Frequency Statistics Software method to examine words repeated throughout district and school publications. Second-level coding identified 15 primary concepts which were later analyzed for themes.

Excel worksheets were aggregated in a single document and the information tracked in Excel included the date, source, level one code, level two code, theme, notes related to the initial code, and correlations between the research question and pertinent notes (see Appendix J). As the research progressed the code and theme columns were completed on the individual worksheets and exported to the aggregated file. Detailed notes extracted from Word documents were reviewed and updated three times and all notes cross-referenced for theme identification.

**Thematic overview.** The examination of codes and consideration of the sources and the notes that supported the codes resulted in the emergence of four main themes. These four themes were then inserted into the Excel spreadsheet and examined in comparison to the first level of coding as well as the notes associated with the concept to ensure appropriate assignments. The theme results of *Facilitators of Change*, *Accountability*, *Structuring the Support*, and *Constraining Factors* are presented in order of significance to the building of the Instructional Leadership Team and its role within the change efforts undertaken at the site.

**Results**

The results of the eight-month study indicated that four main themes occurred across all data sources. The thematic concepts detailed below appear in the representative order of the building of the ILT’s story from foundational requirements to driving forces to the impact of the
ILT. The constraining factors theme posits the challenges the site and ILT faces due to factors that are within the scope of work the ILT can address and those outside of the group’s influence.

There is a graphic within each of the four themes that demonstrates the relationship that exists between the sub-topics. Each sub-topic relationship was found to be unique to the theme and as such the illustrations vary from a Venn Diagram to process tools to one theme nestled within another. Figure 2 diagrams the themes and the codes that supported the thematic development and precedes the detailing of the concepts.

![Thematic Outcomes Diagram](image)

*Figure 2. Thematic relationships*

**Theme one: Facilitators of change.** This category, composed of the information within the collaboration, empowerment, ILT development, and ILT leadership codes, became the
repository of steps taken toward achieving desired change. Notes focused on the impact of collaboration and the areas of accomplishment versus need. Teacher empowerment was a frequent code, and is linked to the ILT model. Data assigned to this theme were extracted from those aligned to guiding question one.

The development of the ILT model within the district was based on the power of teaming and collaborative voice in leadership. This approach to change represents the foundation of the study. District administrators selected the ILT model to support the adoption of the new evaluation system. The superintendent described the ILT as being crucial “Because the demands of the common core, educator evaluation, changes in population dynamics, and the need to make significant changes and the inability to do it with a single administrator signaled the need to do things differently.”

This theme, connected to guiding question one of the research, concentrates on the actions and responses of the educators and their impact on change efforts and encompasses the sub-themes of ILT development, collaboration, empowerment, and ILT leadership. The sub-themes are presented in order of their role in building the capacity for change at the site. The relationship of the concepts is demonstrated in Figure 3 which shows how each area built on the former and all worked to advance the change efforts of the site’s ILT and teachers.

![Figure 3. ILT progression](image)

**ILT development.** According to district administrators, and verified through document review, the district had been financially supportive of an ILT model for the prior two years. During administrator and teacher interviews it was stated that prior leadership/data teams lacked
scope, focus, and a strategic process to select people to serve. After district and school administrators defined the required skills the members should have in order to be prepared as change agents, the 2014-2015 ILT was selected through a more formalized process. This year, principals were given the directive to diversify the teams to ensure representation across all grades, content, and to be inclusive of core and non-core subjects, Title I, and Special Education.

District administrators stepped back from the ILT selection process after the initial guidance that teams were to be diversified. During the interview with district and school leadership it was stated that principals had been instructed to lead the whole process of building the ILT because, “Ultimately, it was the principal’s decision as to who was on the team… The superintendent is not involved in the interview process because [ILT members] need to know they are working for the Principal.” The exceptions to the district remaining hands-off were the posting of the ILT positions, approving the $32 per hour stipends, and completing the paperwork to officially appoint members to the teams.

The four applicants for the three open ILT positions at the site were interviewed by the principal. The principal stated that each of the four applicants offered something unique to the team based on varied backgrounds and personalities and selecting only three would mean a gap in representation of all grades/content. Over a two week period unused funds from the grant that covers ILT stipends (approximately $500 per person, per year) were allocated to the school. This allowed the principal to add the other applicant to the ILT. The justification was the size of the school and faculty, when compared to others in the district, clearly identified the need for a larger team if all educators were to be served. Table 2 shows the team and the experience brought to the group.
Table 2

*ILT member background*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Assignment</th>
<th># of Years on ILT</th>
<th># of Years in Building or District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Literacy Director</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Math Director</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3 teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4 teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education middle grades teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Subjects all grades teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support Professional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title I teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The background of the ILT members selected added legitimacy to the team and a greater ability to connect, assist, and represent all teachers in the building. Interviews across grade-level teams showed that in four of the seven meetings teachers identified the diversity of the appointed members of the ILT as a factor in the perceived representation of their interests. In two cases grade-level teams could not identify the specific ILT members by name though they indicated feeling supported due to the myriad perspectives and backgrounds represented.

There was data training provided to the ILT members through work with an external consultancy group. Returning ILT member interviews indicated that the assistance of the external consultant helped in viewing state-wide student performance data reports, understanding and identifying trends and in developing data displays. The superintendent and principal also cited the benefit of the ILT external consultant support and committed to on-site coaching and
professional development for the duration of the school year. The ILT’s summer work culminated in a PowerPoint presentation that shared the data findings and provided individual work packets to teachers that were the anchor for grade-level team goal designs.

Three returning members of the ILT presented the data overview during professional development sessions at the start of the year. ILT members facilitated grade-level work by attending meetings and providing guiding questions that directed teachers in the examination of their packets. Protocols that guided the data work were taught by the ILT members. Data findings were reported on posters an ILT member had designed and were hung up for a gallery walk at the end of the work time. Applicants for the open ILT positions were encouraged to work with current ILT members to better understand how to read and interpret the data.

The ILT continued the support of data-based decision-making beyond the initial data work during the first month of school. The ILT was not at full capacity until November due to delays in the official district appointment of new ILT members. The effect of the span of time in hiring resulted in different levels of training and exposure to protocols and initiatives. This was evident in discussions with the new members who stated their frustration with feeling as though they were on the periphery of the decision-making process.

The ILT struggled with focus for the first three months in part due to the Team being only partially staffed. During ILT meetings, members reported feeling ineffective due to the inability to thoroughly support change efforts. The low ILT membership meant people needed to assume additional roles, which was observed to be a source of tension. Meeting minutes and observations showed the ILT members strayed from the planned topics; rather they focused on the difficulties of being under-staffed. Interviews with teachers across the grades indicated sporadic attendance of ILT members at collaborative sessions. Ideally, an ILT member was to be
assigned to every breakout group (either by grade or special teams) in order to build teacher
capacity around initiatives. Survey results showed only 40% (n=10) of the teams reported an ILT
member was regularly present during structured collaborative times.

Research notes from ILT and staff meeting observations during October and November
reflected a lack of direction for the Team. As one ILT member stated, “It felt like we were
spinning around and doing little bits here and there. There was no central focus.” A comment
from an ILT meeting in November indicated a sense of disconnect and frustration. One
individual questioned the purpose in attending the meetings because they lacked direction and
specific desired outcomes.

The need for leadership (principal and ILT) to guide the collaborative time of weekly
staff meetings occurred as a result of unproductive use of time noted during principal
walkthroughs. This provided immediate focus for the Team. The ILT was charged with
facilitating the staff meetings and helping the teachers understand the purpose of the data-driven
academic focus areas in English/language arts and math.

In January, the external consultant introduced collaboration protocols. The goal the
consultant had was to build the capacity of the entire staff around protocol usage. The ILT
members were trained first and expected to support the consultant’s work across grade-level
teams. Importantly, this training occurred with the ILT fully staffed and, based on survey results,
provided common understanding, direction, and knowledge. Through this training the ILT
developed skills in running meetings, assigning roles, setting times, and creating communication
structures and participation expectations of their members.

Results indicate that the integration of protocols and processes will continue to enhance
the effectiveness of the ILT and develop its cohesiveness. Training for new ILT members around
the Team goals and focus, professional development around data use, and meeting expectations never occurred. In meetings, emails, or interviews new members expressed a sense of intimidation and frustration related to joining the ILT part way through the year. This left the recently-appointed members with a sense of not having the necessary background to fully participate. Findings suggest that the full development of the ILT will be dependent on the recognition of the necessity of such training. This concept is related to others found within the Structuring the Support theme.

Collaboration. In August, members of the ILT participated in a regional summer data institute. Site educators report, and data documentation confirms, attendees collectively identified data trends demonstrating successes and concerns. Participants then developed displays and talking points to share with the full staff. Once shared, the data trends provided the academic focus for the school for the 2014-2015 school year. Teacher reception of data was positive across all grades. One participant commented, “We never had common goals before.” Another explained that, “We had never thought about teaming on goals before or coming together to support each other in this work until this year’s experience,” thereby documenting the newness of the work occurring during collaboration.

When the concept of shared goal development was first rolled out, collaborative expectations, schedules, and topics were not defined. By late fall teacher input indicated collaborative sessions felt disjointed. The ILT worked with the principal to outline meeting expectations. ILT members were then assigned to grade-level meetings. Within two weeks of the new meeting formats teachers commented that, “We worked as a group and were joined by a member of the ILT who came in and explained how to read the data and make decisions from it.”
Results demonstrated that a commitment to collaboration among all educators at the site was exemplified in the setting of professional goals mandated through the EES. The ILT provided direction on goal-setting during a staff meeting in order to support the work teachers were being asked to do. Teachers brainstormed, compared data points, explored common approaches to goals and in three grades, developed the same professional and/or student goals. One teacher explained, “I brought my goals to my collaborative meeting and sought input from my colleagues. We talked as a group about language and content delivery and developed common focal points.” Still another stated the benefits of collaboration as being a way to explore approaches in the classroom and practice with colleagues before bringing them to the students. The analyzed outcome was that teachers believed the critical feedback would provide stronger future instruction.

The principal continued to work with the ILT on an increasing numbers of issues related to teaching and learning. The principal had ILT members integrate structures into the collaborative sessions and support reporting-out of the findings from each meeting. Weekly newsletters from the principal praised the value of teacher report-outs and the benefits of building vertical understandings of grade-level efforts to support the academic focus.

Despite improved collaboration, there still existed opportunity for growth. The initial goal of the collaborative design of a school-wide academic focus took longer than the principal and ILT anticipated. Staff meeting and observation showed an initial lack of agreement on grade-level support of the academic focus. Fall ILT meeting agendas, minutes, and analytical notes indicated a continued lack of collaboration time during staff meetings. Last, during the time the ILT was not at full membership, some teachers were without guidance for goal design.
**ILT leadership.** This code reflected actions and results of the ILT’s work supporting change and professional growth for the teachers. As the ILT developed so did opportunities for leadership. The ILT was trained in meeting protocols and then worked to integrate the protocols into grade-level team meetings as a way to build commonality and capacity.

