
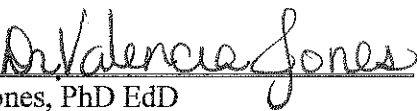


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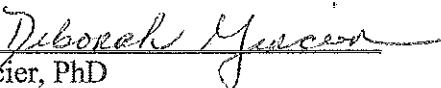
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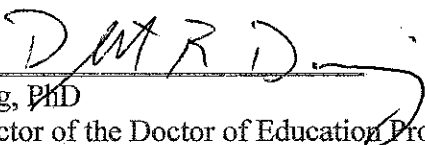
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HOW DO TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THE SIX, ESSENTIAL
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY (PLC) CRITERIA
IMPACT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A PLC?

by

Sharon Lee Davis

A Dissertation

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Requirements for the
Degree of
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in
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October 24, 2016

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Concordia University Irvine

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ABSTRACT

Using two case studies this dissertation project examined teacher perceptions of the six essential criteria required for an effective Professional Learning Community (PLC) model: shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, authentic assessment, self-directed reflection, stable setting, and strong school-level administrative support.

Specifically, the following three questions were answered in these studies:

1. How do teachers within the professional learning community perceive their community?
2. How effective do teachers perceive the professional learning community when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are implemented?
3. Is there an increase in students passing their English-Language Arts and mathematics requirements? In graduating from high school ready for career or college?

Representative of two urban schools, these studies presented data from teacher surveys, observations, and interviews – as well as federal, state, and local education agency data – to explore how professional learning communities support student performance. The data showed increases in student achievement in English Language Arts and mathematics, and in graduation rates of high school students after the adoption of the Professional Learning Community Model.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	
ABSTRACT.....	
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Study	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Purpose of the Research Study	7
Goal of the Research Study.....	8
The Researcher.....	8
Significance of the Research Study	9
Definitions of Terms	10
Theoretical Framework.....	16
Limitations	17
Delimitations.....	20
Assumptions.....	20
Organization of the Study	21
Summary.....	22

	Page
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
Introduction.....	23
Historical Educational Reforms	27
Reforms After A Nation At Risk	28
Reforms After the No Child Left Behind Act.....	33
Research Questions.....	38
The Six Essential Criteria of Professional Learning Communities	39
Shared vision and Goals.....	40
Collective Responsibility	41
Authentic Assessments	42
Stable Setting	42
Self-Directed Reflection	43
Strong School-Level Administration Support	43
Summary.....	51
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY	
Introduction.....	53
Data Collection	55
The Schools in the Research Study	
School One.....	58

	Page
School Two	61
Selection of Participants	63
Confidentiality of the Participants and the Schools in the Research Study.....	71
Instrumentation	72
Teacher Survey Reliability	72
Teacher Survey Validity	74
Teacher Observation Reliability	75
Teacher Observation Validity.....	75
Teacher Interview Reliability	76
Teacher Interview Validity	76
Strategies for Validating Findings	77
Data Collection	77
The First Stage	77
The Second Stage.....	78
The Third Stage.....	78
The Fourth Stage.....	79
Data Analysis Procedures	80
Summary.....	81
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS	83
Introduction.....	83
Quantitative Data Analysis	84
The First Stage	84

	Page
The Second Stage.....	86
Findings of Qualitative Research.....	89
The Third Stage.....	89
The Fourth Stage.....	91
Data Analysis Procedures	92
Participant Demographics.....	94
PLC Survey Results	94
The Observation Results.....	96
Summary of Interview Findings	98
Summary.....	102
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	104
Introduction.....	104
Summary of the Study	104
Methodology.....	105
Survey Findings	106
Observation Findings.....	107
Interview Findings	110
Student Data.....	113
Conclusions and Recommendations	114
Problem and Purpose	127
Summary.....	133
REFERENCES	136

	Page
APPENDICES	143
A. Site Authorization School One	144
B. Site Authorization School Two	147
C. University IRB	150
D. District External Research Review Board	152
E. Teacher Consent	154
F. Pilot Survey #1	158
G. Responses to Pilot Survey #1	162
H. Pilot Survey #2.....	164
I. Responses to Pilot Survey #2	168
J. Professional Learning Community Survey	170
K. Essential Criterion Check Off School One	176
L. Essential Criterion Check Off School Two	178
M. Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Questions.....	180
N. Summary of Teacher Interviews Montrose and Sylvain	184
O. Evidence Table PLCs Work.....	196

LIST OF TABLES

Table I.	The consequences of not meeting AYP and API targets (years)	18
Table 2.	The 21 responsibilities and their correlations (R) with student academic achievement	44
Table 3.	The participants in the study	63
Table 4.	Case processing summary	84-85
Table 5.	Reliability Statistics	85
Table 6.	Teacher Perceptions	85
Table 7.	Descriptive statistics survey with Montrose and Sylvain	87
Table 8.	Descriptive statistics survey strong school-level administrative support ..	89
Table 9.	Frequency of six essential criteria observed at professional development and department meetings Montrose High School	90
Table 10.	Frequency of six essential criteria observe at professional development and grade level meeting Sylvain Pilot High	91
Table 11.	Frequency of six essential PLC criteria (Interviews).....	93
Table 12.	Evidence Table: PLCs Work	95

LIST OF FIGURES

Pages

Figure 1 Where PLCs Work..... 10

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) formed by then-U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell released the report *A Nation at Risk*. The most famous line of the widely publicized report declared that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) the report led to comprehensive school reform efforts, and was the impetus for the academic-standards movement.

Perhaps the most important legacies of *A Nation at Risk* have been the educational reforms in schools since its publication including Effective Schools, Accelerated Schools, Schools Within a School, and the Educational Goals Movement (Bohrnstedt, 2013). Instituting Effective Schools, Accelerated Schools, Schools within a School and the Educational Goals Movement reforms produced limited changes improving student achievement in small percentages with the students directly involved in these reforms. The majority of students in public schools continue to underachieve as evidenced on state and national assessments.

This research study utilized surveys, observations, and interviews showing how Professional Learning Communities (PLC) have led to improvements in student achievement at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School¹. A PLC exists when a group of teachers organized by grade level, subject matter or theme, work

¹ The school and district names are fictitious to protect their anonymity

together positively impacting student learning (Dufour, 2015). In 2011 the Public Charter High School Initiative selected and authorized Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School to implement Professional Learning Communities to address the needs of underachieving students, especially those who continued to fall short of academic mastery in the English language arts, and mathematics.

Statement of the Problem

Presently K-12 public schools are not graduating students career and college ready. Public schools are losing students to charter schools. This movement began in 1992 picking up momentum in the late 1990s and continuing to grow in momentum each year. The reason most parents cite for moving their children from public schools to charter schools is that they believe that public schools are failing to adequately educate their children (Delaney, 2015). Parents not only have goals for what their children learn but very definite ideas about how that learning should occur, ideas strongly anchored in their own experiences as school children (Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N. Dutton, L., & Kleiner, A., 2012). Most adults remember a teacher who believed in their ability to learn, and created warm socio-emotional climates in their classrooms in which all students were engaged and errors were not only tolerated, but also welcomed (Dufour and Marzano, 2011). Parents demand the same level of success they experienced graduating from high school and successfully moving into four-year colleges and various entry-level careers. Many of today's high school graduates are not able to successfully enter a four-year college or entry-level career job after high school graduation (United States Department of Labor, 2016). Since Professional Learning Communities at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School have been in place, both schools have shown an increase in the

number of students successfully graduating from high school. Many educational reforms were implemented to bring about the increase in student graduation rates including:

- **Effective Schools:** Dr. Larry Lezotte describes Effective Schools as having seven correlates; they are safe and organized, expect students to achieve, have relatable leaders, have a clear mission, monitor student progress, provide a framework for learning and build a partnership between the school and home.
- **Accelerated Schools:** Public schools that have permission to make decisions about who enters their school. Accelerated schools only admit high achievers who must maintain success in all their classes to continue attending the accelerated school. In an accelerated school, every student is treated as gifted with a high expectation towards success (Accelerated Schools, 2016)
- **Schools within a School:** Many large schools divided into smaller learning communities including Magnet Schools, and academies. Educators believe that smaller student/teacher populations provide a sense of community and belonging.
- **The Educational Goals Movement:** Introduced by President Bush January 23, 2001 and titled *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* was legislation, in which national academic content and performance standards were created to hold public schools accountable for student learning. The NCLB goals state that all students are expected to excel academically, parents and community members are to be engaged in discussions about student learning and classroom teachers are to be involved in the educational improvement process.

- Professional Learning Communities: A concept designed to develop the collective capacity of educators to meet the needs of students. Based on the premise that if students are to learn at higher levels, processes must be in place to ensure the ongoing, job-embedded learning of the adults who serve them.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have made the greatest impact on improving student achievement at over six hundred high schools. This information was presented in the research studies conducted by Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano and reported in their co-authored book *Leaders of Learning* (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). The successful implementation of a Professional Learning Community changes the educational system to meet the needs of all students. Based on the District XYZ data achievement increased when the educational community worked together to effectively meet the needs of the student.

Initially, the teachers at Montrose High School viewed Professional Learning Communities as another district program being superimposed upon them. The constant loss of teachers at Montrose High School due to declining student enrollment, when parents moved their children to charter schools, motivated the staff to incorporate the essential PLC criteria into their instructional strategies. The implementation of all six essential PLC criteria facilitates the greatest increase in student achievement. The six essential criteria of PLCs are

- 1) Shared vision and goals,
- 2) Collective responsibility,
- 3) Authentic assessment,

- 4) Self-directed reflection,
- 5) Stable setting,
- 6) Strong school-level administrative support.

The criteria of PLCs incorporated at Montrose High School includes shared vision and goals, authentic assessment and strong school-level administrative support but they are missing formal self-directed reflection, collective responsibility and a stable setting, where teachers and administrators work collaboratively to make their instructional program a fully effective PLC model school. Although teachers at Montrose High School lack a stable setting (teachers are not provided time during the instructional day to meet as teams) and are not yet committed to collective responsibility, some teachers are practicing informal self-directed reflection and academic achievement among the students they teach is increasing. Increases in student achievement is discussed at Professional Learning Community bi-monthly meetings where teachers dialogue concerning student progress reports from the five, ten and fifteen week grading periods. The teacher discussion is a dynamic of the critical friends philosophy. Critical friends are teachers who constantly seek to improve their instructional practices by asking questions of themselves and their colleagues and helping each other to secure positive answers (Bullock, 2016 pp. 119-124). Authors Richard Dufour and Michael Fullan suggest that, “teachers need common planning time during the instructional day to develop as critical friends” (Dufour and Fullan, 2013, p. 74).

Sylvain Pilot High School is a District XYZ pilot school in the same district as Montrose High School. Sylvain Pilot High School has implemented the PLC stable setting essential criterion. Common planning time during the instructional day is

provided for teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School. The teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School were empowered to structure the school schedule because their written plan to separate from the larger comprehensive high school in District XYZ and create a school with a more positive learning/teaching environment with the goal of increasing student achievement was approved by District XYZ. The founding teachers of Sylvain Pilot High School provided time for biweekly meetings during the instructional day for teachers and educational support staff to meet, review student data, share best practices and develop plans to address the needs of underachieving students. Teachers meet, evaluate student data and create responses that sufficiently address the needs of struggling students. These collaborative teacher meetings include some of the essential criterion of PLCs including shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, and strong school-level administrative support. The researcher observed that teachers do not consistently engage in formal self-directed reflection. Self-directed reflection is the so-called red thread that connects a person's beliefs to his/her actions. Reflection is a way of taking stock that leads to a pattern of thinking that produces a more effective professional practice (Hall, Childs-Bowen, Cunningham-Morris, Pajardo & Simeral, 2016). PLC's increase student achievement in public high schools when teachers perceive that there is strong school-level administrative support. The type of school-level administrative support necessary for effective PLCs will be presented and evaluated in this study. This research study discusses how teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the PLC model adopted at their school facilitated improved student achievement. The missing essential criteria required for 100% improved student achievement from PLCs at Sylvain Pilot High School are self-directed reflection and authentic assessments.

Teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School were quicker to blame their colleagues than to reflect on their own individual teaching style and make positive changes. Also, because Sylvain Pilot High School had 350 students it did require more than one content teacher per grade level so teachers did not collaborate or create departmental assessments. Another important consideration at Sylvain Pilot High School was that the four lead teachers changed the instructional and administrative staff annually. Improvements begun in one school year could not be carried into the next school year without training the new staff. Both the teaching and school-level administrative staff had changed each year over the past five years that Sylvain Pilot High School had existed. This constant change created a non-stable instructional setting.

Purpose of Research Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine teacher perceptions on the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities in two urban high schools.

Specifically, this study was designed to answer the following three questions:

1. How do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community?
2. How effective do the teachers perceive the Professional Learning Community when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are implemented?
3. Is there an increase in students passing their English-Language Arts and mathematics requirements? In graduating from high school ready for a career or college?

This study presented to the educational community the systematic changes that are required for maximum efficiency when implementing Professional Learning

Communities. This study presented a compelling picture of the practices in place and their impact on student achievement at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School. This study also presented the teaching practices in place at schools where PLCs were piloted by Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano, these schools demonstrated and continue to demonstrate high levels of improvement in student achievement (Dufour and Marzano, 2011). The results of this research study described the effectiveness of a school system, with a culture that operates with consistent collaboration among staff, supportive community members, shared leadership, collective responsibility and application of learning (SEDL, 2015).

Goal of the Research Study

The goal of this study was to enhance the effectiveness of educators/professionals within by providing evidence that student achievement increases when some of six of the essential PLC criteria are implemented. This study's goal was achieved by providing evidence in the form of teacher testimonials and school reports, indicating that the percentage of freshmen matriculating through high school and graduating within a four-year period of time career and college ready increased. The data presented also documents passing rates in English Language Arts and mathematics from schools where Professional Learning Communities were adopted have improved student achievement.

The Researcher

The researcher was a veteran teacher with more than 30 years of experience as an instructor in the district where the study took place. The researcher was also a student attending schools in the same district, which shall now be known as District XYZ, successfully matriculating through primary and secondary school and graduating from

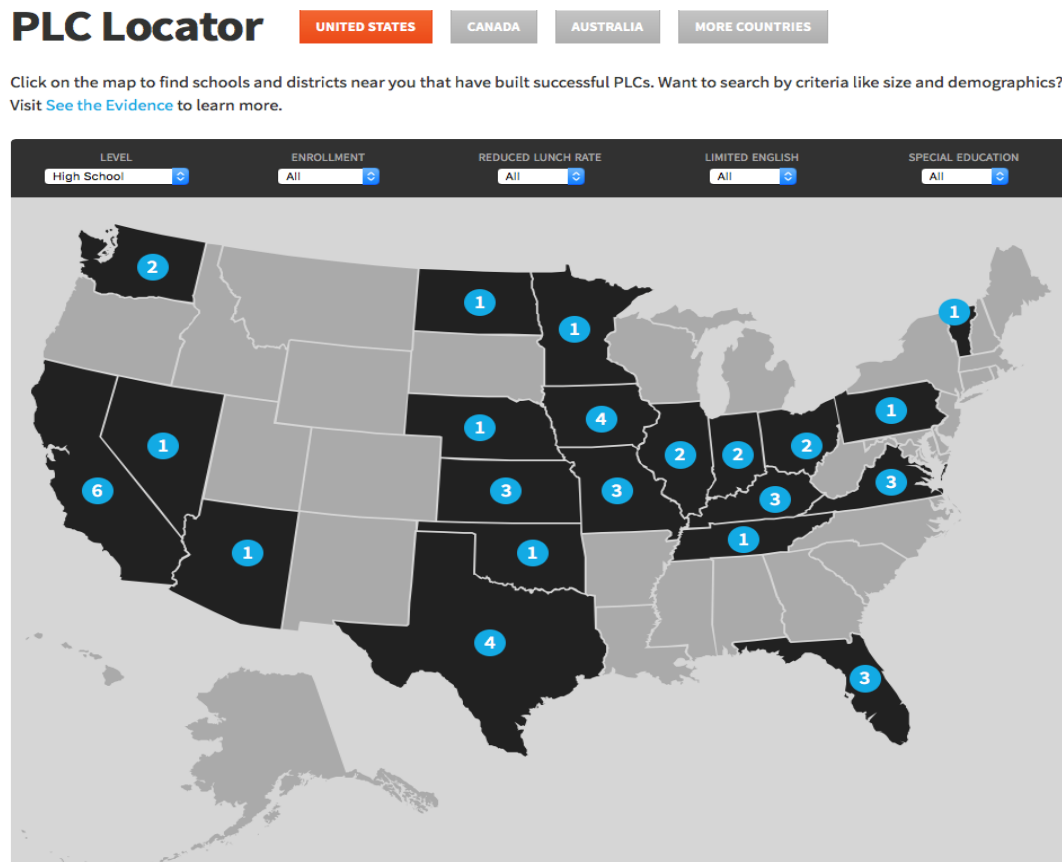
high school. She holds two Master's degrees in Education-- one in counseling and one in administration. While completing her Master's degree in Educational Administration she worked with two other teachers to complete a collaborative action research project in which she experienced the power of teachers working together to improve student achievement. The collaborative team of teachers worked as a professional learning community.

The three teachers unknowingly participated in what is today known as a professional learning community because the dynamics of this team included shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, authentic assessments, self-directed reflection, a stable setting and strong school-level administrative support. These dynamics form the essential PLC criteria required for an effective Professional Learning Community Model. The three teachers experienced the rewards of working as a PLC to improve student achievement. This researcher's experience demonstrated the success of teachers working together and she passionately desires to provide convincing evidence to all teachers of the gains that are made in student achievement when all the essential PLC criteria are implemented to enhance the academic skills of a group of students.

Significance of Research Study

This research study was significant because the Professional Learning Community when implemented correctly can lead to increased student achievement and the quality of instruction provided by the teacher (Dufour, 2006). "At last, the district that boasts, "Student needs come first," will have evidence that demonstrates the focus is on students: increased student achievement. The map below shows the schools in the United States that have successfully implemented all six Essential PLC Criteria.

Figure 1 Where PLCs Work



This research study is significant because it indicates that a system change is necessary in order to effectively increase student achievement at high school's implementing the Professional Learning Community Model.

Today's technological resources provide parents information to review when making decisions about which high school to send their children. The School Accountability Report Card, California State Department of Education reports and the Great Schools website include testimonials, graduation rates, and proficiency rates in English Language Arts and mathematics requirements that parents review to formulate decisions. PLCs can lead to improved student achievement, which improves the

information presented for parent review. Parents who want the best for their children send their children to the schools with the best reviews.

The Professional Learning Community Model meets the needs of underachieving students especially when aligned to authors Dufour and Marzano's Big Idea #3 (Dufour & Marzano, 2011), which explains that creating the conditions for continuous school improvement requires a coordinated, systematic, and collective effort rather than a series of isolated individual efforts. Implementing the six essential PLC criteria for a successful Professional Learning Community Model in public K-12 schools improves student achievement and instructional practices.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this research study:

Academic Performance Index (API): The cornerstone of California's Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999; measures the academic performance and growth of schools on a variety of academic measures

Accelerated Schools: Public schools that have permission to make decisions about who enters their school. Accelerated schools only admit high achievers who must maintain success in all their classes to continue attending the accelerated school. In an accelerated school, every student is treated as gifted with a high expectation towards success.

Action Research: The use of techniques of social and psychological research to identify social problems in a group or community coupled with active participation of the investigators in the group efforts to solve these problems.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): A statewide accountability system mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 which requires each state to ensure that all schools and districts make adequate yearly progress which is 5% of the difference between their API and the statewide target of 800 with a minimum target of five-point growth.

Authentic Assessment: A form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills.

California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP): On January 1, 2014, California *Education Code* Section 60640 established the CAASPP System of assessments. The CAASPP is California's statewide student assessment system. The CAASPP measures students' progress and performance in English Language Arts and mathematics in grades 3, 8 and 11.

California Standards Test (CST): CSTs were developed by California educators and test developers specifically to measure students' progress toward achieving California's state-adopted academic content standards in English–language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and history–social science, which describe what students should know and be able to do in each grade and subject tested.

Career Pathways: is a workforce development strategy used in the United States to support workers' transitions from education into and through the workforce. This strategy has been adopted at the federal, state and local levels in order to increase education, training and learning opportunities for American's current and emerging workforce.

Collective Responsibility: Each person holds himself responsible for each other's success. Every member assumes responsibility regardless of an individual member's involvement in decisions or the member's position or rank.

Communities of Practice: Groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Critical Friends: A colleague or other educational professional, such as a school coach, who are committed to helping an educator and/or school improve by constantly asking thought provoking questions causing the individual to self reflect.

Effective Schools: Defined by Dr. Lezotte as having seven correlates; they are safe and organized, expect students to achieve, have relatable leaders, have a clear mission, monitor student progress, provide a framework for learning and build a partnership between the school and home.

Instructional Rounds or Lesson Study: Is a process in which teachers jointly plan, observe, analyze, and refine actual classroom lessons called "research lessons."

National Board Certified Teacher: An organization created by teachers for teacher certification. It is the profession's mark of accomplished teaching. It is built upon National Board Standards and the five Core Propositions: rigorous and performance-based, multiple measures, peer-reviewed, voluntary, valid and reliable.

Professional Learning Community: A professional learning community is a group of educators that meet regularly, share expertise, and work to improve their skills by practicing self-directed reflection.

School Culture: The total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values, and knowledge, of a particular school that constitute the shared bases of social action.

Self-directed reflection: The act of looking back at something you did and evaluating it for its merit and its effectiveness in meeting a specific goal. When done within a group of your peers it is known as formal self-directed reflection.

Shared vision and goals: When a group of teachers, administrators, students, parents and community members work together for common goals, partnership, and shared leadership. It is a group that is evolving and learning clearly identifying challenges and solutions.

Small Learning Community: A subdivision of large school populations into smaller, autonomous groups of students and teachers. A small learning community is a school within a school.

Smarter Balanced Assessment: A computer adaptive format assessment created by educators and sponsored by the Membership of Governors who represents fifteen states who are seeking to improve student achievement and how it is measured.

Strong School-level Administrative Support: School principals who build a climate of openness and trust that empowers team members to make decisions on how to improve teaching effectiveness directly linked to student needs. The principal is the gate keeper for instructional excellence, building collective capacity through cultivation of Professional Learning communities, individual capacity through differentiated supervision, alignment of rigorous curricula, comprehensive formative and summative assessments, real time data, monitoring systems and instructional intervention.

SMART Goals: specific, measurable, attainable, time bound objectives used to recognize success and to identify necessary changes.

Theoretical Framework

This research study comes from two theoretical frameworks:

- 1) The first is based on an old African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” made popular by Hilary Clinton in 1996. It is synonymous to Richard Dufour’s concept of collective responsibility (Dufour, 2011). Collective responsibility means that the education of the student is contingent upon the adults in the student’s life playing an active role in enhancing and improving student learning. This concept is not clearly evident in schools where teachers continue to work in isolation. The Professional Learning Community Model has shown that a collection of dedicated teachers working in isolation cannot produce the same results as interdependent colleagues who share and develop professional practices together (Moirao, D, Morris, S., Klein, V., and Jackson, J., 2012). Teachers increase their efficiency once they move out of isolation (Williams & Williams, 2011) meet regularly and share their best practices positively affecting student achievement (McClure, 2008) and
- 2) The second theory is advocated by Stephen Covey in *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Covey, 2008) and by Marilyn Vojta and Pete Hall in *Characteristics of the Effective Leader* (Vojta & Hall, 2004) who state that the effectiveness of schools is based on the effectiveness of the school’s leader. Their research studies focus on the principal’s leadership skills especially those required for an effective Professional Learning Community Model.