Initial ILT leadership was displayed during the rollout of data to the full staff early in the fall. Identification of trend data, the development of a process for grade-level teams to determine responses to the academic focus, the creation and posting of school-wide goals, and the expectation of the sharing of efforts toward goal benchmarks are examples of ILT efforts. Assistance with the writing of EES goals can be partially attributed to ILT members; however, the sporadic integration of ILT input across all grades keeps this from being a widespread accomplishment.

ILT interviews, staff meeting observations, and a review of ILT meeting notes shows the Team managing attendance at collaborative sessions, scheduling follow-up to unfinished business, and facilitating accountability. After the ILT’s modeling, teachers increasingly shared more of their work during staff meetings. Initial reticence was demonstrated by complaints to ILT members, but share-outs increased across grades and content. Conversations about how the school was moving forward occurred across staff and grade-level meetings by the winter months.

As the ILT further defined their work and function their actions became more purposeful. By the mid-point of the second quarter the ILT was developing the professional development sessions and assembling the materials needed by each teacher. Staff meeting agendas reflected ILT input and comments made during these meetings noted the beneficial assistance of the ILT. Teacher statements included, “With the classroom teachers on the ILT they now know how to really help us.” Leadership was evidenced by a teacher who remarked, “When an ILT member is
in our grade-level meeting it is not viewed as seeing what we’re up to; rather, they’re helping us to understand things.” Similar sentiments were reported by teachers across four of the lower-grade level teacher teams during interviews and the mid-year survey (See Appendix K). ILT members adjusted their approach at staff meetings. Rather than pushing information out to teachers, their actions became more supportive and instructional by January.

The ILT deciphered district initiatives to make sense at the school and/or classroom level. The Team discussed how to build on projects and identify links between several initiatives in order to align future professional development and prepare targeted responses. ILT interviews repeatedly identified the need to stay committed to seeing changes through and avoiding the inconsistency found in the history of initiative rollouts. An example is the district goal of using Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) in all classes. Teachers were struggling with the SLOs and classroom walkthroughs showed inconsistent use and design. The ILT modeled the concept at the next staff meeting and committed to revisiting the examples during the year. The principal directed the ILT to reinforce the SLO initiative until there was full use of the practice across all content and grades.

ILT leadership extended beyond teacher support and connected to the training provided by external partners. The principal explained, “I rely on external partners for supports through training, activities, reflection, and guidance. We need thinking partners as we navigate being a team, being leaders, and targeting our data responses.” The ILT displayed an openness and willingness to being vulnerable and self-identified where each member needed assistance or development to effectively assist others. Leadership was by example as members modeled a commitment to excellence.
The more the ILT developed, the more the team wanted to take on. By January, the ILT was running staff meetings, planning, and then executing half-day professional development sessions. Members assumed the role of planner, communicator, recorder, etc., for meetings and then shared this practice with the teachers during collaborative sessions. Members set talking points for concept rollouts and designed work templates for collaborative sessions. During the principal’s extended absence the ILT arranged coverage of student common areas before and after-school in addition to their staff meeting obligations.

Throughout the school year the ILT self-monitored progress toward their unofficial goals discussed (but not recorded or assigned benchmarks toward completion) at the start of the year. At the completion of the study’s data collection there was still the need to formalize protocols for staff meetings and collaborative sessions and enforce usage expectations. Training with external consultants in the gradual-release coaching model had not been completed. The principal also charged the ILT with determining a format for teacher lesson plans in support of the EES and the district-union negotiated requirements. Additionally, there was no prescribed monitoring of ongoing student data points against the site’s academic focus goals. ILT meeting observations showed this monitoring to be conceptualized but not formalized with a schedule and benchmarks for success.

**Empowerment.** The empowerment code was applied throughout transcribed team interviews, though the frequency varied based on the grade. Upper grade-level teachers noted less frequently a sense of empowerment related to the ILT being representative of them or as a conduit of information both horizontally and vertically. Conversely, lower grade-level teachers expressed greater empowerment, noting their concerns and accomplishments being communicated to administrators through the ILT. Obvious examples of empowerment were ILT
members working one-on-one to develop EES goals prior to taking the priorities to the evaluator for approval. Another example was the ILT carrying messages from team meetings to the appropriate administrator for decisions/support. Empowerment was also exemplified through the struggles around how collaborative time was arranged. When teachers reported to ILT members a lack of dedicated collaboration time the ILT changed the schedule. Teacher responses to this adjustment identified feeling “listened to” and “valued” because it reflected their needs being recognized.

Specific actions that supported empowerment were both provided to the ILT and by the Team. District administrators committed to the ILT as an entity that would enhance leadership through collaborative problem-solving. In August, district administrators committed to building-based responsibility for change rather than the top-down model that was the historical approach. The administrators’ belief was that ILT empowerment would occur through the Team making higher-level decisions and by placing academic, data, goal-setting, and protocol responsibility under their purview. Administrative interviews revealed the belief the principal needed to support the ILT development by providing guidance but allowing for time to struggle with challenges. The district administrators’ commitment to developing ILTs in each building and having shared-leadership reflected a change in philosophy. During the study evidence of this commitment was found predominately in document reviews. Documents showed professional development topics supporting school-based leadership work with external partners and providers from the prior year to the current.

The ILT’s support of teachers’ initiatives enhanced the sense of empowerment of the teachers. An example of this commitment was the support around examining a program designed to reinforce students’ positive choices and behaviors. The initiative began with two teachers
presenting a concept and suggesting a book study. Select ILT members became involved; some out of curiosity and another feeling it was a responsibility in his or her role as a leader. The principal felt the value in the program was that it was grassroots and because people felt strongly about building collegiality. The principal identified the teacher taking charge as “an excellent example of leadership” because teachers felt confident to take on a large project. The process was viewed by the principal and ILT members as actively building momentum around EES integration.

Teachers reported a sense of galvanization based on the ILT membership. During interviews and in the qualitative survey teachers cited feeling empowered through having a voice, sharing in decision-making and by having the ILT seek input and carry messages to administration for discussion. Also common in the teacher feedback was a sense of agency coming from knowing colleagues represented their interests and priorities.

The principal worked to build a vertical information channel by keeping the ILT informed of decisions from the district administrators through each of the grade-level meetings. Observations of ILT and staff meetings demonstrated this commitment through the ILT being called upon to lead their colleagues and make choices central to the academic focus. Also noted was the fact that in ILT meetings all members were seen as equal and every voice honored. When comparing this approach to prior years’ examples of leadership the philosophical evolution to the Team’s composition and role was noteworthy.

The ILT in turn worked hard to empower their colleagues by providing opportunities for grade-level teams to make decisions. Agendas for collaborative times were set by the ILT but grade-level teams were encouraged to select the data points, student work, and practices to be reviewed. An ILT meeting discussion centered on the need to let grade-level teachers select the
specifics of a collaborative session as long as it directly related to the dedicated topic and provided a discernible outcome. The ILT provided non-core and special education teachers with the information that would be discussed at their assigned grade-level team’s session to optimize the participation of all teachers.

The principal’s weekly staff update email included an open invitation to the ILT meetings and this message was reinforced at staff meetings. To encourage visitors, meetings were moved to a location that facilitated a larger number of attendees. ILT members encouraged others to attend. A review of the minutes of ILT meetings and researcher observation noted that after the staff meeting where attendance was encouraged showed one or two teachers coming to three subsequent ILT meetings.

Research data analysis reflected that the successes noted are just the beginning. In order for growth to continue there must be ongoing opportunities to enhance teacher voice. The ILT has been charged with the redesigning of a common lesson plan format and the Team will take the work to the teachers for collaboration. Furthermore, the principal will continue to enforce the idea of the EES goals being collaborative so teachers see it as developmental rather than as punitive. These areas were set as goals by the district and school administration and were believed to be reasonably addressed by the end of the first quarter. However, observation at the site and document review indicated the timeline will extend into the 2015-2016 school year before such areas are operationalized.

**Theme two: Accountability.** Accountability emerged as a theme from the information associated with the secondary codes of accountability, data, and goals. Accountability was assigned to data regarding state-level expectations, district responsibility to the site and educators, ILT and teacher obligations to colleagues and students, assessments, professional
focus, and student performance. Accountability, as a major concept, was evident early on and throughout the data collection. The frequency within the study was attributed to the impact of the state assessment and accountability system, the district’s history of frequent assessments across all grades and subjects, and the impact of the EES. The theme applied to both the school’s collective response to the state’s ranking and ratings (based on multiple years of student performance data) and to the teacher response to district and school goals. Accountability was identified and supported by guiding question one in this study.

Each of the three concepts became intricately woven at different junctures of the study yet each maintained a distinct identity. Figure 4 illustrates the overlapping of the topics that were at once individual and connected. Accountability stood alone in its direct identification of actions that had to be addressed and educator actions required as a result. Data represented the quantitative and qualitative factors that drove the need for a response. Goals were the result of accountability factors and the EES and some goals were set by the school as part of the academic focus. Again, each concept had a specific identity yet was continually and directly related to the others.

Figure 4. Accountability relationships
Significant data were gathered on specific actions and efforts of the district and school administrators and ILT in the leveraging of accountability at all levels. A breakdown of the successes and challenges follows.

**Accountability factors.** This sub-topic first emerged from the review of the 2014 school and district-level preliminary accountability figures released to administration in August. The data showed another drop in performance from the prior year across English/language arts, math, and science. This continual drop resulted in a decline in the school’s percentile ranking. District administrators responded with goals to address the teachers’ knowledge of best practices and to increase the level of rigor in the taught curriculum. This need was subsequently linked to the district’s professional development plan as a response to the state accountability rankings. One aspect of the response was the decision to partner with external agencies that had previously supported district work. This contracting brought direct support to the school administrators and teachers. The agencies had been prior learning partners so the essential trusting relationships were established. The superintendent briefed partners on the details of the EES agreement and need for data-based decision-making. District leadership set goals for partnership work that aligned to the multi-year academic focus plan, thereby creating continuity and cohesiveness in the approach to improvement.

The school’s academic focus for the year was aligned to district-level initiatives and curriculum standards that required additional attention as evidenced in the accountability and assessment data. The principal directed the ILT to work with grade-level teams to develop plans in support of the school-level focus. The principal believed mutual accountability through support (and not criticism) of the teachers would help to build a positive culture. This attitude
reflected a critical friend approach, which is a similar concept to what the school continued to build through the ILT. As the superintendent commented,

There’s a lot of work to do with the new Common Core, the new EES rubric, test scores, test protocols, assessment planning and all of that starts to become pieced out to different areas. But a team can bring it in small pieces with different people monitoring.