The writings of Vojta and Hall (2004) support the idea that effective leaders have the ability to make changes happen by gaining the approval of everyone involved to make an

idea a reality. The principal and/or school leaders must act as the Chief Learning Officer(s) (CLOs) at the school. Student performance expectations rest squarely on the shoulders of the principal /school leaders and their ability to gain support for a vision that improves student achievement. Therefore principals/school leaders must create both a school culture and infrastructure that supports effective teaching and learning (Hall, Childs-Bowen, Cunningham-Morris, Pajardo & Simeral, 2016). Throughout this research study the term “administrative support” is mentioned. This term refers to the effectiveness of the principal and/or school leaders.

Limitations of the Study:

The limitations that the researcher encountered while conducting the study were the diverse composition of the two schools; Montrose High School is a large comprehensive high school with 2100 students who have been divided among four smaller schools and Sylvain Pilot High School is a small school of 350 students. Another limitation was the motive that each school used to implement the Professional Learning Community Model. The teachers at Montrose High School complained that both the division of their large comprehensive school into smaller learning communities and the adoption of the Professional Learning Community Model were imposed upon them by the state and teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School cheer that they chose to structure their school as a Professional Learning Community Model. The US Department of Education states the following:

The Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required all
Districts and schools receiving Title I funds to meet state
Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals for their total student

population and for specified demographic subgroups. The goal was that all students would reach the proficiency level on reading/language arts and mathematics tests by the 2013/14 school year. States defined the minimum levels of improvement as measured by standardized tests. AYP targets were set for overall achievement and for subgroups of students, including major ethnic/racial groups, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient (LEP) students, and students with disabilities. If the school receiving the Title I funding failed to meet its AYP target for two or more consecutive years, the school was designated as “in need of improvement” and faced specific consequences as outlined below (U. S. Department of Education, 2009).

Table 1

**The Consequences of Not Meeting Adequate Yearly Progress and
Academic Performance Index Targets**

Consequences of not meeting index targets	Years of not meeting index targets				
	1	2	3	4	5
Students can transfer to other schools	X	X	X	X	X
Supplemental services provided by district		X	X	X	X
School takes corrective action			X	X	X
Restructuring (planning At the school site)				X	X
Restructuring (implementation At the school site)					X

The divisions at Montrose High School into four smaller schools created a spirit of competition between the schools with one school attempting to out perform the other school and draw more students to their small school than in attendance at the other small schools. Montrose High School has two magnet schools and two smaller learning communities. The pride of the teachers at Montrose High School was their ability to share leadership through their school based management association. After four years of failing to meet adequate yearly progress the district decreased the authority of the school

based management association and restructured the internal organization of the school; first by dividing the large comprehensive school into four smaller schools and second by mandating the Professional Learning Community Model.

Sylvain Pilot High School was founded by four teachers who gained district approval to create a pilot school; a pilot school is like a charter school enjoying control over staff selection and budget control, autonomy from central office curriculum requirements, flexibility over teaching and assessment practices, professional development, governance, autonomy over the length of the school day and year for both students and faculty and the ability to evaluate the school's principal each year and transfer out at the end of the year if they so desire (UTLA, 2016). Therefore the teachers at Montrose High School complained that the professional learning community was imposed upon them and the teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School cheered that they chose to develop their school under the professional learning community.

Delimitations of the Study

Delimitations of this research study included the following facts:

- The researcher worked as a teacher, counselor and coordinator at the comprehensive school for over ten years and has personal knowledge of how the PLCs work at the comprehensive school and the researcher worked as a counselor at the pilot high school and collaborates weekly with the school-level administrative and instructional staff.
- The personal knowledge that the researcher had of each school provides support by understanding that the comprehensive high school is a public school where teachers work in isolation and the pilot high school is facing declining enrollment

with the exception of increasing enrollment among students with special needs who possess individual education plans (IEPs).

- The research did not include any student data. Using student data requires the consent of parents, students, the school district, and teachers. Therefore, time constraints to complete this research study influenced the researcher's decision to focus on teachers' perceptions and not on student data.

This research study presented recorded teacher perceptions and experiences through surveys, observations and interviews among the instructional staff that work within the Professional Learning Community Model.

Assumptions

An assumption is something that is taken for granted without proof. There are several assumptions that can either encourage or discourage the effective professional learning community. A few assumptions made by the researcher are listed below:

1. When teachers believe that there is strong support from the principal, then there is more support for PLCs.
2. When teachers are happy student achievement increases.
3. All students can graduate high school ready to enter four-year colleges and universities
4. Teachers won't attend district-mandated professional developments on Saturdays.
5. State tests adequately measure student learning.
6. Professional learning communities are just a "fad" and they will die out soon.
7. If teachers were paid higher wages student achievement would increase.

8. Teachers who make choices concerning the organization and management of the school are happy to work at the school.
9. It is easier to organize a small group of teachers into professional learning communities than it is to organize a large group of teachers into a professional learning community.
10. The core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that students learn.

Organization of the Study

This research study was presented in five chapters:

- Chapter One explained the problem along with the significance of the study, key terms, theoretical frameworks, research questions, delimitations, limitations and assumptions.
- Chapter Two is divided into the following themes: Introduction, evaluating the public school system and presenting the failure of public schools, school reforms after A Nation At Risk, school reforms after the No Child Left Behind legislation, the impact of Professional Learning Communities and a summary of all the information.
- Chapter Three presented the methodology used to conduct the study and how the data was collected, analyzed, validated and evaluated in the study. Chapter Three described how the participants and the instruments used in the study were selected.
- Chapter Four presented qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data collected in this study. The data collected report the frequency of the PLC essential criteria

suggested by Richard Dufour an expert on implementing effective professional learning communities.

- Chapter Five summarized the study and alludes to implications for practice, as well as recommendations for further research. This research study was organized in such a way that any educational practitioner can follow the layout of the study to conduct similar studies comparing new data with the data gathered and presented in this research study.

Summary

In this chapter the background of the study was established with a discussion of the problem and the purpose and goal for completing this study. The researcher was introduced and a description of the significance of this study was presented. Chapter Two presented the review of the relevant literature on Professional Learning Communities.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Four authors inspired this research study: Peter Senge, Michael Fullan, Richard Dufour, and Robert Marzano. Peter Senge discusses the type of systems change necessary to improve achievement for all students. These ideas are presented in his book *Schools That Learn* (2012). In *Schools That Learn* Dr. Senge stipulates that it is possible to create organizations (schools) that learn by changing the way people think and respond to their environment. Dr. Senge presents five disciplines necessary to produce successful system changes within the school culture that will lead to improved student achievement. Systems change is the fifth discipline of the disciplines discussed by Senge. All five disciplines presented by Senge are germane to this study including personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning and systems thinking.

Personal mastery is the practice of developing a coherent image of your personal vision; the results you most want to create in your life alongside a realistic assessment of your current reality. Shared vision establishes a focus on mutual purpose. Shared vision allows people with a common purpose to learn and nourish a sense of commitment in a group or organization by developing shared images of the future they seek to create and the strategies, principles and guiding practices by which they hope to get there. Mental Models are based on reflection and inquiry skills that focus around developing awareness of attitudes and perceptions of yourself and those around you. The principal's support is very important within each of these disciplines.

When teachers begin their journey of self-directed reflection and critical friends, the principal is shouldered with the responsibility of maintaining a safe environment where the capability to talk safely and productively about dangerous and discomfoting subjects is in place (Senge, 2012). Team learning involves a group of educators who participate in dialogue and skillful discussion. This group interaction can transform the collective thinking of participants who learn to mobilize their energies and actions to achieve common goals that draw forth an intelligence and ability greater than the sum of the individual member's talents (Senge, 2012). The fifth discipline- systems thinking may be the most important because it ushers in willingness. Willingness is required to change the system from its present isolated, competitive instructional staff to a team of collaborating instructors who work together to improve student achievement.

Michael Fullan has devoted his distinguished professional career to the exploration of how to best bring meaningful change in schools, districts, and the educational system (Dufour and Fullan, 2013). Fullan's message to educators is that Professional Learning Communities are not programs to be implemented; they are changes in the educational system and the school culture that will lead to continued student achievement. Unlike structural changes that can be mandated, cultural changes require altering long-held assumptions, beliefs, expectations and habits that represent the norm of people in the organization. Thornton, Peltier and Perreault mimic Fullan's belief by stating in order to bring long lasting change to educational organizations the beliefs, assumptions and norms held by the educators must be altered (Thornton, Peltier & Perreault, 2004). Fullan explains that a PLC is not a program it is a process, which

requires time for its successful implementation. Effective and successful Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) can be achieved with continued effort.

Richard Dufour could be titled the modern day Father of Professional Learning Communities although the term professional learning community first emerged among researchers as early as the 1960s when researchers offered the concept as an alternative to the isolation endemic to the teaching profession in the United States (Solution Tree Press, 2016). Research over the next three decades continued to show that schools where teachers engaged in collective efforts to achieve a clear, commonly shared purpose for student learning and created a collaborative culture to achieve that purpose taking collective responsibility for all student learning made the greatest improvement on both the instructional practices of teachers and student achievement (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995). Despite the consistent findings of the researchers regarding the benefits of the Professional Learning Community Model that improve schools, teachers, and students, the research was not greatly accepted by practitioners until the publication of *Professional Learning Communities at Work, Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* by Richard Dufour and Robert Eaker (Solution Tree Press, 1998). Richard Dufour and Robert Eaker along with Rebecca Dufour introduced three big ideas that guide the daily work of educators in professional learning communities:

- 1) Ensuring that students learn,
- 2) Developing a culture of collaboration and
- 3) Focusing on results.

Ensuring that students learn flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that

students learn (Dufour, 2004). Developing a culture of collaboration facilitates sharing of knowledge and experience between educators. Educators must come out of their isolation and work together for all students to learn. Focus on results means that student data must be used to guide instruction and intervention. Educators must stop reapplying the same strategies that don't work (Thornton, Peltier, & Perreault 2004). A strategy that works occurs when educators practice self-reflection, see their shortcomings and instead of hiding behind excuses, reach out to other teachers, and/or field experts to learn new instructional strategies that successfully demonstrate improvements in student achievement.

Robert Marzano stated that he believes deeply in the power of professional learning communities as a catalyst for ongoing change, improvement and innovation in education; as such, he also believes that it is incumbent on all people in the field of education to act professionally, to be active learners, and to work as members of communities or teams (Burgess, 2016). Most of Marzano's conversation regarding professional learning communities deal with team building and the necessity for strong school-level administrators to provide sufficient time (25 hours per school year) for school-level administrators and instructional staff to meet together during the school day, discuss student data, participate in self-directed reflection and share best practices (Marzano, 2009). But what Marzano and Dufour partnered to produce that provides a definitive definition of PLCs along with evidence that PLCs when implemented correctly work better than any of the other reforms discussed earlier to improve student achievement is found in the book they co-authored *Leaders of Learners* (2011).

In the book *Leaders of Learning* (2011) Dufour and Marzano define the professional learning community as a concept that represents “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve (Dufour, Eaker, & Manny 2010). *Leaders of Learning* focuses on the idea that no single person has all the knowledge, skills, and talent to lead a district, improve a school, or meet all the needs of every student. It takes a collaborative effort and widely dispersed leadership to meet the challenges confronting schools (Solution-tree Press, 2011).

Historical Educational Reforms

In April 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education formed by then-U.S. Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell released the report *A Nation at Risk*. The most famous line of the widely publicized report declared that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) the report led to comprehensive school reform efforts, and was the impetus for the academic-standards movement. Perhaps the most important legacies of *A Nation at Risk* have been the educational reforms in schools since its publication including Effective Schools, Accelerated Schools, Schools Within a School and the Educational Goals Movement (Bohrnstedt, 2013). Instituting Effective Schools, Accelerated Schools, Schools with a School and the Educational Goals Movement reforms produced limited changes improving student achievement in small percentages with the students directly involved in these reforms. However, the majority of students in public schools continue to underachieve as evidenced on state and national assessments. A description of each

type of reform paints a picture of the successes. The type of reform necessary to improve student achievement on a global level is a reform that changes the educational system from the isolated and limited miracles to a systems wide approach that is attainable within the professional learning community.

Reforms after A Nation At Risk Leading to the No Child Left Behind Act

Dr. Larry Lezotte described Effective Schools as having seven correlates.

1. They are safe and organized,
2. They expect students to achieve,
3. They have relatable leaders,
4. They have a clear mission.
5. They monitor student progress, and
6. They provide a framework for learning and
7. They build a partnership between home and school

According to Lezotte all students learn in Effective Schools because the schools crossover racial and socioeconomic barriers to support student achievement. In 1994 Accelerated Schools began with two teachers J. Williams and K. Sved who envisioned a school that combined community and parent participation in a charter school environment. Charter schools and Accelerated schools are not the same. A charter school receives public funding, but is not accountable to Federal and state mandates. Federal and state laws allow communities to create charter schools provided charter schools describe the specific accountability index used in their charter to evaluate student achievement. Charter schools are different from public schools. Accelerated schools are public schools but they have permission to make

decisions about who enters their school. Accelerated schools only admit high achievers who must maintain success in all their classes to continue attending the accelerated school. They receive public funding and must be approved by the state or local education agency. Accelerated schools are held accountable to a measurable assessment of student learning (Virginia Department of Education, 2013). A characteristic of Accelerated Schools is that every student is treated as gifted, with a high expectation towards success (Accelerated Schools, 2016).

A great deal of research suggests that smaller schools contribute to student achievement, and students sense a greater degree of satisfaction (Cotton, 1996, Fowler, 1995, Howley, 1994). California Partnership Academies exemplify the small school movement where teachers and students are grouped together from grades ten through twelve with the goal of preparing students for careers as well as for college admission. All students enrolled in California Partnership Academies are required to take at least one career technical course related to the academy's career theme technical courses include, but are not limited to business finance and management, catering and food management, and graphic arts. Several evaluations of career academies found positive effects on student performances during and after high school (Stern, Dayton & Raby, 2010). Many large schools divided into smaller schools/learning communities, academies and magnet schools to provide a sense of community and belonging for students. While the small school is a laudable idea it has not been fully embraced in all schools and must be autonomous from the large school system to best succeed. (Deweese, 2007). Research shows that each of these reforms: Effective Schools, Accelerated Schools, and Schools within a School made positive progress among small groups of students. The

Educational Goals Movement was created to improve student achievement for all students.

The publication of *A Nation at Risk*, and the Modern Education Standards Movement that still operates prompted the Secretary of Education, to compare the urgency of addressing and comparing the condition of grades K–12 to that of a virtual state of war:

Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, is lost and competitors throughout the world are overtaking technological innovation. While we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems, which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament. Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them. We must understand that these demands on our schools and colleges often exact an educational cost as well as a financial one (NCEE, 1983 p.3).

This disturbing comparison led to the national legislation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) introduced by President Bush on January 23, 2001, in

which national academic content and performance standards were created to hold public schools accountable for student learning. Setting standards accomplishes specific goals such as:

1. Provides a statement that all students are expected to excel academically.
2. Engages parents and community members in discussions about student learning.
3. Involves classroom teachers in the educational improvement process.

Members of the United States Department of Education set the standards that stipulate all students can and will learn (U.S. Department of Education, 1996). According to the U.S. Department of Education's, *Improving America's Schools*; a newsletter on issues in school reform, congress passed the *Goals 2000 Educate America Act* in the Spring 1996, providing funds to schools, communities and states to raise educational standards by:

1. Defining the "essential aspects of each subject.
2. Writing a rigorous core of priority standards that speak directly to the concerns of teachers and parents in coordination with broad based community groups.

Many educators believe that the No Child Left Behind Legislation conflicts with the United States Constitution, which places education under state authority (Janson, 2011). "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the states, are reserved to the states respectively, or to the people" (U. S. Constitution). Since the NCLB legislation ties federal money for funding to state education is compliance with federal mandates (tests) and national standards, states not complying with federal mandates cannot receive federal money. Many states in need of federal funding put academic standards in place in the core subjects of Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies, while developing their own formal and

informal assessments. In California one of the formal assessments was the California Standards Test (CST).

The state created standards were then submitted to the federal NCLB Governing Board for approval, and once they were approved, states received federal money to fund education. The State Board of Education set the statewide Annual Performance Index (API) target at 800 out of a possible 1,000. The Public Schools Accountability Act called for most schools to improve their performance each year by 5% of the difference between their API and the statewide target of 800, with a minimum target of five-point growth (Ed-Data, 2015). The Academic Performance Index (API) is a single number on a scale of 200 to 1,000 that indicates how well students in a school or district performed on the test given in the spring of the school year. An API is calculated for the whole school plus its numerically significant subgroups, including socioeconomically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient students, and students with disabilities (Ed-Data, 2015). These sub-group students were also expected to gain 100% proficiency over a span of eleven years (2003 – 2014). The Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) came from the No Child Left Behind Act. It measures how every public school district in the country performs on standardized tests, with the intent of making yearly progress every year until 100% of all students become proficient on their state's standardized tests by the 2013-2014 school year.

Each year between 2003 and 2014 national assessments measuring student achievement showed students not testing proficient. Students did not meet API (Annual Progress Indicator) and/or AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) standards, which caused schools to lose autonomy. When the schools lost autonomy, the teacher voice was

silenced. Instead of encouraging and rewarding teachers who worked together, the state hired “professionals to develop goals and the state imposed these new program goals onto teachers. State standards were expected to strengthen graduation requirements and curriculum content, increase instructional rigor and expectations, create a longer instructional day, improve teacher preparation and hold elected officials responsible for school leadership.

Reforms after the No Child Left Behind Act

The state has experimented with various approaches to interventions including:

- Accelerated learning options. Accelerated learning options involve the whole mind and body. Accelerated learning is seen as a creation instead of a consumption in which collaboration aids learning. Accelerated learning takes place on many levels simultaneously and is derived from doing the work itself with feedback. Accelerated learning generates positive emotions that greatly improve learning. Accelerated learning is learning that occurs naturally (Meier 1980).
- Extended learning time programs combine three components-academic enrichment, cultural activities, and recreational opportunities that guide learning and engage children and youth. High quality extended learning opportunities enrich learning opportunities for students by complementing rather than duplicating school learning, employ and adequately compensate qualified staff and management, and provide regular professional development and career advancement opportunities for staff and volunteers (NEA, 2008). Extended learning programs extend the instructional day, week or semester providing more

support for students to meet grade level standards. The focus is on ninth grade students. The goal is to prevent them from dropping out of high school.

- Personalized learning environments or personal learning environments (PLEs) focus on the individual. Personal learning environments are commonly created using specific technologies and tools such as online resource organizers. PLEs aim to visualize and organize the influx of information and resources that students are confronted with daily. A PLE is essentially an educational response to the overload of information in the digital age (Ash, 2013). Personalized learning environments engage, motivate and support students by redesigning high school. This personalized learning environment has been found to be particularly effective for at-risk students. It transforms the school culture into one that is student –centered (Chait, Muller, Goldware & Housman, 2007) incorporating literacy instruction into the curriculum (Chait, Muller, Goldware & Housman 2007).
- Credit Based Transition Programs provide college credit to high school students and lessen the time towards a college degree. The theory behind the Credit Based Transition Program is that providing at-risk students with more challenging course work and access to higher education is a more powerful motivator and more likely to achieve greater student achievement than remediation (Chait, Muller, Goldware and Housman 2007).
- Credit recovery programs help students make up classes they previously failed.
- Drop Out Prevention and Recovery Programs include the Connect Model, Project Grad USA, Talent Development High School and the Check and Connect Model

Drop Out Prevention Program that was developed at the University of Minnesota to increase student engagement in school. The Check and Connect Model Drop Out Prevention Program has shown evidence of effectiveness for students with emotional and behavior disabilities (Chait, Muller, Goldware & Housman, 2007).

- Project Grad USA partners with high schools and all of its feeder elementary and middle schools to improve instruction and student motivation.
- The Talent Development High School Model developed at the John Hopkins University's Center for Research on the Education of Students placed at-risk is a comprehensive reform model designed specifically for failing schools (NEA Today, 2013).

Several changes were made to increase student achievement, including the Congressional Legislative Act of the No Child Left Behind legislation, however only small increases in student achievement was noted. According to the Koret Task Force, a group organized by the Hoover Institution and Stanford University to study the status of education reform, there has been "uneven" implementation and only minor gains in academic achievement since *A Nation at Risk* was published. The Koret Task Force argues that *A Nation at Risk* did a good job of pointing out the problems in American schools, but was not able to identify the fundamental reasons for the problems or address the political influences in the public education system (Peterson, 2003).

A Nation at Risk found that an "incoherent, outdated patchwork quilt" of classroom learning led to an increasing number of students who were subjected to a cafeteria-style curriculum that diluted the course material and allowed students to advance through their schooling with minimal effort. In the 30 years since this scathing indictment, most

schools have taken drastic steps to meet the report's challenge to adopt more rigorous and measurable standards for learning. As a result all states have adopted academic standards, and forty-five states including the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Agency have embraced the Common Core State Standards to ensure that students have the necessary knowledge and skills for success in college and careers. Overall, however, despite the initial fervor around *A Nation at Risk*, the report didn't lead to many far-reaching changes. Many of the problems identified in 1983 remain unaddressed, and stagnant student achievement continues to challenge educators and administrators (NEA Today, 2013).

100% graduation rate has not been achieved. Thornton, Peltier, and Perrault discuss this phenomenon in the article *Systems Thinking; A Skill to Improve Student Achievement*. They present that the current system must be evaluated before it can be changed. Evaluating the current system helps identify allegories that impede progress.

One allegory presented in the article *Systems Thinking: A Skill to Improve Student Achievement* is "the harder you push, the harder the system pushes back. This allegory provides a reason explaining why the No Child Left Behind Act did not effectively improve student achievement. Thornton, Peltier and Perrault state that The No Child Left Behind Act was passed with the intent of improving student achievement – all students and schools will demonstrate proficiency on rigorous state test – but many educators did not believe that this one-size fits all approach was realistic. As a result, they pushed back. What's missing? Simple, teachers must work together to improve student achievement and this is accomplished when teachers believe the principal supports their

efforts (Hall, Childs-Bowen, Cunningham-Morris, Pajardo, & Simeral 2016). A Professional Learning Community Model facilitates the system change necessary to improve student achievement among all student groups. Although professional learning communities vary in form and context, they share some fundamental core beliefs and values such as:

- Maintaining an environment that fosters collaboration,
- Honest talk – is teacher-to-teacher communication that is ongoing and effectively working to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Honest talk involves formal self-directed reflection where teachers share in a group their strengths and challenges. Teachers talking together about student data used to measure student knowledge are paramount to improving student achievement. Sharing and adopting teacher created best practices can enhance the instructional strategies of all teachers. Implementing these practices can facilitate an increase in student achievement.
- Commitment to growth and development of individual members to the group as a whole.

The Professional Learning Community Model encourages and supports members who examine their practices, try out new ideas, and reflect together on what works and why it works. They provide opportunities for the collective construction and sharing of new knowledge as educators identify and solve problems and together build the capacity and collective will to move forward the equity agenda of their schools and districts and enhance the learning and achievement of all students (Lieberman & Miller, 2008).

Three questions were addressed in this research study:

1. How do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community?
2. How effective do the teachers perceive the Professional Learning Community when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are implemented?
3. Is there an increase in students passing their English-Language Arts and mathematics requirements? In graduating from high school ready for a career or college?

Currently a great deal of the public school instruction occurs where teachers and students work in isolation. It is text-focused and teacher-directed and students work on routine assignments; while educators grade on a curve and have little opportunity to engage in conversation with each other. Often in traditional communities where teachers and students are “tracked” in formal hierarchies according to their experience or ability, teaching takes the form of standards based instruction and emphasizes accountability that is measured by tests (Dufour, 2004).