The teachers reported drafting professional, student, and grade-level goals based on the accountability and student assessment data the ILT shared. The ILT planned staff meeting and professional development session topics around student performance data and linked the initiatives to the school’s academic focus. Teachers reported, and observations confirmed, academic target areas discussed in staff meetings. When teachers asked questions, and either the principal or a colleague responded or investigated the answer, teachers perceived mutual accountability as one party was seeking answers and the other was supportive. Another example of perceived accountability was addressing the lagging state assessment performance. Teachers presented their specific intervention work during staff meeting share-outs and administrators were then accountable to the teachers through addressing teacher-identified needs with targeted support and/or professional development.

The staff will need to continue its operationalizing of the accountability goal-setting process to fully realize the desired level of accomplishment in this area. Despite a common academic focus a review of grade-level goals and teacher professional goals showed seven instances of targets that were approved by evaluators yet not aligned to what was directed by the ILT.

Localized data. As stated earlier, these data were the qualitative and quantitative information reviewed or produced in support of the academic work at the site. Much of the
accountability work described was based on the review of data from either state assessment results or local data collected by the ILT. Teachers reported, and staff meeting minutes confirmed, multiple dates where student data were the focus of collaborative time. A review of the local data collected showed they applied to student assessment results that addressed accountability requirements, district-determined measures (DDMs) or other assessments created and administered at the district level. During the course of the study the principal charged the ILT with supporting data-driven decision-making connected to district, school, and grade-level goals.

The ILT supported grade-level teachers in the use of data by breaking aggregated results into curriculum-based strands, topics, or by types of questions (e.g., multiple choice, short answer, essay) in order to teach about disaggregation, methods for drilling through data points, or determining root cause. Another cited example of ILT support of data use was the designing of professional development and collaborative meeting time to explore local data results and instituting protocols for the review and outcome reporting. Teachers at two grade levels identified ILT members’ support of colleagues through continued guidance and assistance on data-related projects. This theme was mentioned at other grade-level meetings as well, though all occurrences were in the lower grades. Middle-level grades provided no instances of direct ILT support with data; rather, they indicated a reliance on one specific teacher to guide data reviews and responses.

**Targeted objectives.** Targeted performance objectives were intricately woven into accountability factors and data. Goals were set at the district, school, and grade-levels. The school’s status level assigned by the state mandated student academic improvement goals to be set. These improvement goals subsequently drove the ILT’s work with the grade-level teams.
The actions to reach the goals were targeted performance measurements for the EES. In this way, goals not only served to drive the process but they also served to drive the end result.

The ILT support of goal-setting was recognized by all grade-level and special-subject teachers interviewed, especially when addressing the school’s academic focus in ELA and math. District and school administrators equally acknowledged the supporting role of the ILT, noting it as part of the site-based management commitment. District administrators expected a review of progress during the twice-monthly administrative cabinet meetings. Analytical notes of two meetings did not indicate an actual assessment of progress; rather, school administrators reported a list of tasks completed by the grade-level teams. As district leaders stated during an interview, “There’s a pretty steep learning curve around using data and having data that drives instruction.” This sentiment was reiterated at the site by teachers who felt they were not always certain of exactly where to focus their data inquiry in order to inform instruction and support improvement efforts. Three grade-level teams reported working with the district’s Literacy and Math Coordinators who, while they were part of the ILT, were consulted because of their district leadership role. Other grade-level teams felt the ILT was assistive in the presentation of data, its interpretation, and in the crafting of responses to the issues reported in the data, which were then linked to teacher goals. Upper grade-level teachers stated it was the principal, not the ILT, who attended their collaborative sessions to assist with data-based decision-making. Despite the early lack of ILT interaction with this grade-level team, the teachers were quick to note their commitment to supporting school goals and insisted their lack of ILT engagement was due only to scheduling conflicts. Observations during staff meetings showed all grade levels participated in sharing their efforts, accomplishments, and continued challenges in addressing student achievement goals.
The application of the code *Targeted Objectives* within ILT work showed dedication to supporting district and school initiatives, but there was a lack of an action plan for this work. During interviews, ILT members cited training from a June, 2014, presentation around goal design as being helpful and inspiring. However, members also acknowledged that the four new teachers on the ILT lacked this formative knowledge from the training. Little or no preparation for newly-appointed ILT members created inconsistency and confusion during discussions, which was documented during ILT and principal interviews.

Another challenge within *Targeted Objectives* was the lack of a formalized vertical alignment of initiatives. While all educators in the building spoke of district/school/team plans, no alignment was found in documents.

The ILT had not yet addressed the integration of protocols around examining data and monitoring progress toward goals. Additionally, the results demonstrated the need for continual monitoring of the EES goals along with guidance on updating progress within the data-collection tool. Furthermore, the ILT must also create benchmark indicators, a timeline, and action steps. The research suggested that the plan needs to be rooted in data and aligned to initiatives. Teachers, ILT members, and the external consultants reported such an approach would allow the ILT to better manage their work. This work may help the ILT to avoid losing direction similar to that evidenced in analytic notes from ILT meetings in November, 2014. Two consecutive November sessions had resulted in members exiting the meeting wondering what work was truly accomplished and how the ILTs discussions fit into their initially-conceptualized work.

**Theme three: Structuring the support.** A major theme of the research, *Structuring the Support* is comprised of the level-two codes of district support, school support, teacher support, communication, consistency, and systems design. The structures encompassed six of the 15 level
two codes (as demonstrated in Figure 2), reinforcing the need for the ILT to operationalize their work. The study’s second guiding question examined the structures required for change efforts to succeed; the resulting breadth of this theme emerged from the line of inquiry. Figure 5 illustrates the types of support that would benefit the ILT. The diagram identifies the supports that are available and the fact that there must be planned actions within those areas.

**Figure 5.** ILT structured system design

*District support.* It was hypothesized that the theme of district support would be evident throughout the data collection cycle. This hypothesis was based on analysis of the data indicators that emerged during the first two months of collection. Several times, district administrators were cited during site interviews for providing professional development opportunities and for accessing external trainings. The early data included a copy of the District Improvement Plan, a Multi-Year Improvement Plan, and the Literacy Plan showing teacher professional development aligned to the same work the school was committed to. A district administrator explained the Multi-Year Improvement Plan was developed because, “Teacher training had always been episodic and someone else [an outside provider] was always in charge. A more sustained and longitudinal approach to coordinate professional development was created.” Professional development calendars for the current school year confirmed all professional development was approved by the district administrators and was aligned to areas within the Multi-Year
Improvement Plan. In addition to the alignment, the professional development was personalized, initiated, and managed at the school-level. According to the principal, improvement efforts selected by the school were based on teacher-demonstrated need but the ILT was pulled in to ensure school efforts and district directives were matched. The district provided the ILT support through the allocation of grant funds to secure training with an external agency. District administrators demonstrated sustained support for academic improvements through partnering with an instructional practices assistance group. ILT meeting minutes confirmed the external agencies worked monthly with the Team on identifying data and instructional response practices for teachers in support of their EES goals.

Upon analysis, very little data emerged to demonstrate that teachers understood the district administrators’ support of the ILT. District Improvement Plans, grant application reviews, personal observation, and school administrator interviews captured the district administrators’ commitment to the ILT and their role in leveraging the EES. During many research conversations, it was discovered that there was a lack of teacher knowledge of the district administrators’ support of the ILT-EES connection. Although this partnership existed, the requisite communication to teachers rarely occurred.

**School support.** School support of the ILT was strong throughout the course of the study. The principal remained committed to the concept of shared-leadership and the staff moved from ILT-awareness to recognizing the ILT as a decision-making body.

The principal identified early in the study that the ILT was charged with supporting teachers with the data-based decision-making mandate. The ILT assisted with the EES goal-setting since goals were based on data. The principal created collaborative sessions and worked with the ILT to outline expectations of the sessions and required specific academic goals being
addressed. This action, based on teacher interviews, showed the principal’s belief in, and commitment to, the shared-leadership model. The principal’s backing of the ILT also enhanced the teachers’ faith in the work of the ILT. Based on teacher survey comments, the principal’s faith, coupled with the representation of all grades/content within the school, provided legitimacy for the ILT in teachers’ eyes. A final data point that emerged from the ILT member interviews addressed the principal’s coaching model. Interview notes showed that by coaching the ILT and providing the ILT with external supports, the Team developed the sense of being trusted and being able to trust the principal.

Teacher interviews indicated the need for the principal to share more information regarding the external support groups working with the ILT in order to build understanding and capacity across grade-level teams. The external consultant working with the ILT on protocols and processes confirmed the plan to work with all of the site’s educators through June, 2015. At the completion of the study this work had not yet begun.

**Teacher support.** The ILT, as conceptualized by the superintendent and championed by the principal, was to be the main level of support for the building’s teachers. In further clarifying the ILT’s work, both administrators assigned the ILT the task of supporting the evaluation process by preparing teachers for data-driven decision-making and goal setting. The role of the ILT in addressing the broad scope of the goals was presented at the kickoff half-day staff meeting in September and was reiterated to staff at the next two after-school meetings. By mid-December, despite what appeared to be a clear connection between the school’s accountability data, areas of student performance in need of attention, and the principal’s repeated identification of the ILT’s support of the evaluation system, the research notes did not indicate teachers making the same connections. It wasn’t until the ILT members stepped up the distribution of minutes and
provided structures to operationalize staff meetings that teachers began to connect the work of
the ILT and their educator goals with more clarity.

The ILT explained and demonstrated the alignment of teacher-level goals to the district’s Multi-Year Improvement Plan. Once evident, teacher comments regarding the ILT’s role indicated a deeper understanding. For example, during an interview with two grade-level teams, teachers noted that this was the first year state assessment performance data had been shared across grades and multiple teachers examined student results by curriculum standards. Researcher observation notes recorded a teacher remarking student performance data had not been explored before, and prior to an ILT member sitting and explaining how to read it, no one had taken time in the past to teach data analysis and interpretation. During another grade-level team meeting, teachers cited a particular strength of the current ILT was the personal contact with a colleague who provided hands-on training. A quote that captured the result of this learning came from a teacher who was initially reticent to engage in the data review, “In meetings we talk about what kids need and there’s back and forth and sharing of people’s opinions about what kids need and that makes a big difference for a lot of us.”

The ILT members collectively noted the need to build on the current momentum. “We need to provide professional development and leadership around the elements we’re looking at from the district’s focus on lesson planning and learning objectives. Currently, we are embracing them without supporting them and that will not ultimately be helpful” cited one member when asked about next steps. Teacher comments during interviews support the value of the ILT’s continued focus:

• I’ve been reaching out to my colleagues more and go to them for support;
• I see how some of what we speak to our ILT members about is integrated into staff meetings or the principal’s weekly report;

• The ILT asking us about what the school can do, and responding to our feedback makes us feel more a part of the process.