By contrast, in professional learning communities teachers collaborate around teaching and learning and develop expertise through shared knowledge fueled by the belief that all students can learn. These collaborative communities are focused on active student engagement ultimately leading to enhanced student learning (McLaughlin and Talbert 2001, 2006).

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) identifies six characteristics of successful professional learning communities (Carroll, & Doerr, 2010):

When a school or district functions as a PLC, educators within the organization embrace high levels of learning from all students as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it. In order to achieve this purpose, the members of a PLC are guided by a clear and compelling vision of what the organization must become in order to help all students learn. They make collective commitments clarifying what each member will do to create such an organization, and they use results-oriented goals to mark their progress. Members work together to clarify exactly what each student must learn, monitor each student's learning on a timely basis, provide systematic interventions that ensure students receive additional time and support for learning when they struggle, and extend and enrich learning when students have already mastered the intended outcomes (Schmoker, 2006, pp. 135-154).

This research study evaluated and identified the relationship between the teacher's perception of administrative support and the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Community as it relates to increasing student achievement. An effective Professional Learning Community has the following essential criteria: Shared vision and goals, authentic assessment, self-directed reflection, collective responsibility, stable setting and strong school-level administrative support (Carroll & Doerr, 2010).

The Six Essential Criteria of Professional Learning Communities

1. Share vision and goals – challenges are clearly identified.
2. Collective Responsibility – each person holds himself responsible for each other's success.

3. Authentic Assessment – team members use assessments that give them real-time feedback on student learning and teaching effectiveness.
4. Self-Directed Reflection – reflective feedback loop of goal setting, planning, standards, and assessment driven by the learning needs of the students and corresponding professional development needs of the teachers.
5. Stable Setting – team members are given dedicated time, space, resources and leadership for their collaborative work.
6. Strong school-level administrative Support – leaders build a climate of openness and trust that empowers team members to make decisions on how to improve teaching effectiveness directly linked to student needs.

Shared vision and goals.

Kruse, Louis and Bryk (1994) discuss the six essential criteria required for building and maintaining an effective professional learning community in the Issue Restructuring Schools in an article titled Building Professional Community in Schools. They assert that researchers and reformers can't afford to overlook the impact of decisions and actions that teachers, working together in some type of sustained professional contact, take to improve student achievement (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994). When the school community shares the same vision and goals unity occurs leading to a united effort to improve student achievement. In schools where teachers share the same vision and goals, teachers work together more effectively and put more effort into creating and sustaining opportunities for student learning. Teachers are willing to share, observe, discuss each other's teaching methods and philosophies developing a shared understanding of students and producing materials and activities that improve instruction.

Teachers who share vision and goals support the collective focus on student learning. They believe that all students can learn and they prioritize their time and use of resources to facilitate student learning. Sharing the same vision and goals can be accomplished within the professional learning community when everyone assumes collective responsibility.

Collective responsibility.

Collective responsibility asks each person to hold him/herself responsible for each other's success. Establishing collective responsibility in a school culture requires organizing teachers into collaborative teams. A collaborative team in a PLC is a group of people working interdependently to achieve a common goal for which members are mutually accountable (Dufour and Marzano, 2011). Collective responsibility cannot be maintained without interdependence; therefore teachers must come out of isolation and work together to improve student achievement. They must share responsibility in addressing the fundamental questions that drive the work of a PLC (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010):

- What is it we want our students to know?
- How will we know if they are learning?
- How will we respond when individual students do not learn?
- How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient?

Teachers are more likely to improve their practice when they work within meaningful teams collaborating with their colleagues to focus on the curriculum, instruction and assessment linked to the subject (Little, 2006). This type of team must be supported within the school day, it cannot be a hit or miss endeavor. Time must be provided for

teachers to meet and work together in collaborative teams therefore a stable setting is required.

Authentic assessments.

Creating authentic assessments may look like this the team turns its attention to developing common formative assessments (authentic assessments) to monitor each student's mastery of the content standards. Team members discuss the most authentic and valid ways to assess student mastery. They set the standard for each skill or concept that each student must achieve to be deemed proficient. They agree on the criteria by which they will judge the quality of student work, and they practice applying those criteria until they can do so consistently. Finally they decide when they will administer the assessment (Dufour, 2004). Authentic assessments are used frequently to answer the questions:

1. Are students learning what they need to learn?
2. Who needs additional time and support to learn?

Teachers working together to create assessments to measure student learning can lead to improved student achievement.

Stable setting.

Stable settings dedicated to improving instruction and learning are required for teams to work together to improve student achievement. It is recommended that teams need at least three hours each month dedicated to instructional inquiry and improvement, while facilitators need about two hours each month to develop strategies and plan for the ongoing assistance and leadership of teacher teams (Gallimore and Ermeling, 2010). Establishing, publishing, and protecting a calendar for these meetings can achieve

establishing and maintaining a stable setting. Creating a stable setting will require educators to look at the data, what is currently being done and what are the results. Educators must ask themselves what can be done on a personal level to improve student achievement. This question is answered through self-directed reflection.

Self-directed reflection.

Self-directed reflection is the so-called red thread that connects beliefs to actions. Reflection is a way of taking stock. It leads to a pattern of thinking that leads to a more effective professional practice. Through reflection a person becomes aware, conscious, takes action and refines his/her behavior to meet the prevailing goal (Hall, Child-Bowen, Cunningham-Morris, Pajardo & Simeral, 2016). Each educator must identify his/her strengths and weaknesses (Senge, 2012) and answer the question: What skills, talents, etc. do I bring to the educational system that will help improve student achievement. This self-directed reflection reveals the truth to each individual. During the self-directed reflection the individual can answer the following questions: Why am I here? What is my purpose on this earth? Responding to these questions creates personal mastery (Senge, 2012) a discipline discussed in chapter one of this research study.

Strong school-level administrative support.

Marzano notes that leadership is the single most important aspect of effective school reform. Marzano states that a strong leader builds collective capacity through the cultivation of a Professional Learning Community, builds individual capacity through differentiated supervision, coaching, feedback and evaluation, ensures alignment of rigorous curricula research based best practices in instruction, and encourages comprehensive formative and summative assessments with real time data monitoring

systems and instructional intervention. In other words a strong leader possesses and exemplifies the essential criteria of an effective professional learning community and to the extent that teachers perceive strong school-level administrative support influences how teachers navigate through the professional learning community, which ultimately impacts increasing student achievement.

Principals are one of the most important players affecting the character and consequence of teachers' school-site professional learning community. Principals are culture-makers (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006). Research supports powerful school leadership on the part of the principal/school leaders as a positive impact on student achievement (Dufour and Marzano, 2011). However, it is rather the indirect actions not the direct actions of the principal that positively impact student achievement. The actions of teachers directly impact student achievement and the actions of principals directly impact the actions of teachers (Dufour and Marzano, 2011). Marzano, Water, and McNulty identified twenty-one different responsibilities of the principal that have a positive influence on what teachers do (Marzano, Water, & McNulty, 2005). This list of twenty-one multifaceted and disparate responsibilities underscores two of the fundamental historical constraints that well-intentioned principals have confronted in their efforts to be effective school leaders. First, there has been no vehicle that allows them to influence directly what isolated teachers do in the classroom. Second, no one person has the knowledge, skills, or energy to fulfill twenty-one responsibilities simultaneously (Dufour & Marzano, 2011).

Table 2

21 Responsibilities of the Principal/School Leaders

The 21 Responsibilities and Their Correlations (r) with Student Academic Achievement					
Responsibility	The Extent to Which the Principal...	Average <i>r</i>	95% CI	No. of Studies	No. of Schools
1. Affirmation	Recognizes and celebrates accomplishments and acknowledges failures	.19	.08 to .29	6	332
2. Change Agent	Is willing to challenge and actively challenges the status quo	.25	.16 to .34	6	466
3. Contingent Rewards	Recognizes and rewards individual accomplishments	.24	.15 to .32	9	465
4. Communication	Establishes strong lines of communication with and among teachers and students	.23	.12 to .33	11	299
5. Culture	Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation	.25	.18 to .31	15	819
6. Discipline	Protects teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their teaching time or focus	.27	.18 to .35	12	437
7. Flexibility	Adapts his or her leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation and is comfortable with dissent	.28	.16 to .39	6	277
8. Focus	Establishes clear goals and keeps those goals in the forefront of the school's attention	.24	.19 to .29	44	1,619
9. Ideals/Beliefs	Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling	.22	.14 to .30	7	513
10. Input	Involves teachers in the design and implementation of important decisions and policies	.25	.18 to .32	16	669
11. Intellectual Stimulation	Ensures faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices and makes the discussion of these a regular aspect of the school's culture	.24	.13 to .34	4	302
12. Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is directly involved in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.20	.14 to .27	23	826
13. Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Is knowledgeable about current curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices	.25	.15 to .34	10	368
14. Monitoring/Evaluating	Monitors the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on student learning	.27	.22 to .32	31	1,129
15. Optimizer	Inspires and leads new and challenging	.20	.13	17	724

	innovations		to .27		
16. Order	Establishes a set of standard operating procedures and routines	.25	.16 to .33	17	456
17. Outreach	Is an advocate and spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders	.27	.18 to .35	14	478
18. Relationships	Demonstrates an awareness of the personal aspects of teachers and staff	.18	.09 to .26	11	505
19. Resources	Provides teachers with materials and professional development necessary for the successful execution of their jobs	.25	.17 to .32	17	571
20. Situational Awareness	Is aware of the details and undercurrents in the running of the school and uses this information to address current and potential problems	.33	.11 to .51	5	91
21. Visibility	Has quality contact and interactions with teachers and students	.20	.11 to .28	13	477

Teachers work in isolation. Working in isolation does not lend to teacher growth and school improvement. The design of work in schools is fundamentally incompatible with the practice of improvement. Teachers spend most of their time working in isolation from each other in self-contained classrooms. This design does not provide an opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice (Elmore, 2003). This traditional structure and culture have made it difficult for principals to have an impact on the professional practice of teachers (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Working in isolation is an established norm that is challenged by the professional learning community. The PLC process and the collaborative team structure in particular, are specifically designed to alter this dynamic by changing the traditional practices of schooling. The PLC process provides a vehicle for focused interactions between principals and teachers (Dufour & Marzano, 2011). Principals meet with team leaders (Department Chairpersons, Magnet school Coordinators, EL Coordinators, SLC lead teachers, Instructional Leadership Team) who meet with teachers providing an

opportunity for principals to have more directed influence over teacher instruction and practice. According to Marzano (2011) the PLC process provides a focused venue in which to address nineteen of the original twenty-one responsibilities:

1. Providing affirmation and celebration of staff effort and achievement – in a PLC the principal identifies the goals of each collaborative team, recognizes and celebrates progress toward those goals and helps the team to identify and overcome the obstacles that prevent the attainment of those goals.
2. Challenging the status quo as a change agent – within the PLC the principal assists each team implement a continuous improvement process.
3. Establishing processes to ensure effective communication throughout the school – within the PLC process the principal ensures that each collaborative team has a clear understanding of priorities and has access to the principal during PLC meetings.
4. Shaping the assumptions, beliefs, expectations, and habits that constitute the school's culture – in a PLC the principal creates the conditions that promote collaboration and collective efforts based on shared vision and commitments.
5. Demonstrating flexibility in meeting the different needs of teams and being willing to make modifications to school procedures – within a PLC the principal works with the collaborative team to identify the most appropriate and effective type of guidance and support required for individual teams and the necessary behavior is to be executed.
6. Focusing on clear goals and relentlessly pursuing the school's purpose and priorities – within the PLC the principal ensures that each collaborative team has

identified and is working toward clear SMART (Specific measurable, attainable, relevant, time bound) goals that can only be achieved if members work interdependently to achieve them.