Data collected during interviews suggested the need for the ILT to extend its focus beyond data and accountability. Two interviews, one of a grade-level teacher and one of a support professional, identified the desire for ILT support regarding student behaviors and instructional techniques. The development of a student behavior code that the entire school can embrace and assisting teachers with techniques to engage families was requested as a way to help students experience a sense of community. A common set of instructional techniques that all teachers and after-school program instructors can implement was suggested as another ILT topic for support.

**Communication.** Teachers needed to have communicated knowledge of how ILT members were supporting the EES professional, student, and grade-level goals during the year. District administrators reported that structures were in place to support communication. For example, the new website format allowed for teachers to set up pages and Google Docs were used for communication between district and school-level teams. The researcher observed other formalized communication structures including email, dedicated mailboxes, open time at staff meetings, collaboration time and the principal’s weekly newsletter. Informal communication methods included a coffee social twice monthly, the office and copy rooms used for professional conversations, and hallway talk around student-related issues. A review of interview transcripts indicated no set method for dissemination of particular types of information with interviewees
indicating that they had to scour several areas for announcements or updates. Additionally, interviewees reported that at times they were unable to find necessary information.

Staff meeting minutes, researcher observation, and ILT interviews noted each of these communication options being used by the ILT. Although ILT-specific communication included announcements at meetings, an open meeting structure, information sporadically placed in the principal’s weekly newsletter, distribution of minutes to all educators via email, and the facilitation of vertical share-outs during staff meetings, it was sporadic. No single method was consistently used and therefore teachers could not rely on all information being distributed in the same manner.

Concern about fluctuation of methods within ILT communication was expressed by all participants within the study. In reviewing the transcribed documents, communication issues and related frustrations emerged across all interviews and in nine staff meeting observations and applied to the full range of information sharing, not just ILT issues. This concern applied to horizontal communication between staff, the ILT, and among core versus non-core teachers. The same distress regarding lack of communication was conveyed about vertical communication practices. Inconsistencies and gaps were observed in the sharing of ILT and staff meeting minutes, agendas, professional development activities, EES goal development, and in lack of knowledge about the focus of district goals versus school goals. Examples of common notes/remarks with respect to communication demonstrate the significant positive impact and drawbacks communication influenced and the inconsistencies experienced at this site:

- The ILT decided to place assignments for all teachers and building specialists right in body of agenda so people know where they are going and can prepare for their respective meetings;
• I liked when the ILT sent information out so when I walked into the next meeting I wasn't blindsided by something. I had background knowledge of what ILT was going to be talking about and attempting to implement at that meeting. I wasn't sitting there trying to think about it for the first time;

• I'm not exactly sure what they do. They come to our staff meetings sometimes and they talk to us. They present. And I don't know what else they do;

• I don't know what the role of the ILT is in the school. There is no "publicized" task for the ILT. This could be my not knowing but I don't see anything about the ILT;

• The ILT is not working with data walls but they’re not communicating if we are to or not. This is typical;

• The ILT is not bringing our grade any information. (Researcher’s note: one of the grade-level teammates is an ILT member.);

• It would be very good for the ILT to address people in staff meetings so everyone can hear the same thing, the same way, at the same time. We'd hear each other ask questions then we get the benefit of hearing others' input and reactions.

ILT members expressed a desire to operationalize communication expectations within the school and to create structures for information dissemination to and from district administrators. During the information-gathering portion of the study communication was observed to be improving and the ILT was focused on increased transparency by distributing meeting minutes and the next meeting’s agenda within two days of their meeting.

Consistency. Another sub-topic that emerged within the constraining factors theme was the lack of coherence/consistency in priorities from one year to the next. Consistency was an area of focus noted within the goals of the district due to the reported randomness of priorities in
yearly school improvement plans. Early staff meeting agenda and improvement plan reviews confirmed the district administrator’s claims of a lack in cohesion. Document review revealed differing formats among meetings, a lack of norms and agendas, and a wide range of random topics. Summer data work identified key areas for focus yet those areas did not consistently appear on weekly update emails, grade-level team meeting agendas, or staff meeting records. Questions posed to teachers around district and school supports necessary to develop leadership and empower teachers elicited responses indicating concern about lack of cohesion. A sample of the teacher responses follows:

- Our history with professional development and focus has been ‘one and done’;
- We never stay with one thing long enough to be good at it. Each year it’s a different focus and no one tells us why it changes. It just does;
- Last year we had data walls. This year they are hanging up but we haven’t done anything with them. Why not? Are we using them or not?
  If we stuck with it and perfected data walls we could be following a format to inform our work. This is just one example of something we should be targeting as a district. Stick with one thing until we’ve mastered it.

ILT meeting minutes from February and March documented the members’ commitment to building consistency in prioritized agenda topics across collaborative meetings in order to maintain alignment of academic, grade-level, and school improvement goals. In addition, this action supported a consistent approach to academically-driven professional development. The ILT then worked to simplify the steps for identifying the data points that were used during each collaborative session. The ILT’s guidance on data-driven inquiry facilitated an ongoing
reflection and evaluation cycle for targeting instruction. The ILT maintained that providing a consistent, prioritized agenda for all collaborative sessions made data-based inquiry more meaningful for the teachers. The ILT’s work on building teacher capacity to engage in this inquiry resulted in a consistent focus during collaborative sessions. A common teacher claim was that in the past the ‘one and done’ model of professional development did not allow teachers to learn the concept, practice it, and receive feedback. Observations of staff meetings and a review of grade-level meeting notes showed the start of the operationalizing of data-driven inquiry as an integral and consistent practice.

**Systems design.** The protocols and practices the ILT learned through external partners needed to be systemized through their work at the school. A district administrator noted that supporting teachers, especially in the evaluation process and instructional planning/assessment work, would raise the bar for academic success. This would occur, the administrator posited, because teachers would know what the process was, would know how to access assistance and from whom, and would know the steps in place to move from start to finish. The principal concurred and during interviews spoke about the ILT working with school and district administrators to craft the written protocols and processes. An example of the systems designing was the documenting of the data used to make decisions, the individual(s) in charge of accessing and distributing the data, the questions and protocols that will guide the work, and the product that will emerge as a result of the data inquiry. Consistent communication, mentioned in a prior sub-topic within the Systems Building theme, will be necessary to support the systematic addressing of teaching and learning practices.

**Theme four: Constraining factors.** This theme combined the constraints placed on the site based on the community factors and the culture of the district and school. Constraining
factors were often external, resulting from community resources (or lack thereof), geographic limitations, financial restraints, or contractual boundaries. Cultural influences or restrictions were also identified within this theme and were often coded as collegiality, disrespect, isolation, role delineation, trust, or district/school impact. The school culture was, at times, driven by the community as there were always outside expectations and influences that drove the school’s work, as seen in Figure 6. For example, issues with drugs and violence impacted students and the school responded by implementing student informational and support programs and facilitated external counseling services seeing students at the school.

![Figure 6. Constraining factors relationship](image)

The constraining factors theme was assigned to those areas that impacted the site and/or the work the educators do. In the case of culture, there was internal control with little external influence noted. In the other, community, there was little internal influence and some external locus of control. This study’s guiding question three inquired about demands of a rural system and elicited information that generated the data for this theme.

**Culture.** Culture was associated with data that represented “how we do things” (as stated by a teacher) in the school or the district. Culture represents the actions, words, practices, and widely-accepted beliefs within the study (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

District administrators provided a base for understanding challenges that existed as a result of long-standing practices from members of the community. Interviews with district
leaders noted a history of top-down decision-making rather than encouraging a shared-leadership model. District administrators also felt that collaboration and collective problem-solving had not been particularly valued and that changing the approach would require slow, methodical interventions on the part of all educators that viewed themselves as leaders. The developing focus on school administration taking the lead on determining the path the school follows is new, and while embraced, will take time to become enculturated. During the interviews with district leaders the idea of the need for clear distinction between district-level and school-level responsibilities was revealed by the lack of a fine-tuned communication structure. Several times it was shared that communication challenges complicated the exchange of information at each tier within the district’s structure.

School administrators, the ILT members, and teachers identified that shifting the building culture toward examining instructional skills and determining teacher needs was a necessary step in facilitating change. The ILT stated that past practice for building leaders was to give teachers ideas or orders about what to do. Now, the ILT works alongside colleagues, elicits ideas on what would be helpful, and collaborates to establish and address those concerns. A review of staff meeting and collaborative session notes showed teacher requests for ILT assistance and training in differentiated instruction in math, addressing open response questions across all content areas, and behavioral interventions.

According to teachers, past methods for the ILT to support needs would have been for a solution to be offered and assumed to be acted upon. During teacher interviews, five grade-level teachers noted that during prior years there was a lot of negativity toward the ILT and what the Team proposed. Rather than being assistive it was described as “prescriptive” and interpreted as “looking down on us” leading to frequent rejection of ILT recommendations. Conversely, the
new atmosphere was said to be “collaborative” and “collegial” with most teachers seeking help and being willing to share ideas. There were only two teachers who indicated during interviews that their actions were about compliance rather than an acceptance of change initiatives.

Teachers indicated a sporadic sense of both responsibility for students and ownership of school-level academic focus objectives. School administrators were consistent in their message that all teachers must take responsibility for all students and participate fully in the change efforts. However, interviews with grade-level teachers indicated that lower-grade teachers felt a sense of ownership and dedication to all of the students in the school. At the higher grades there was a greater sense of responsibility for only their grade-level students. Early in the study upper-grade teachers reiterated this sentiment in statements around professional isolation as well, commenting that, “There is a sense of separation between the ILTs work, our work as a school, and the work that is done at the lower grades versus higher grades. We’ve yet to find common ground.”

The ILT worked with the principal starting in late November to address the culture in the building. In the fall, the principal had asked teachers to collaborate to review student work documents. However, interview notes indicated there had never been directives on topics or expectations to produce anything. The ILT and principal designed a plan, effective in January, whereby ILT members would be accountable for work that each grade-level team completed during collaborative sessions. During ILT meetings the agenda for the next grade-level collaborative session would be created, disseminated, and a plan for how to report out the results was created. The principal instituted this format with the first session in January and the ILT’s support began immediately. At the conclusion of the study’s data gathering the work was continuing, confirmed via observation and document review.
All participants in the study agreed that the next significant work the school must take on was the building of positive attitudes toward a culture of change. The superintendent stated, “We have a lot of work to do and it’s going to take everyone, all of the time, to move our schools to where we want them to be.” According to the principal, the ILT’s influence will be the anchor for change work as the members will lead by example and set the tone for the positive environment. One ILT member recognized the importance of the approach, saying, “It’s going to take a few years to change the experiences that defined our past professional approach. We’re on our way, but it’s slow. If the ILT goes slow and supports people…and we follow through…people’s attitudes will change.” Observations within staff meetings supported teachers’ concern around change. There were three documented occasions from staff meetings when teachers could be heard expressing displeasure over having to do something differently. Teachers cited instances of being questioned regarding the validity of their input in data meetings, not feeling cohesive as a staff and not considering all teachers on equal footing as examples of negative aspects of the culture.

**Community.** The challenges and impact of the rural community on the work of the ILT were presented within this subtopic. The ILT has been asked to address change initiatives that benefit from additional financial resources but there were none available. The lack of population growth and economic expansion projected within the geographical area does not support increased school budgets. This leaves the district to wrestle with building capacity for staff and students without financial and human resources typically associated with growth. The community concept drew mixed responses within the data when exploring the role the rural environment played in the school’s education efforts. Based on responses to the pilot questions, it was plausible that the rural limitations would be reported by participants as significantly
impactful and restrictive. However, interview data across participants was not completely aligned with respect to the impact of rural limitations, especially when comparing participant impressions of what resources were available in suburban and urban environments. This may be more a lack of understanding of the academic, social, and economic support opportunities possible in other communities.

A reduction in this district’s school budgets occurred simultaneously with changes in curriculum and an increase in student numbers. This led to paring back the staff; both teachers and support personnel. According to the principal and the teachers, this impact was felt most in the model of instructional delivery and assistance available to students. What was needed, according to district and school leadership, were innovative thoughts about how to address student needs. During an early interview the superintendent addressed how the ILT could assist,

I see the ILT as a method to meeting the challenge of the difficult financial times.

We need to always be looking at different ways of doing things. We need to provide more services with less people. My ILTs become coaches and data experts and trusted colleagues in brainstorming answers to difficult questions.

They understand that there won’t be the ability to hire extra people so everyone could focus on specific issues. That’s not what our rural community can support. So we get creative and we use the talents we have because in the end it’s all about what’s best for our students. We are ‘all in’ all the time.

Another direct impact that finances and a reduction of force had on the ILT was the inability of the school schedule to facilitate ILT attendance at all of the during-school collaborative sessions. The ILT was only represented at grade-level meetings when an ILT member was also a teacher in the particular grade, or in the rare event that an ILT member did
not have a classroom responsibility. ILT attendance at grade-level meetings was only guaranteed during collaborative sessions scheduled as the initial part of weekly staff meetings.

ILT members and teachers also spoke to the constraints the physical geography places on their craft. The isolation experienced by many of the children and their families kept them from accessing varied cultural and ethnic resources that can enhance learning. An ILT member explained, “Being rural, we don’t have a lot of attractions. We don’t have money, we don’t have businesses; the tax base is not here. We don’t have the privileges that kids who live in proximity to a city would.” An ILT member with a history of working and living in the community further explained the complexity of access due to transportation challenges and the fact that many of the district’s families do not have cars. Four ILT members noted that public transportation was limited and many people did not have the money for the service. Walking was not an option as the services that existed to support families were neither centralized nor within proximity to where the most needy populations live.

An additional challenge to services that supported families was the wait time for specialists who could assist. The food pantry had been moved 45 minutes south, counseling services had a long wait time to access, and there was high turnover in the counselors serving with the local center.

The ILT had these concerns brought to them by teachers in the building. While the ILT could not solve external geographic and financial problems, the Team noted the necessity of balancing the academic demands with the social/emotional/psychological demands. The school formed a committee that addressed the non-academic needs and the suggestion was made during a February ILT meeting that a line of communication between the two groups be formally developed.
Conclusion

The myriad of state and district mandates being faced by the site could easily overwhelm a single leader. District and school administrators’ decision to adopt a shared-leadership model and to use the ILT to support the integration led to several areas of growth indicated within the research. This chapter documented how the ILT became facilitators of change, supported the required accountability response, identified the need for structures for change, and worked within the constraining factors while addressing instructional challenges. Four themes encompassed fifteen sub-topics that further categorized the initiatives and challenges the ILT navigated in championing their colleagues’ and district’s multi-year improvement efforts. Each area was explored through the lens of the administrators, the ILT, and the teachers. The findings and implications of the study, and the subsequent recommendations follow in chapter five.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this case study was to document the process a district, school, and Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) engaged in to support the integration of the state-mandated Model System for Educator Evaluation (Massachusetts Educator Evaluation Regulations, CMR 35.00), known in the district as the Educator Evaluation System (EES). The research was further bracketed by placing the study within the confines of a rural, economically-challenged location in a district that lacks personnel and resources. The data around work of administrators and the ILT was explored through the lens of social capital theory. The findings and recommendations address actions and progress that a district and leadership team can engage in to be structured for success. The next steps include further training of the team and development of its responsibility as a team and as individuals. Future directions in research include investigating shared-leadership specific to the rural environment and the power of the collective voice. The following questions guided this study:

1. How is the ILT leveraging its role in brokering the acceptance of the EES the staff must operationalize?
2. What district and school actions and supports are necessary for school-based leadership teams to undertake this change action within the school?
3. How do the limited financial and staffing resources and characteristics of the rural district influence the progress of the ILT?

Findings

The study examined the ILT’s 1) work with the data through the knowledge of the EES requirements, 2) familiarity with the district culture and 3) professional responsibility to support
the work of the school principal. Throughout the course of the study, myriad data emerged around several themes within the aforementioned lenses, each of which was identified and linked to the work of the ILT and/or the goals of the EES. The findings are described within the categories of 1) district delegation of responsibility, 2) preparing to lead, 3) collective value, 4) rural impact, and 5) communication and structures. The findings are generalizable to other initiatives at the site and within the district and are indicative of themes from prior research of best practices in professional growth and development.

**District delegation of responsibility.** The ILT’s legitimacy was established when the district superintendent assigned the ILT the responsibility for the necessary professional development that revolved around the integration of the EES and maintaining the established academic focus. Historically, district administrators selected topics for professional development and distributed the yearly schedule showing the date and topic. During the 2014-15 school year the responsibility for professional development became site-based. The ILT’s work with the principal to identify training topics and to focus on a very limited number of subjects was seen by the teachers and staff to be a key to successful training. This recognition also extended to the teachers’ view of the ILT purpose. “The ILT is helping us to get what we need rather than a ‘one and done’ approach to our PD,” remarked a grade-level teacher. This sentiment was echoed numerous times during the course of the study and stated directly to the ILT members in staff meetings. PD was planned or reflected on during most ILT meetings from September through the end of the data collection period in March, demonstrating the commitment the school leadership placed on local control of targeted teacher training.

**Preparing to lead.** The ILT’s strategic pre-work on data provided the essential foundation for the successful launch of the initiatives. Several ILT members participated in a
summer data institute that examined the English/language arts, math, and science performance indicators on the 2014 Massachusetts state standardized tests. Under the guidance of a data specialist, ILT members and teachers spent 15 hours together working to identify trends in the aggregated and disaggregated scores across all tested grades. The data work then translated to the established launch points for the school’s year-long academic focus. ILT members assembled data reports specific to all teachers, created and delivered a data overview, and facilitated the meetings that allowed teachers to determine instructional focus areas. Observations of the grade-level team meetings showed teachers using the data, the recording methods, and the share-out formats the ILT had modeled. In addition, the ILT facilitated continual data analysis throughout the year that was based on their collaborative exploration of data during the summer.

**Collective value.** The empowerment of teachers is a research-proven result of shared-leadership (Brenneman, 2015; Burns, 1978; Douglas, 2015; Kotter, 2012). This empowerment to lead needed be realized at the individual and group level if the ILT was to move the school’s academic focus areas forward. Self-awareness of these strengths and their relation to the ILT’s accomplishments were categorized within *collective value*. The ILT’s sense of collegiality and members’ recognition of their value as a collaborative team facilitated the necessary commitment to move initiatives forward. There were many changes the ILT incorporated into the school year. Not all were met with the same degree of enthusiasm, yet all were designed to support the school’s academic focus. During the two times where there was significant pushback by teachers around the changes instituted, the ILT came together to research, prepare, and strategize on facilitating the change and building support. Several ILT meeting discussions revealed a great deal of concern about the risk of isolating individuals, including themselves, due to changes the ILT members were instituting. Struggling with difficult situations and the process of making
decisions that were met with resistance helped to develop the ILT’s internal capacity through skills development and perseverance (Glatthorn & Newberg, 1984). The struggling and subsequent approaches the ILT took in either making the difficult decisions or dealing with teacher pushback led to the identification of processes that could be studied and potentially replicated at the site during future work.

In observing the ILT under pressure due to staff dissatisfaction, the role and impact of social capital emerged. The team relied on the strength of their social ties and the comfort that came from knowing they would face challenges, and especially the teachers’ resistance to change, collectively (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Similarly, when the ILT experienced successes, or the “productive benefits” (Claridge, 2004) of social capital, the accomplishments were attributed to the ILT as a whole, and celebrated as such. The group realized their collective approach and beliefs united the members in something larger than the presentation of data to drive instruction. The recognition of the potential the united front afforded led the ILT to a willingness and readiness to address challenges that emerged from further district-level mandates.

Rural impact. The rural impact and lack of resources were evidenced in ILT availability as each teacher assumed multiple roles, thereby restricting collaborative meeting time coverage as there was not enough staff available to do so. Throughout the course of the research, the rural location was cited by participants as the reason the school goes without so many of the resources that other schools often have. The ILT intended to have representation at all daytime grade-level team meetings as well as those scheduled for after school. Despite the ILT implementing several schedule changes, coverage was not possible at most daytime meetings which left teaching teams without assistance. This issue was raised during interviews when teachers noted a lack of support
on how to set and/or measure benchmarks for their professional goal development work. Teachers also expressed a lack of guidance from the ILT members on learning how to read the data files the team had provided at the start of the school year. All ILT members except one have classroom responsibilities and this often prohibited them from attending other grade-level meetings simply because substitute coverage was unavailable. Furthermore, staffing cuts reduced the number of special subjects offered which necessitated the distribution of more teaching time among all core-subject teachers.

**Communication and structures.** The findings caution that the ILT’s influence will be jeopardized if communication standards and organizational structures are not integrated within the school’s culture. From the initial meeting observation in August through the end of the research time, the idea of communication inconsistency was continually raised. The data collected in different settings indicated the need for a communication process to be designed and then implemented with fidelity. Teacher interview questions regarding how the ILT shares their goals, minutes, and upcoming staff plans elicited comments such as “I don’t know what goes on much of the time because no one tells us,” or, “If I knew what was expected of me prior to the meeting I would have been prepared. This would let me contribute more meaningfully.”