7. Articulating the ideals and beliefs that drive the day-to-day work of the school – a PLC provides an opportunity for the principal to infuse the big three ideas advocated by Robert and Rebecca Dufour: Focus on learning, collaborative culture that assumes collective responsibility and data driven success. Improving student achievement becomes the measure of a successful school.
8. Soliciting input from staff in the design and implementation of procedures and policies – within the PLCs the principal empowers teams to make important decisions that directly impact the quality of student learning and the principal regularly seeks input from team members regarding school-wide decisions.
9. Engaging staff in the ongoing review and discussion of the most promising practices for improving student learning – the principal is able to use the PLC as a forum to share relevant research with teams and engage team members in collective inquiry regarding the instructional strategies that directly impact student learning through action research.
10. Participating in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment – PLCs provide an opportunity for the principal to clarify, monitor and engage in dialogue with teams answering the four critical questions of learning: a) Are we clear about what we want students to know and be able to do, b) How will we monitor to know that students know and are able to achieve the

objectives, c) How will we help students who are not learning and d) How will we enhance the knowledge base of students who have learned?

11. Demonstrating interest in the knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment – within the PLC the principal provides teams with ready access to information on promising practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and learns with team members as they apply that knowledge.
12. Creating processes to provide ongoing monitoring of the school's practices and their effect on student learning – within the PLC the principal monitors the individual and the aggregate impact of the efforts of collaborative teams on student achievement, engagement, and perceptions, and provides teams with the tools to monitor their own progress.
13. Creating the conditions that optimize school improvement efforts – the principal uses evidence of student learning and positive peer pressure to inspire teachers to explore new practices.
14. Establishing clear procedures and orderly routines – within the PLC the principal establishes clear expectations and protocols for the work of collaborative teams.
15. Serving as a spokesperson and advocate for the school and staff – within the PLC the principal connects teams to resources, ideas, and supports outside of the school.
16. Establishing a positive working relationship with each member of the staff – the principal uses the collaborative team process to increase accessibility to teachers and to become more familiar with individual teachers and their concerns.

17. Providing teachers with resources, materials and support to help them succeed at what they are being asked to do – within the PLC the principal ensures that each collaborative team has the necessary time, materials, information, and support to work effectively execute their work.
18. Recognizing the undercurrents of the informal organization of the school and using that information to be proactive in addressing problems and concerns – within the PLC the principal is able to use the ongoing discussions with team leaders to discern current or future issues that might affect the functioning of the school.
19. Being visible throughout the school and having positive interactions with staff and students – the structure of the PLC provides an opportunity for the principal to meet with the teams on at least a monthly basis and be actively involved in their concerns.

Only two of the twenty-one responsibilities offered by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2011) do not naturally have a home in collaborative teams: Contingent rewards and discipline which focus on the principal's interaction with specific individuals. Principals can build capacity by devoting their time to working with team leaders and collaborative teams rather than classroom walkthroughs, pre-observation conferences, formal observations, post-observation conferences and write ups. Interaction between teachers regarding student achievement and the identification of student needs is relative to specific academic goals. When the specific needs of the students are identified teams can work together to address those needs. The transformation from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration will not occur in a

school, without the effective leadership of the principal. According to Dufour and Marzano (2011), who reviewed McLaughlin and Talbert, they conclude that principals are in a key strategic position to promote or inhibit the development of a professional learning community. Principals make a difference in student learning and the most powerful strategy for having a positive impact on that learning is to facilitate the learning of the educators who serve those student through the PLC process (Dufour and Marzano, 2011).

Summary

Chapter Two discussed the history of educational reforms leading to professional learning communities. Chapter two focused on the failure attributed to public schools that do not adequately prepare students graduating from high school to successfully achieve at four-year colleges and/or achieve in various entry level careers. In chapter two several educational reforms were evaluated and the progress made by each reform was noted. The progress made was not significant or sufficient to prepare all high school graduates for success in four-year college and/or within various entry-level careers. A report published by the Educational Testing Service in 2013 shows that 75% of high school graduates in the United States are not proficient in English language arts, reading, science or mathematics. Proficiency in these subjects is required for success in four-year colleges and in various entry-level careers. The Professional Learning Community defined by educational leaders Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano can produce improved achievement for all students; producing high school graduates college and career ready.

The researcher presented Dufour's six essential criteria necessary for the effective PLC Model that this research study is based on:

- 1) Shared vision and goals,
- 2) Collective responsibility,
- 3) Authentic assessment,
- 4) Self-directed reflection,
- 5) Stable setting, and
- 6) Strong school-level administrative support.

In the next section a lengthy discussion of the methodology used in this research study was presented.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to examine teacher perceptions of the six essential PLC criteria required for an effective Professional Learning Community Model at their school. Specifically this research answers three questions:

1. How do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community?
2. How effective do the teachers perceive the Professional Learning Community when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are implemented?
3. Is there an increase in students passing their English-Language Arts and mathematics requirements? In graduating from high school ready for a career or college?

This study took place at two urban high schools. The study was intended to impact the awareness of educators and, ultimately, enhance the effectiveness of educators/professionals in such a way that students ultimately benefit. This research study provided compelling evidence in the form of teacher surveys, observations and testimonials as well as data from school reports to indicate the percentage of freshmen matriculating through high school and graduating within a four-year period of time with documented passing rates in the English Language Arts and mathematics requirements from schools where the Professional Learning Community Model has improved student achievement.

This study used in a mixed-methods phenomenological design. It explores how different people experience the same phenomena: the Professional Learning Community Model (Creswell, 2015). The quantitative data was shown in teacher surveys on the essential PLC criteria chart and data gathered from federal, state and local education agency reports. The qualitative data was gathered from the teacher interview responses. The reader will review how people's perceptions differ based on how information is experienced by them (Cherry, 2014). Why use a mixed methods phenomenological research design? Quantitative and qualitative research designs include phenomenological studies, case studies, ethnographic designs, grounded theory designs, and mixed methods research designs. Reporting qualitative and quantitative information provides a numerical as well as a narrative summary of information gathered and enhances the validity of the findings. Evaluating the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Community Model among teachers at a public comprehensive high school and a pilot high school affords the researcher and the reader a correlative mental exercise comparing the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Community Model when some, but not all of the six essential criteria required for a an effective PLC are put into place by educational leaders.

Mixed methods phenomenological research is a basic form of research. The data described is basic information, actions, behaviors and changes of teachers' perceptions of the phenomena. Always the description is about what the phenomena "looks like" from the perspective of the researchers and the participants in the research (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). PLC models in schools have varying degrees of success based on the direction of resources committed

by the principal/school leaders. Strong school-level administrative support in the form of committed time and monetary resources facilitates creating a climate of shared vision and goals, encouraging collective responsibility and authentic assessment, negotiating self-directed reflection, providing a stable setting and building a climate of openness and trust that empowers team members to make decisions on how to improve teaching effectiveness.

Commitment of time and money is vital and directly relative to the amount of student achievement and improvement realized as a result of implementing the Professional Learning Community Model. This study focused on whether or not teachers working within a PLC model perceived support for the implementation of all six essential PLC criteria.

This study examined each criterion as expressed by the teacher and the specific way in which the criterion was manifested within the learning environment. Permission was granted to conduct this research study at the two schools by the school level administrators (Appendix A) and (Appendix B), the University Internal Research Board (Appendix C) and the District External Research Review Board (Appendix D). After recruiting teacher volunteers (Appendix E), the manifestation of each criterion was evaluated using the following three tools: Teacher Survey (Appendix J), the Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart (Appendix K, L) and the Interview Questions (Appendix M). This research study gathered information from teachers working within professional learning communities at two public high schools. Each school adopted and implemented the Professional Learning Community Model to help improve student achievement. The Professional Learning Community Model was adopted and implemented as a result of a

national study that presented evidence that this nation's public high schools were failing to successfully meet the needs of students who graduated high school and were not prepared to succeed in four-year colleges and entry-level careers.

Data Collection

Data was collected based on three research questions:

Research question one: Teachers perceptions.

The first question in this research study was: How do teachers within the Professional learning community perceive their community? A survey was developed to gather data and piloted with two groups of educators (See Appendices F-I). The first pilot was done with a group of nine doctoral candidates, themselves educators, who worked within a professional learning community or who were interested in establishing a professional learning community in the schools where they taught. Based on the responses gathered from the first pilot the survey was refined. Six educators participated in the second pilot. A total of 15 educators participated in the pilot groups. The pilot groups included public and private school teachers working with students in grades K–12. The participants in the pilot groups taught within different school districts in the same state in which the research study was conducted. Teachers in the pilot groups were asked to respond to the survey questions and to share suggestions to improve reliability and validity. Their responses and suggestions were incorporated into the final survey and the interview questions given to the research participants. (See Appendices L-O)

Research question two: six essential PLC criteria.

The second research question of this study was: How effective do the teachers perceive the Professional Learning Community when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are implemented? Both the survey and the interview questions were developed from the six essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community. A successful professional learning community increases student achievement. The researcher predicted that there would be a significant difference in the way that the ten teachers (five from each of the two high schools) participating in this study responded to the survey. There would also be a difference in the way the six respondents answered the interview questions based on their perception of the six essential criteria.

The researcher believed that the school-level administrator's ability to embody the six essential criteria could gain the trust and support of the school's staff, facilitating the implementation of all six PLC essential criteria and producing higher levels of student achievement. Teachers from Sylvain Pilot High School chose to adopt Professional Learning Communities as part of their approach to improving the academic success of students. It was assumed that teachers who choose to implement professional learning communities implemented the more of the six PLC essential criteria than teachers following a mandate. At Montrose High School, implementing the Professional Learning Community Model was state mandated because Montrose high school had failed to meet the Annual Yearly Progress targets required by the No Child Left Behind legislation.

Research question three: academic achievement.

The third research question was: Is there an increase in students passing their English-Language Arts and mathematics requirements? In graduating from high school ready for a career or college? Information from public records gathered and compiled by the allthingsplc website, the California State Department of Education and the local education agency reports was used to note increases in state norm referenced testing, specifically the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) in English Language Arts and mathematics. The CAASPP is a new academic achievement assessment adopted by California in 2014. It was piloted at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School in 2015. No scores were reported in 2015. The specific CAASPP test given is named the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC). The SBAC scores in English Language Arts and mathematics were reported during the 2016 school year. The SBAC was adopted by over 17 states in the United States attempting to nationalize standards (common core standards) by offering one assessment created by educators from fifteen different states. Also Information from public records gathered and compiled by the allthingsplc website, the California State Department of Education and the local education agency reports were used to note increases in the number of students graduating from high school after a four-year period of time college and career ready.

Educational Settings

School One.

Montrose High School first opened in 1911. Montrose High School was a public comprehensive high school of 2100 students divided into two magnet schools: The Foreign Language Magnet opened in 1988, the Science Technology Engineering Medical Mathematics Magnet (STEMM) opened in 2013 and two small learning communities (SLCs): The Media Entertainment Drama Industry and Art SLC opened in 2010 and the Earth Justice SLC opened in 2010. Montrose High School was an old school with a rich history and an active alumnus. Most of the teachers and staff at Montrose High School grew up in the surrounding community and either attended the high school or have parents and/or children who attended the high school. Community residents frequent the school often and Montrose high school has strong alumni support.

In 1970, a Superior Court Judge ruled that District XYZ operated segregated schools and rendered the initial order to integrate District schools. Later a State Supreme Court Judge identified five harms of racial isolation (LAUSD, 2016).

- 1) Low academic achievement,
- 2) Low self-esteem,
- 3) Lack of access to post-secondary opportunities,
- 4) Inter-racial hostility and intolerance, and
- 5) Over-crowded conditions in the schools

The Foreign Language Magnet at Montrose High School was established to address the issue of integration responding to the findings and mandates of the court to

help ameliorate the identified harms of racial isolation. The STEMM magnet at Montrose High School was established to attract students living both within and outside of the school community who had opted to attend charter schools and pilot schools that were represented in a more positive light than the two small learning communities at Montrose High School. The STEMM magnet evolved from the Business Engineering Science and Technology SLC to the STEMM magnet. A magnet school draws more positive attention than a small learning community (SLC) especially a STEMM magnet. STEMM is the new trend in secondary education being promoted by state and national government.