A formalized flow of communication was one example of an organizational structure that was cited for lacking clarity. When the structures are in place then a systems design can be applied (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger, 2003; Harris, 2004). Structuring the system will lead to planned support for the initiative or team. School administrators, the ILT, and teachers all discussed a lack of structures around the work they did as being particularly challenging. This was observed in four staff meetings when teachers questioned the application of district-directed lesson plan formats that would address EES requirements. No agreement was
in place about what the lesson plans must include, and there was confusion around who would ultimately make this decision. The ILT met twice to determine how to support their colleagues while still implementing the formats desired by district administrators. Again, discussions ensued around processes and products (teacher plans, student learning objectives, chain of command for evaluator questions, written documents descriptively stating the negotiated EES practices and policies) and the ILT determined that communication protocols could have been a solution to many of the site problems experienced.

Limitations of the Study

There were four primary limitations identified within this study, 1) the participants, 2) location, 3) the role of the researcher, and 4) the challenges of conducting qualitative research. Each limitation is presented in more detail and the impact described.

Participants. Thirty-five participants were projected to be drawn from all grade levels and representative of the core and non-core subjects and student services. There were, in fact, 35 participants though the individuals differed slightly from the original plan. Two core teachers chose not to participate (citing personal reasons as the reason), but an after-school coordinator and an external consultant were added, bringing the total participants back to the targeted number. In addition, interviews with grade-level teachers included grades one through seven. Kindergarten teachers were not interviewed as a group because two-thirds of their goal-setting process was driven by the Title I Coordinator. Kindergarten teachers were involved in four staff meeting observations, the survey, and document review.

The participants on the ILT and the teaching staff had various levels of time and experience at the school. There was also a range of participant training on the EES and with the ILT. Individuals’ experience with goal-setting and preparation to support attainment of the goals
differed greatly, as did their interpretations of the ILT’s work. For example, teachers newer to
the building reported having direct contact with only their teaching team to set goals. Teachers
who have been there for three years or more were more likely to engage as a full grade-level
team and to work with the ILT’s data and guidance.

Additionally, the ILT members received stipends of $32 per hour for work completed
during the school year and over a three-day period in the summer. The use of stipends to
incentivize work must be recognized as influential though it is also pertinent to acknowledge no
stipends exceeded a total of $500.

The site was one of three schools in this district that engaged an Instructional Leadership
Team for a shared-leadership approach to decision-making. There are similarities between the
schools; however, it was impossible to completely generalize the findings from this site to the
others due to differences in the building culture and the participants’ backgrounds and
experience. Also, the principal’s level of acceptance of the shared-leadership model differed
between each building.

**Rural impact.** The location of the study in a region classified as a “former rural
economic center” (Massachusetts Board of Education, 2003) translates to a region once
economically viable but now struggling under declining business opportunities and limited
growth potential (Massachusetts Census Data, 2013). This factor impacted the scope of the study
in that there were few external partners, no real opportunity for expanding training due to limited
access to professional development providers and the continual cuts in the budget. As a result,
the ILT had limited time to train in order to support the teachers and their work with data. The
only external assistance involved with this site came through grant-funded initiatives. The
sustainability of the grants can never be guaranteed, requiring the district and school administrators to have a yearly contingency plan for financing the ILT through the local budget, should it be required.

**Researcher’s role.** This study coincided with the work done during on-site coaching and through regular assistance sessions. The definition of “regular” is determined by the site and can range from several times per week to several times a month. The demands of work and the study required the balancing of exchanges as the site between the expectations of the professional relationship and the role as data collector. As a participant observer, it was crucial to record what was seen and heard with little to no interpretation. Staff meetings generated teacher interest in what was being recorded and teachers occasionally inquired as to the scope and depth of the content chronicled.

While all aspects of the research were transparent, it must also be acknowledged that the researcher’s professional responsibility was to advance the school’s improvement initiatives. Therefore, work being done directly by the researcher both informed the study and aided the site’s targeted performance-improvement strategies. Despite this professional responsibility, the support was limited to the assistance and guidance of the ILT’s initiatives and operated within the parameters of the district and school focus. The goals of the study did not interfere with, nor influence, the researcher’s work with the site.

**Nature and time frame of qualitative research.** This data gathered for the study was gathered through interviews, observations and a qualitative survey. Data were collected over a period of eight months of a single school year, restricting the participants’ experience details to this time frame. Each data collection method relied on the interpretation of impressions either of or by the participants. Challenges to the researcher were also posed by the qualitative research
protocols. In this study there was careful attention paid to maintaining boundaries and not having a subjective experience to statements or decisions made regarding the ILT or professional development (Creswell, 2013; Dickson-Swift, James, & Kippen, 2004). For example, participants would claim to not be aware of an expectation or occurrence yet the researcher had observed the communication of the expectation. Confidentiality and anonymity agreements required that this information not be shared with administration despite its potential benefit to the principal or ILT. Regardless of the triangulation of data and careful exploration and coding, the results reflect the understandings of the ILT actions as first viewed by the participants and subsequently interpreted by the researcher.

**Implications**

This eight-month study focused on the actions and strategies of the ILT in its work to operationalize the EES within the confines of a resource-limited rural environment. The study identified actions at the district and school administrative level that would support the shared-leadership methodology the school had adopted. Research also indicated there was strength in the shared-leadership model as it supported changes made at the school integrating the new EES model. The data revealed the need to structure the organizational supports within the operation of the school to integrate the changes reflective of the dynamic nature of an educational environment.

**District role.** The level of the decision-making that the district administrators were willing to relinquish provided the impetus for the development of shared-leadership capacity. The district administrators involved in this study had negotiated with school-level administrators for the right to have school-based professional development choices. The site’s principal directed the ILT to develop an academic focus and connect all PD to it. The success experienced by the
ILT was furthered by the teachers’ reception of the ILT as colleagues who were assisting rather than dictating. The research validated the district’s approach to site-based management of the professional development. The positive feedback from teachers indicated their embracing of a common professional development focus and site-based control. As a result of this, the training was developed based on data-driven needs rather than from an administrator’s perception of need.

**Early work.** Preparation prior to school being in session provided the opportunity for all teachers to be engaged in the data-based decision-making model right from the start of the school year. The district’s schools historically engaged in looking at student data during the course of the first few weeks of school. That time was challenging as there were many other responsibilities. This research demonstrated the value of providing time prior to the school year start when there are no phone calls, forms to collate, lessons to plan, or students to assist. Focus remained on the task at hand and participants reported their appreciation for the amount of work that was accomplished during this uninterrupted time.

**Developing leadership.** Providing an opportunity for leadership teams to grapple with challenges and to analyze outcomes can also assist in building the bonds of the group and the development of individuals’ strengths and capacity (Anderson, 2004; Anderson & Herr, 2007; Curry, 2008; Fullan, 2001; Hon & Chan, 2012). These findings indicate that the building of social bonds is an intricate part of the ILT’s problem-solving ability as the team addressed challenges in a unified manner. Individuals did not see themselves as attacked personally during times of teacher pushback and that kept ILT members engaged. In applying the social capital theory to the ‘community’ structure of the ILT, the team’s actions can be gauged against the measurements of social capital. Future application of these findings could identify the deliberate
actions and philosophical approaches of shared-leadership groups and evaluate the actions and relationships that promoted team development and nurtured social capitalism.

**Rural environment.** Schools and districts operating in rural environments would benefit from exploring different scheduling approaches that would create opportunities for collaboration (Broton, Mueller, Schultz, & Gaona, 2009; Miller, 1993; Scheie, 2001). Despite the reality of ‘multiple hats’ being worn by most people in rural environments, it is essential for colleagues to have time to work together either in the shared-leadership capacity or in collaborative sessions where decisions can be made around approaches to teaching and learning. The benefits of teacher collaboration and the engagement in meaningful reflection and response to the student data examined (Dufour, 2004) may be enhanced by an ILT member who facilitates and coaches. This study provides another example of the challenge of operating without adequate time for the ILT to serve in a leadership capacity with grade-level teachers.

**Communication structures.** It is suggested that in order for any initiative to be successful there must be adequate structures of support (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Curry, 2008; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger, 2003; Harris, 2004). The findings indicated that communication will continue to be the key to successful initiatives, and especially those that require cooperation and buy-in. This study supported the hypothesis that formalized structures for specific types of communication would benefit any organization through reliable expectations around communication methods and timelines. The research suggested that although multiple methods are still appropriate, consistency in the way particular information is shared is crucial.

**Recommendations**

The findings from this case study, while specific to a single elementary school, may be of use to other schools or systems. The focus the ILT had on data-driven decisions, site-based
management, collaboration, and the identified need for a formalized communication structures are concepts that are transferable and the recommended actions could be replicated within other environments.

**Actions.** It is recommended that the site continue to engage the district and school administrators and the ILT in the work of defining structures and processes in support of the work of operationalizing the EES at the school. Furthermore, the methods and approaches to collectively leveraging change efforts, personal skills-building, needs-assessments, and opportunities for support should continue to be carefully documented and reviewed. Moreover, strengths and areas for growth should be identified and deficits remedied, employing timely and collaborative means.

As the ILT members continue to develop as professionals and as leaders, their credibility will be based on the assistance they provide to teachers (Astuto, et al., 1993; Douglas, 2015; Hord, 1997; Senge, 1990). Indicators from the study show that involving all teachers through transparency and responding to concerns is foundational for future work.

It is further recommended that district administrators explore ways to free up ILT members through flexible scheduling, or through formal appropriation of additional time during the course of the school day. Finding opportunities for the ILT members to attend grade-level meetings will create a greater sense of ILT responsibility and provide another avenue for teacher voice to be nurtured and shared-leadership encouraged.

The research strongly suggested that focused collaborative sessions need to be preserved and the refinement of agendas needs to include rigorous targeted topics. An unstructured agenda that lacks focus on the school’s targeted academic areas can derail meetings (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2010) so the site must ensure a method of
process evaluation for the grade-level team meetings. Meeting norms, agendas, and minutes should be integrated into the site’s practice with the ILT leading the process.

**Further study.** This study occurred over a period of eight months and logged data specific to the initial year for the ILT’s work supporting the EES. The EES is a relatively new concept and districts are engrossed in a multi-year cycle to fully implement the system. A study that tracked the progress of a team approach to integrating the EES and documented the outcomes of a longevity approach would allow for a complete system to be explored.

Replicating the study in another school environment such as a similarly-sized urban elementary school (which has additional funding and personnel available to address gaps identified within this study), or a similarly-sized rural middle or high school, or a suburban elementary school of comparable poverty rates, race, and size would allow for the methods to be compared. The role of finances and personnel could be further explored to examine how each impacts shared-leadership training, teacher coverage of classroom responsibilities to allow a team member to attend other grade-level meetings, stipends, or other finance/personnel-related issues. Furthermore, there is a need to examine the application of change methodologies used by shared-leadership teams across school levels to better understand the impact in grade-span environments.

Additional study of the application of the social capital theory within the education field will allow for researchers to better understand the impact of a team that purposefully and methodically goes about building its dynamics as a way to leverage change. Such research should explore the team as a unit as well as individuals, investigating the impact of social capital on the team and discrete members (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). A better understanding of the influence of the same experiences on the collective versus the individual with respect to the
application of theory could be more deeply appreciated and potentially applied to the education field. This would extend the research of social capital theory and teaming.

**Conclusion**

Teacher participation in school leadership roles is not a new phenomenon, nor is the concept of teacher evaluation. However, using teacher-leaders, via an ILT, to support a new, statewide mandated high-stakes evaluation system has not been heavily documented in research. This case study examined the work of a rural district administrators leveraging of shared-leadership to integrate a new, mandated evaluation system. Despite challenges in time and supporting resources, the ILT was able to lead teachers in the use of data-driven decision-making for determining an academic focus and yearly professional goals and to use said goals to guide instruction throughout the year. Supports, including formalized communication channels and operational structures for group meetings (including agendas, timed formats, minutes, and a follow-up expectation), were identified as necessary for the ILT’s work to take hold. The research suggested that these supports may be of assistance across the scope of academic work in the K-12 environment and offered additions to the literature on shared-leadership.

This research adds to the knowledge of ILTs and district/school supports, especially within a rural environment. The data also recognized communication channels and consistency in message and focus as necessary for change management. The findings in this study hinged on district administrators’ willingness to empower the school administrators and faculty with the ability to drive their academic focus and methods to achieve the related goals. The trust in teachers to guide their colleagues, to build relationships and enhance teacher agency, and the purposeful data-driven decisions the ILT made, are all indicators of the significance of collaboration and the power of shared-leadership.
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doi: 10.1080/03057640320000122005


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doi: 10.1177/0149206309347376


Appendix A

Letter of Intent

Kimberly Roberts-Morandi
Street address provided                    home phone
City, state, zip code                       krobertsmorandi@une.edu

September 12, 2014

As a doctoral student at the University of New England in the Department of Education, seeking my degree in Educational Leadership, I am conducting a research project that documents the impact of the Instructional Leadership Team on the Educator Evaluation System’s implementation within your building. This case study research will inform the study of the related purpose and work of the Instructional Leadership Team in a small, rural environment.

This study has been approved by the University of New England’s Institutional Review Board.

I am reaching out today with more information regarding the study being conducted at your school and to provide necessary background. As principal of the school I am asking that you please forward this information to all teachers and staff within the building in order that they may be notified as well.

The following information is provided to help you and the faculty/staff make an informed decision about participation in this research study.

Project
Leveraging an instructional leadership team to support educator evaluation in a rural elementary school.

Purpose
It is the intent of this study to investigate key actions, supports, research and findings related to the functions of an Instructional Leadership Team on a small, rural district’s implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation. It is the hope of the researcher that trends or aspects of the work the school engages in can be considered as building blocks for other work, including that of district initiatives or those other similar districts may engage in.

Risks and Benefits
There are no benefits or risks associated with the research.

Procedure
Participation in this study is completely voluntary and is approved by the IRB at the University of New England.
Data collected for this study will be via individual interviews and focus groups (which are then transcribed), photographs of data walls and Instructional Leadership Team products for the school, document review, a possible open-ended survey and participant observation.

**Data Confidentiality and Protection**

Data will be reported in the aggregate, thereby assuring confidentiality. Additionally, statements that contain comments that may be attributed to particular individuals can be adjusted to strike personally identifiable information. To validate research procedures, research supporters will be granted direct access to the research data without violating the confidentiality of the participants.

Data will be maintained electronically and in hard copy. Collection methods will be protected through the use of encrypted files and secured files for hard copy format. Video will be transferred to a Microsoft Word movie file and kept in the protected file area as well. All information will be coded and secured. Every effort to protect your identity and confidentiality will be taken and all data will be used for professional purposes only. Data will be maintained securely for the duration of one year beyond the degree completion and then destroyed via cross-cut shred for hard copy and permanent file deletion for electronic versions.

**Opportunity to Ask Questions**

Further information regarding the research can be obtained from the principal researcher, Kimberly Roberts-Morandi, at krobertsmorandi@une.edu or 413-281-0388. Should participants have questions regarding their participation, they may contact me directly or the University of New England IRB at:

Olgun Guvench, M. D.
Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board
207-221-4171 or irb@une.edu

Thank you for your time and participation in this research project.

Regards,

Kimberly Roberts-Morandi, Principal Researcher
University of New England Doctoral Candidate
Appendix B

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Facilitating the Massachusetts Effective Educator System in a Rural Elementary School: An Instructional Leadership Team Approach

Principal investigator(s):
Kimberly Roberts-Morandi
University of New England
Doctoral Candidate

Advisor(s):
Dr. Michelle Collay
Office: 140 Decary Hall
University of New England
Biddeford, ME 04005
207.602.2010
mcollay@une.edu

You have been asked to participate in a case study that seeks to document the explicit steps taken and advancements made by the school’s Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) in moving forward state mandates around curriculum, accountability and evaluation. The study seeks to explain the district and school actions taken in support of the ILT work, with the goal being the discovery of particular efforts that had the greatest impact. Lastly, there will be an attempt to identify cultural shifts in the building that occur as a result of the shared decision-making process in this rural school setting.

The goal of this form is to document your interest/willingness to participate in the study through interviews (individual or focus group), open-ended survey questions, or document review with the researcher.

Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you.

- The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and to document your decision.

- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete by speaking with the principal researcher, Kimberly Roberts-Morandi, via email: krobertsmorandi@une.edu.

- You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate.

- Your participation is voluntary and responses are confidential.
• Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University of New England or your employer.

• If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

• You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.

• If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

• During our time together, you will be asked a series of questions about your experience as or with an ILT member. You may decide to withdraw your participation at any time, and you are not obligated to answer any question that you are not comfortable with.

• Your name, institution’s name, and all identifying information will be removed, in accordance with Federal Laws surrounding student records. No individually identifiable information will be collected.

• Today’s conversation will be recorded and transcribed. All notes and recordings will be securely locked and only accessible to the researcher. At the conclusion of this research, all recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

  o Please note that the IRB at the University of New England may request to review research materials.

• There are no foreseeable risks or hazards to your participation in this study.

• The location of today’s interview is mutually agreeable and in a location that assures a level of privacy.

• There are no financial benefits to your participation in this research. Your participation will, however, indirectly inform the higher education community of important practices.

• The results of this research will be used for a doctoral research study at the University of New England. It may be submitted for further publication as a journal article or as a presentation.

A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only the principal investigator will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.

If you would like a copy of the completed research project, you may contact the principal researcher directly.
If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call:

Olgun Guvench, M.D.
Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu

You will be given a copy of this consent form.

**Participant’s Statement**

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

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Printed name

**Researcher’s Statement**

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

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Kimberly Roberts-Morandi
Appendix C

Conceptual Framework

Leveraging the ILT Role in Brokering the Acceptance of State Mandates
Appendix D

Individual/Group Interview Questions

1. Please state your name, position, and number of years you have been teaching at this school and total years teaching.

2. Do you consent to this interview being taped (audio or video)?

3. How did you first become aware of an Instructional Leadership Team at your school? (Probe: awareness, school attempt to advertise, notify, etc.)

4. What was the process to being appointed to the ILT?

5. How does the ILT communicate its activities and projects within the building?

6. How do you plan/did the ILT share its goals for the 2014-2015 school year?

7. For ILT members: Does the 2014-2015 ILT Action Plan guide your work, and if so, to what degree? (cite examples)

8. What goals guide the grade-level team meetings and where did the ideas for the goals come from?

9. Who created these goals (Probe: leadership actions by the ILT at grade-level meetings)

10. With respect to state mandates regarding Educator Evaluation, please talk about the role the ILT is playing in supporting the school’s adoption.

11. What are your feelings about the usefulness of the Educator Evaluation System in driving your development as an educator?

12. With respect to district determined measures, please talk about the role the ILT is playing supporting the school’s blending of DDMs with Educator Evaluation goals.

13. What aspect of the ILT is crucial to the successful infusion of these mandates? (Probe: in what way(s) the participants believe the ILT is gaining ground.)

14. Are there areas the ILT could be enhancing its work with the EES to assist you in understanding or addressing your individual and team goals? Please support your response with examples or reasons.
ILT-Specific Questions:

15. Please describe, in as much detail as you can recall, the training that the ILT received, as a group, to prepare you for this role. (Probe: inclusion of trainings conducted by CCE.)

16. Did you attend the on-site training for protocols conducted by CCE? (probe CCE’s methods, support, applicability to ILT work)

17. Have you utilized any of the CCE training in your ILT role?
   a. If so, what?
   b. If not, why?

18. What, in your opinion, is needed by the ILT, with respect to training that either the school or district needs to supply?
Appendix E

ILT Support of Educator Goals Survey Questions

The purpose of this brief survey is to identify the occasions and type of ILT interaction with teachers, how the ILT shares information, and to what degree the ILT assists in supporting the Educator Evaluation System’s use with teachers in the building. There are no “correct” response regarding ILT interaction; rather, this survey seeks to document the collaboration thus far. While question one seeks information regarding grade level and subject taught it will not be reported in any specific or identifiable way. Data from the responses will be reported in the aggregate.

1. Please indicate your grade level and subject taught.

2. Has a member of the ILT been regularly attending a weekly grade-level meeting? (If yes, skip to Q4)

3. If not, how often is a member of the ILT at your grade-level meeting?

4. How is the ILT working with you currently in addressing your professional and personal goals for the Educator Evaluation System?

5. How often, and through what method(s) does the ILT communicate with you? Please be specific. For example, “through email once a week” as opposed to “through email”.

6. What topics are shared through the ILT’s communication?

7. Describe the usefulness of the Educator Evaluation System in driving your development as a teacher?

8. What support systems are you currently engaged with other than the ILT for assistance applying your work to your goals within the Educator Evaluation System?

9. What supports beyond the ILT the Educator Evaluation System do you need from the ILT that are not currently in place?
Appendix F

Graduated Stakeholder Interest in ILT Site Study

- **DSAC**
  - Leverage techniques for future growth. Self-assess roles and needs.

- **District**
  - Identify essential actions for district to ensure ILT continues and grows.

- **School Admin**
  - Understand principal's role in supporting and empowering ILT. Consider training and development.

- **ILT**
  - Explore report findings for strengths/areas for further focus and next steps. Conduct self-reflection and set next steps.