Approximately 68% of the student body at Montrose High School was Latino, 10% are African American, 17% were white and five percent were of Asian or Native American heritage. Class sizes were generally around 40 students to one teacher and there is an equal proportion of male students to female students in fact the male population was higher than the female population (51% male students and 49% female students). Among the certificated staff 85% were white, five percent are Hispanic, five percent are African American and five percent are Asian American. There were approximately 100 teachers at Montrose high school and more than twenty percent of the teaching staff at Montrose High School was National Board Certified (NBCT). Teachers for teachers created the National Board of Certified Teachers; completing the National Board Certified Teacher curriculum places the mark of excellence on the teacher.

Among the freshman and sophomore class approximately 50 percent of the students failed their English Language Arts class and mathematics class. 95% of the freshmen and sophomore who failed are either African American or Hispanic. Over 90%

of the white and the Asian students successfully matriculated from the ninth to the twelfth grade. Teachers at Montrose High School did not choose to divide into smaller learning communities and the teachers did not choose to implement Professional Learning Communities. Montrose High School was forced to divide into smaller learning communities and to adopt the Professional Learning Community Model because English Learners, students with disabilities and an disproportionate number of Latino and African American students failed to meet the AYP and API goals over a period of five-years. Between 2005 and 2012 the divided Montrose High School did more blaming and competing than networking and achieving. The Professional Learning Community can bring more cohesion to the divided schools. Teachers met as PLCs within their small school and also within their content specific groups. Teachers representing all four divisions met together in content specific groups.

Montrose High School had a large number of students with Individualized Educational Plans approximately twenty percent of the students were special needs students and a large percentage of Long Term English Learners, most of which were born in this country. In some cases the English Learner (EL) student was also identified as a special education student.

School Two.

Sylvain Pilot High School opened in 2011 on a newly built District XYZ campus. Sylvain Pilot High School shared the campus with five other schools, two non-public charter schools, one public high school, one middle school and one continuation school. Students from all four high schools were grouped together in extra curricular activities including Associated Student Body (ASB) leadership, band and competitive athletics

(football, soccer, basketball, baseball, softball and cheer). There were also two times a year that the teachers of the different schools were called together. Teachers from each of the six schools were invited to network at the Winter Social and the spring social. 95% of the 350-student population at Sylvain Pilot High School is Hispanic, three percent is white, one percent is Asian and less than one percent is African American. There were approximately 350 students attending Sylvain Pilot High School. Sylvain Pilot High School was a linked learning educational institution.

The credentialed staff at Sylvain was approximately 50% white, 30% Hispanic, 15% African American, and five percent Asian. Unlike Montrose High School, the teachers at Sylvain School chose to separate from a larger comprehensive school creating a small pilot school and implementing the Professional Learning Community Model. Four teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School wrote the proposal that was approved and recommended for funding by District XYZ. However, Sylvain lacked stability. Each year 50% of the instructional, as well as the administrative and support staff changed.

The percentage of special needs students was growing at Sylvain Pilot High School and more than 10% of the student body had an IEP. Sylvain Pilot High School implemented Career Pathways within its instructional plan. Not all six of the essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community was implemented at Montrose High School or Sylvain Pilot High School. The researcher predicted that the implementation of some of the six essential criteria for an effective PLC would increase student achievement in English Language Arts, mathematics, and a higher high school graduation rate.

In addition to English Language Arts and mathematics requirements all high school graduates must complete A– G requirements, which include:

- A) Three years of Social Science,
- B) Four years of English,
- C) Three years of mathematics,
- D) Two years of Science,
- E) Two years of a Language other than English,
- F) One year of a fine art and
- G) One year of an advanced college preparatory core elective.

Completing the A-G requirements and earning a grade of C or better represents the minimum requirements for the state's four-year colleges.

The completion of this study was done in stages. The first stage was to meet with the school principals, present a proposal explaining the goal and purpose of this research study along with the need for teachers to participate in this study. The second stage was to present the preliminary proposal to the University IRB and the District External Research Review Board for approval. After receiving the principal's approval, the university's approval and the district's approval the staff recruitment began. The researcher's obvious passion regarding this study served as a motivating force and several teachers agreed to participate in the study. Teacher participation was voluntary. Teachers agreed to participate because they saw a benefit to networking with other teachers and sharing instructional strategies that improve student achievement.

Selection of Participants

The researcher wanted a purposeful sampling of the teachers from the two school sites where the study was being conducted. Purposeful sampling or purposive sampling focuses on a particular characteristic of a population that is of interest, which best enables, the researcher to answer the research question. The sample being studied was not representative of the population for a mixed methods research design. The specific purposive sampling in this study was homogenous (Lund Research Ltd, 2012). The sample in this research study shared the same or very similar characteristics or traits; they were all public high school teachers and they worked in Professional Learning Communities. There were ten teachers selected from the volunteers. Five teachers from Montrose High School and five teachers from Sylvain Pilot High School were selected to participate in the study.

Table 3**The Participants in the Study**

Teacher	School	# Of years teaching	# Of years teaching at the school	Subject
1	Montrose	30	20	English (Ms. Black)
2	Montrose	15	8	History (Mr. Greene)
3	Montrose	10	8	Mathematics (Mr. Lee)
4	Montrose	25	3	Spanish (Ms. Rice)
5	Montrose	7	1	Science (Mr. Sams)
6	Sylvain	16	5	Theater (Mr. Johns)
7	Sylvain	26	2	Spanish (Mr. Kropps)
8	Sylvain	16	5	Physical Education (Mr. Aimes)
9	Sylvain	11	1	Mathematics (Ms. Kant)
10	Sylvain	5	2	Special Education (Mr. Reed)

All volunteering teachers taught in the public high school setting either in a general comprehensive educational institution or a pilot school. The anonymity of teachers participating in this study were protected by referring to them using an alias for each teacher Ms. Black, Mr. Greene, Mr. Lee, Ms. Rice, Mr. Sams, Mr. Johns, Mr. Kropps, Mr. Aimes, Ms. Kant and Mr. Reed. Not using the legal names of the schools and district in which the schools were located also protected the anonymity of the participants.

- 1) Mrs. Black was a 30-year veteran English and Drama instructor at Montrose High School. She was an African American woman, married and the mother

of two daughters. Both daughters currently attend four-year universities. One daughter attended and graduated from Montrose High School. This daughter currently attends the University of California, Los Angeles on a full scholarship. Ms. Black lived a dual life as both an actress/play writer and a teacher of English, Drama and English Language Development for English learners. Ms. Black sponsored the Black Student Union at Montrose High School and was a member of the MEDIA (Music, Entertainment, Drama, Industry and Art) small learning community. Ms. Black's other daughter refused to attend Montrose High School preferring to complete her high school education at a comprehensive high school with a more diverse faculty. Ms. Black was one of two African American instructors in the school of 100 instructors at Montrose High School for over 20 years.

- 2) Mr. Green was a 15-year veteran Social Studies teacher who was also the co-chairperson of the collective bargaining unit at the Montrose High School. The researcher once jested to Mr. Green that his middle-eastern appearance was what secured his job offer at Montrose High School, which was known throughout District XYZ for not hiring African American teachers especially in the Social Studies Department. Mr. Green was the second African American social studies teacher hired at Montrose High School. The other African American social studies teacher was the researcher who was placed at Montrose High School when Montrose was designated as a capped receiver school for another District XYZ school. Mr. Green co-sponsored the Black Student Union on campus with Ms. Black. Mr. Green was a member of the

Foreign Language Magnet School at Montrose High School. He taught AP US History, AP Government and Sheltered US History for students with limited English proficiency. Mr. Green also coached the Track team at Montrose High School and recently completed and was listed as a National Board Certified Teacher. More than 20% of the teachers at Montrose High School are listed as National Board Certified Teachers. National Board Certification was created by teachers, for teachers and is the profession's mark of accomplished excellence in teaching (National Board, 2014).

- 3) Mr. Lee was a ten-year mathematics instructor who taught both in the comprehensive high school and at the local community college. Mr. Lee was African American, married and the father of three young children one son and two daughters. Mr. Lee was a techie who motivated, challenged and taught geometry and Algebra II through computer manipulations. Mr. Lee worked with Mr. Green and Ms. Black as co-sponsor for the Black Student Union. Mr. Lee's hobby was basketball. He regularly played basketball with other staff at Montrose High School after school. Mr. Lee was a member of the Media Entertainment Drama Industry and Art SLC. Mr. Lee was very active in his son's elementary school. He frequently went on field trips sponsored by his son's elementary school as the Parent Volunteer.
- 4) Ms. Rice was a 25-year veteran foreign language instructor. Ms. Rice was a Caucasian American who taught within the STEMM magnet at Montrose High School. Ms. Rice was the senior class sponsor. She taught AP Spanish language in a pass-ported class to both STEMM magnet students and students

in the comprehensive SLCs. Ms. Rice was added to the staff of Montrose High School in 2013. Ms. Rice was a writer and a musician she enjoyed writing poetry and playing the guitar and banjo. She used both creative writing and musical instruments to enhance student learning in her Spanish classes. Ms. Rice was the proud daughter of a librarian. She loved to travel both domestically and internationally. Ms. Rice favored excursions to the European continent and was planning on sponsoring student field trips abroad. Ms. Rice had one child who was intellectually and physically challenged. Ms. Rice's son attended Montrose High School. Montrose High School was refurbished to accommodate students with physical handicaps.

- 5) Mr. Kropps was a 26-year veteran foreign language instructor. Mr. Kropps came from a mixed ethnic heritage including Haitian and African American. He was fluent in six languages or as he would say he "held academic mastery in six languages". Mr. Kropps loved to travel. He was one of three children. Mr. Kropps taught Spanish for Native Speakers, Spanish 1A/B, Spanish 2A/B and AP Spanish Language. Mr. Kropps joined the staff at Sylvain in 2014. He was recruited by the previous school year principal for his unique way of providing instruction via technology in which he taped and played instructional videos from Spanish speaking countries with announcers who spoke in their native Spanish language. From the time you walked into Mr. Kropps classroom until the time you walk out of Mr. Kropps class room you were inundated with Spanish. Mr. Kropps taught over 100 students each day and 95% of the students successfully pass his class. He was looking forward

to them earning at least a 3 on the upcoming AP exams. Mr. Kropps was not married and did not have any children.

- 6) Mr. Sams was a seven-year (long-term) substitute science teacher who completed medical school but decided to teach at a public comprehensive high school instead of practicing medicine. Mr. Sams was African American. He was not married and he did not have any children. But he did love his dogs. Mr. Sams lived in the immediate community surrounding Montrose High School so he was able to go home during his lunch to feed his dogs and let them out of the house for a bathroom break. Mr. Sams loved to play basketball and played at least three days a week after school with other staff at Montrose High School. Mr. Sams worked with Ms. Black, Mr. Green and Mr. Lee to co sponsored the Black Student Union. Mr. Sams was a member of the STEMM magnet at Montrose High School joining the faculty in September 2015.
- 7) Mr. Johns was a 16-year veteran theater arts instructor. Mr. Johns was one of the original founders of Sylvain Pilot High School. Mr. Johns, a Caucasian American, was married and had one daughter. Mr. Johns was an actor, musician and teacher. He was passionate about performance and hosted at least two productions each semester. Mr. Johns brought media attention to Sylvain Pilot High School being interviewed by NPR and having a school production filmed by KTTV. Mr. Johns was a part of the Instructional Leadership Team at Sylvain Pilot High School and was an avid recruiter of

new students and teaching faculty for Sylvain Pilot High School. Mr. Johns' hobby was hiking.