- **ESF**
  - Comparison of results and requirements for small system not receiving funds for this work versus those with extensive financial backing.
# Appendix G

## Calendar of Research Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review</td>
<td>IRB Doc, Proposal</td>
<td>Proposal revisions through 8/22</td>
<td>Consent forms for participants</td>
<td>Transcript revw; consent forms sign</td>
<td>Transcription review; local editor to revw Chs 1-3</td>
<td>Transcription review</td>
<td>Transcription review</td>
<td>Transcription revw; revw of chs 1-4</td>
<td>Local editors to review chs 1-4</td>
<td>Editors revw full study. Grad pprs</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Revise</td>
<td>Proposal</td>
<td>Chs 1-3; Revise calendar</td>
<td>Chs 1-3; participant grid for scope of represent</td>
<td>Any edits from reviewer</td>
<td>Chs 1-4; Possible IRB questions amendment</td>
<td>Chs 1-4; themes adjust per feedback</td>
<td>Chs 1-4</td>
<td>Chs 1-4</td>
<td>Chs 1-4</td>
<td>Chs 1-4</td>
<td>Final refine of Data Chapters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Chs 2, 3 addl. support readings</td>
<td>ILT initial participant observation, doc rew., focus group</td>
<td>ILT and accountability docs., observe tchr goals set with ILT</td>
<td>ILT-related meetings, intvs, focus group, doc review</td>
<td>ILT-related meetings, intvs, focus groups, doc review</td>
<td>ILT-related meetings, intvs, focus groups, doc review</td>
<td>ILT-related meetings, intvs, focus groups, doc review</td>
<td>ILT-related meetings, intvs, focus groups, doc review</td>
<td>Findings chapter</td>
<td>Complete findings chapter</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Support</td>
<td>Identify local advisor, transcription services,</td>
<td>VoiceThread setup for local advisor; identify 2 local editors</td>
<td>Transcript, coding</td>
<td>Transcript, coding</td>
<td>Transcript, coding</td>
<td>Transcript, coding</td>
<td>Transcript, coding</td>
<td>Editor reviews</td>
<td>Second reader final reviews</td>
<td>Post to DUNE, submit any grad. docs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documen t Prep.</td>
<td>IRB, Proposal for Committee</td>
<td>Study present for Aug 4; consent forms for participants</td>
<td>Grid for tracking participant info</td>
<td>Data chapter – organize ideas and responses</td>
<td>Initial coding list to local advisor for feedback; Data chapter</td>
<td>Data chapter</td>
<td>Data chapter; early Results chapter outlining</td>
<td>Data chapter; Results chapter organization</td>
<td>Data chapter/ conclusions</td>
<td>Chs 1-5 complete, executive version developed</td>
<td>Executive version of study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Proposal to Research Team</td>
<td>Proposal to committee, Aug 4. Study overview to site; editors</td>
<td>Data organize and coding to study partner</td>
<td>Emerging themes to local advisor, partner</td>
<td>Present research findings (defense)</td>
<td>Present research findings (defense)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Approved IRB</td>
<td>Approved Study</td>
<td>Site fully informed; participants identified</td>
<td>Early themes emerging</td>
<td>Themes emerging</td>
<td>Themes solidifying</td>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Thematic conclusions</td>
<td>Drafts of 1-5 revised</td>
<td>Accepted study</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Appendix H

Documents Reviewed in Support of Research

2012 TELL MASS survey results

2014 TELL MASS survey results

2014-2017 District Improvement Plan

2013-2014 School Improvement Plan

2014-2015 School Improvement Plan

District 5-Year Improvement Plan

2014 assessment data reports (each run for grades 3-7 ELA, math; grade 5 science):

MCAS Results by Achievement Level: School, District and State Comparison

MCAS Results by Subgroup

MCAS Detailed School Achievement Distribution

MCAS Achievement and Growth

MCAS Results by Standards

MCAS Test Item Analysis Summary

MCAS Test Item Analysis Graph

MCAS Student Roster

MCAS Student Item Analysis Roster

MCAS Student Growth Scatter Plot

MCAS Student Growth Report

MCAS Cohort Achievement History

School Profiles data reports:

Student Enrollment Data
Selected Populations (2014-15)

Mobility Rate

2014 Staffing Retention Rate

Teacher Grade and Subject by Full-time Equivalents for All Subjects (2013-14)

2013-14 Educator Evaluation Performance Rating

2014 Item by Item Results

2014 Accountability Data

2014 Complete Report Card

2014-2015 Teacher Evaluation Summaries

June 2014 Instructional Leadership Team minutes

2014-2015 twice-monthly Instructional Leadership Team meeting minutes (September – March)


2014-2015 weekly collaborative session notes (when available)
# Appendix I

## Initial Code Sort

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Code (Open [Descriptive] Coding) for Accountability Theme</th>
<th>Initial Code (Open [Descriptive] Coding) Constraining Factors Theme</th>
<th>Initial Code (Open [Descriptive] Coding) Facilitators of Change Theme</th>
<th>Initial Code (Open [Descriptive] Coding) Structuring the Support Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>accountability awareness affecting change</td>
<td>alignment collegiality ambiguity alignment</td>
<td>assessment approach ambiguity</td>
<td>challenges confusion assistance clarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compliance culture benefit coaching</td>
<td>concern deficit buy-in commitment</td>
<td>confusion disrespect change communication</td>
<td>data district culture collaboration communication (electronic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDMs district focus collegiality communication (weekly updates)</td>
<td>DIBELS faculty detail communication concern</td>
<td>disaggregating follow through data confusion</td>
<td>discomfort hands tied decision making connectivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disjointed high needs disconnected consistency</td>
<td>district assessments home empowerment data</td>
<td>district focus insulted faculty meetings disconnected</td>
<td>district goals isolation guidance disjointed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ed eval limitations (geographic) ILT composition district concerns</td>
<td>external partners limitations (interference) ILT concept district focus</td>
<td>focus limitations (resources) ILT data planning district objectives</td>
<td>goal setting limitations (services) ILT development district support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>goals (personal, grade, sch, summative) limitations (social) ILT direction equitability</td>
<td>ignored limitations (transportation) ILT dynamic ESE support</td>
<td>isolation limited help ILT engagement external partners</td>
<td>lack of focus many agencies ILT expectations external support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>math and ELA PLC ILT focus faculty meetings</td>
<td>performance resentment ILT guidance fallout</td>
<td>student performance resistance ILT initiative flexibility</td>
<td>summative resource access ILT knowledge follow through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training respect ILT leadership guidance</td>
<td>unique role delineation ILT membership ignored</td>
<td>rural limitations ILT norms ILT training (district focus)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services (food)</td>
<td>ILT oversight examples</td>
<td>impact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>services (health)</td>
<td>ILT planning</td>
<td>informing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shifting culture</td>
<td>ILT role</td>
<td>interpersonal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td>ILT selection</td>
<td>isolation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transportation</td>
<td>ILT training (goals)</td>
<td>knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trust</td>
<td>ILT training (PLC)</td>
<td>lack of follow through</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wait time</td>
<td>ILT training (support)</td>
<td>overload</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

| ILT work | partnership |
| impact | perspectives |
| information conduit | population |
| isolation | principal support |
| lack of direction | professional development |
| leadership | representation |
| performance | role blurring |
| planning | role confusion |
| postings | rural limitations |
| principal support | school admin support for ILT |
| professional development | self-directed |
| resentment | staff meetings |
| resistance | stipends |
| response to staff | student needs |
| role | student performance |
| shared decision making | support |
| sharing | systems-building |
| struggles | teacher skills |
| time | teacher support |
| training | technology |
| transparency | testing |
| understanding of ILT | time |
| vertical communication | timing |
| | | transparency |
| | | uncertainty |
| | | understanding of ILT |
| | | vertical alignment |
## Appendix J

### Code Structure Excerpt

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>Notes related to code (light yellow = district voice)</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Initial Code (Open [Descriptive] Coding)</td>
<td>Level Ivo Code (Pattern)</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>I need conversation on collaborating to increase the students making connections. We have ways of doing that but if we were a part of the process somehow then we could feel more connected.</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>376</td>
<td>11/18/2014</td>
<td>P18</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>Facilitators of Change</td>
<td>am fortunate enough to be a part of a team that does collaborate and does share ideas. Initially this year when I met with one of the teams they took the time to explain to me the data learnings from the state-implemented data workshop this summer. One of the pieces of information she brought back was ow to better formulate questions; focus on Bloom’s Taxonomy.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>377</td>
<td>11/19/2014</td>
<td>P35</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>Facilitators of Change</td>
<td>We are targeting questions with an increase in Depth of Knowledge. During our collabor session we looked at data and discussed whether improving rigor of questions, vocabulary and writing would be enough.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>378</td>
<td>11/19/2014</td>
<td>P35</td>
<td>goals</td>
<td>goals</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>I have to be aware of SPED students goals as well as grade-level goals and address both.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>379</td>
<td>11/19/2014</td>
<td>P35</td>
<td>ed eval</td>
<td>accountability</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>I drafted a couple of my professional goals as a result of the team’s goals and focus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>380</td>
<td>11/19/2014</td>
<td>P35</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>collaboration</td>
<td>Facilitators of Change</td>
<td>I brought my goals to a collabor meeting and sought input from colleagues and suggested we talk as a group about the language and its applicability to us as a whole.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>381</td>
<td>11/19/2014</td>
<td>P35</td>
<td>personal goals</td>
<td>accountability</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>In the end it was not my SMART goal. I needed to plan my goal development around lesson plan design in order to understand my students and do justice to what is asked of me</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>382</td>
<td>11/19/2014</td>
<td>P35</td>
<td>school goals</td>
<td>goals</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>I embraced the whole idea of questioning and vocabulary but wasn’t convinced it would be the most bang for my buck in my professional and student goal so our team is going to continue to talk about it.</td>
<td>1,2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix K

ILT Impact Survey

Administered via Survey Monkey.

The purpose of this brief qualitative survey is to identify the occasions and type of ILT interaction with teachers, how the ILT shares information, and to what degree the ILT assists in supporting the Educator Evaluation System’s use with teachers in the building. There are no “correct” response regarding ILT interaction; rather, this survey seeks to document the collaboration thus far. While question nine allows you to enter your name it will not be reported with the data. Data from the responses will be reported in the aggregate.

1. Has a member of the ILT been regularly attending a weekly grade-level meeting?
   a. Yes
   b. No
   c. A member of my grade-level team is on the ILT

2. If not weekly, how often is a member of the ILT at your collaborative meetings?

3. How often, and through what method(s) does the ILT communicate with you? (Can be formal or informal communication.) Please be specific. For example, “through email once a week” or “when we see each other in the hallway” is more helpful than “email”.

4. What topics does the ILT communicate about? Identify as many as you recall.

5. Describe how the ILT is currently working with you on your professional and personal goals for the Educator Evaluation System.

6. Describe the usefulness of the Educator Evaluation System in driving your development as a teacher.

7. What support systems are you currently engaged with other than the ILT for assistance applying your work to your goals within the Educator Evaluation System?

8. What supports beyond guidance with the Educator Evaluation System do you need from the ILT that are not currently in place?

9. Name (optional).