- 8) Mr. Aimes was a 20-year veteran physical education instructor. Mr. Aimes had been in education for twenty years and teaching for fifteen years. He chose the teaching profession because he believed it to be his responsibility to give back to the community the same way others gave back to him when he was an adolescent. Mr. Aimes declared that teachers had a profound impact on his life. Mr. Aimes shared with the researcher that the purpose of education is to help students learn how to think critically and inspire students to discover their true passion and interest. He said that, "teachers help cultivate student abilities and produce masters". Mr. Aimes loved going to dances, plays, concerts and professional sporting events. He enjoyed exercising, spending quality time with his friends and family and attending lectures to learn from some of the brightest minds in this world. Mr. Aimes volunteered to participate in this study because he believed it was important to be supportive of his colleagues. Mr. Aimes taught at Sylvain five years being among the first group of teachers to join the staff when Sylvain Pilot High School opened.
- 9) Ms. Kant was an 11-year mathematics instructor who also taught at a nearby community college. Ms. Kant was a Caucasian American. Ms. Kant was a new teacher at Sylvain, but she was not new to the field of secondary education. Ms. Kant enjoys working with students. This was the first time that Ms. Kant worked in a pilot school and she stated that giving the

Instructional Leadership Team the power to remove teachers without mentoring them isn't fair. Ms. Kant's classroom was always lively, she engages students in peer review to facilitate their learning. Ms. Kant believes that students should be well-rounded individuals and she finds ways to teach mathematics across the curriculum. Ms. Kant sat on the mathematics bridge committee, a program at the local community college. Ms. Kant worked tirelessly to prepare high school students for the freshmen level college mathematics courses.

10) Mr. Reed had been teaching five years he was relatively new to the teaching profession leaving a successful career in business to follow his heart and be of service to today's youth. This was Mr. Reed's second year at Sylvain Pilot High School where he served as an RSP and SDP instructor. Mr. Reed's educational philosophy evolved over time but it is centered around three pillars which include: providing students with an equitable education, creating a classroom experience that is student-centered and incorporating writing into the curriculum. Mr. Reed volunteered to be a part of this research study because he plans to pursue a doctoral degree in the future and felt that it was his duty to help a fellow educator and colleague. Mr. Reed received an undergraduate degree in mathematics and is currently completing a graduate degree at a public university to earn an administrative credential. Mr. Reed was married with no children.

These ten teachers were selected from a pool of fourteen teachers to form a purposeful sampling group. The passion to teach and learn is one thing that all of these

teachers have in common. They are willing to apply new knowledge to enhance and increase student achievement. Each participant is an active member of the educational community at their respective schools, sponsor student clubs, attend professional workshops and work one to one with students. Each teacher shared with the researcher that students can learn in a supportive community.

Confidentiality of Participants and Schools

No identifiable information was used referencing the state, district, school or teachers participating in the study. K-12 instructors who taught mathematics, science, English, social studies, physical education, special education and foreign language in either the pilot or the public comprehensive high schools (Appendix A and B). These teachers were assigned alias names. The school and the district were given pseudonyms.

Instrumentation

Reliability is the degree to which an instrument consistently measures whatever it is measuring (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). The researcher-designed instruments including the Professional Learning Community Survey, the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart and the interview questions were based on the six essential criteria of effective PLCs. The instruments measure teachers' perceptions of strong school-level administrative support and the degree to which the essential criteria of a professional learning community were in place within the professional learning community at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School. The researcher-designed instruments were validated by two pilot groups of educators (Appendix F, G, H, I). Validity is

the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008). The teacher survey, Essential Criteria Check Off Chart and teacher interview questions measure teacher perceptions and the degree to which the essential criteria required for a successful professional learning community are in place at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School.

Teacher Survey Reliability

Internal Consistency Reliability was determined by the split-half reliability procedure. The survey was administered to the ten teachers who volunteered to participate in this research study. In split half reliability items that purport to measure the same construct are divided into two sets (Trochim, 2006). The survey measured the extent to which teachers perceive the six essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community. There are four questions for each of the six essential criteria on the survey (choices 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). For example criterion one asks teachers to reflect on shared vision and goals and then presents four statements (choices 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), that teachers evaluate circling one if the criterion is not implemented at all, two if the criterion is rarely implemented, three if the criterion is implemented sometimes, four if the criterion is implemented often and five if the criterion is always implemented. There were five teachers from each school. Teacher responses were coded. The coding for teachers at Montrose High School was I/6, I/7, I/8, I/9 and I/10. The coding for teachers from Sylvain Pilot High School was II/1, II/2, II/3, II/4, and II/5. Responses to choices a,

and c were divided from choices b and d for each of the four statements pertaining to each of the six criteria. Each criterion on the two halves had a score and the two sets of scores were correlated using the Spearman-Brown Correction Formula. Evaluating the results determined that the coefficient was (equal length .871). The high coefficient told the researcher that the instrument had a good split-half reliability.

The researcher-designed teacher survey was based on the six criteria required for a successful PLC. A successful PLC improves teaching and student achievement. The criteria necessary for a successful PLC included shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, authentic assessment, self-directed reflection, stable setting and strong school-level administrative support. The researcher-designed survey was created in Google forms, and piloted with a group of doctoral students in August 2015 (Appendix F). Their responses (Appendix G) and suggestions were incorporated into a second survey piloted (Appendix H) with a group of public and private school educators in December 2015. Their responses (Appendix I) along with the first pilot group's responses were anonymous and were used to create a reliable tool that measured what it was meant to measure; identifying the essential criteria of a PLC practiced at the two schools in this research study. The responses from the educators in the two pilot groups were also instrumental in validating interview questions. The Six Essential Criteria Check Off Chart was based on the literature from Richard Dufour's work.

Teacher Survey Validity

Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. Teacher perceptions of strong school-level administrative support will be revealed in the responses to the questions on the survey. Criterion-related validity was used to evaluate the validity of the survey. The validity of the survey was measured using predicative criterion-related validity. Teacher responses were used to determine the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Community in improving student achievement. Graduation rate data and proficiency rate data in English Language Arts and mathematics requirements were compared over a three-year period (2012–2015). Implementation of PLCs began in 2012 and the graduation rate and proficiency rate of students successfully completing English Language Arts and mathematics requirements was reported by the California State Department of Education, and the local education agency (LEA) report card. The data was gathered and evaluated to show whether student achievement increased since the implementation of PLCs.

Teacher Observation Reliability

The researcher used a chart listing the six essential criteria of an effective professional learning community. Each of the six criteria was listed on the chart and those items discussed at professional development meetings were checked as heard by the researcher and participating teachers during professional development and department meetings. The inter-rater reliability process was used to evaluate the reliability of the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart. Teachers who volunteered to participate in this study were given a chart

and along with the researcher they checked off the essential criteria being discussed during the professional development and department meetings. The scores assigned by the researcher and the volunteering teachers were computed and presented for consistency.

Teacher Observation Validity

The observations were conducted at the school sites during their regularly scheduled professional development and/or department meeting. Content validity is the degree to which an instrument measures an intended content area. The content area being measured in this research study was the six essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community. Volunteering teachers and the researcher completed the Essential Criteria Check-Off Chart during the regularly scheduled professional development and/or department meetings. The validity of the Essential Criteria Check-Off chart was determined by the expert judgment of Richard Dufour, who introduced the six essential criteria of an effective PLC.

Teacher Interview Reliability

The interview questions focused on the two schools that participated in the study and were developed from the survey responses obtained from two groups of educators who piloted the survey in 2015. The interview questions were also evaluated and refined by the dissertation committee methodologist ensuring that all the questions were open-ended.

Teacher Interview Validity

Validity is the degree to which an instrument measures what it purports to measure. Participating teachers responding to the interview questions were provided an opportunity to self-reflect. Self-directed reflection was one of the essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community. In the interview participating teachers responded to questions that evaluated their personal involvement practicing the six essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community: shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, authentic assessment, self-directed reflection, stable setting and strong school-level administrative support. Criterion-related validity was used to evaluate the validity of the interview. The validity of the interview instrument was measured using predictive criterion-related validity. Participant responses were used to predict the impact of the Professional Learning Community Model on student achievement. Improvements in student achievement were evaluated using graduation rates data and proficiency rate data in English Language Arts and mathematics requirements, which compared previous year's data with current year's data.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Validation strategies included interpretative validation using triangulation. The purpose of triangulation in qualitative research is to increase the credibility and validity of the results. Social Scientists O'Donoghue and Punch define triangulation "as a method of cross checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data" (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003, p. 78). The data triangulated includes the survey responses from the ten volunteering teachers, the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart

completed at professional development and/or department meetings, and the interviews collected from six of the ten teachers (three from each school) who volunteered to participate in this research study. After the interviews were conducted and the summaries were typed the information was shared with the teachers who were interviewed to authenticate the typed summaries.

Data Collection

Data were collected in four stages beginning after the dissertation committee's approval of this research study:

The first stage teacher surveys.

The ten volunteering teachers completed an anonymous survey (Teacher Survey Appendix J) during the Spring Semester. Using SPSS the survey responses were uploaded. Applying descriptive statistics showed similarities and differences relative to teacher perceptions of the six essential PLC criteria at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School.

The second stage teacher observations.

Teacher observations were completed at the two different schools participating in the research study. Data were gathered through surveys, observations and interviews. At the observations the researcher listened to hear the frequency of times that the six essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community were discussed:

- 1) Shared vision and goals,
- 2) Collective responsibility,
- 3) Authentic assessments,

- 4) Self-directed reflection,
- 5) Stable setting and
- 6) Strong school-level administrative support.

Participating teachers and the researcher used the Essential Criteria Check off Chart (see Appendix K and L) to identify the six essential criteria mentioned/discussed during the school's professional development, grade level and/or department meetings. Completing the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart (see Appendices K and L) during the professional development, grade level and/or department meetings presented evidence of how the implementation of the six essential criteria was perceived by the teachers at each school. The Microsoft excel program was used to tally information from the completed charts and percentages were calculated to indicate the extent that each of the six essential PLC criteria were being practiced by instructional staff as mentioned within the meeting discussions.

The third stage teacher interviews.

Teacher interviews were completed in the Spring Semester and provided an assessment of teacher perceptions. (See Teacher Interview questions Appendix M). This data pays particular attention to the active engagement of teachers, parents, administrators, and educational support staff as they participated in shared vision and goal setting, collective responsibility, authentic assessments, stable setting, self-directed reflections and strong school-level administrative support. Interviews were recorded and notes were typed from the recordings (see Appendix N). After interviews were conducted, interview summaries were authenticated with the teachers who volunteered to

be interviewed. The researcher working under the supervision of the committee chairperson identified themes established by the responding teachers. This information is presented in an interview summary found in the Appendices (see Appendix N).

The fourth stage on-line data.

On-line data was gathered from allthingsplc, the California State Department of Education and the local education agency reports providing evidence of increased graduation rates and increased proficiency rates in English Language Arts and mathematics requirements for high graduation. Allthingsplc also provides evidence that the Professional Learning Community Model works. It shows high schools throughout the United States that have successfully implemented Professional Learning Community Models. High schools in seventeen states across the country have adopted the Professional Learning Community Model and provide evidence of increased student achievement and increased high school graduation rates. The data gathered from surveys, observations and interviews provided evidence of the researcher's two predictions:

1. The most effective Professional Learning Community Model implements all six of the essential PLC criteria.
2. Teacher perception of the PLC is more positive when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are present.

Throughout the data collection stage, an analysis was made to compare the collected data (survey responses, observations – Six Essential PLC Criteria

Chart and recorded/typed interviews) with the data presented in the writings, observations, videos and other presentations of Robert Marzano and Richard Dufour (2011 p. 60) that advocate the necessity of implementing all six essential PLC criteria. Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano also present the characteristics of effective school leaders in the *21 Responsibilities* of the school leader. Improved student achievement is evaluated based on the number of students successfully completing English Language Arts and mathematics requirements for high school graduation and four-year college admission and the percentage of the freshman class successfully matriculating through high school earning the high school diploma within a four-year period of time. This data is reported to the public by the California Department of Education after it is gathered by local education agencies.

The interview questions measured the active engagement of teachers, parents, administrators, and educational support staff that participated in shared goal setting, collective responsibility, authentic assessments, creating and maintaining a stable instructional setting and self-directed reflections. Interviews were recorded and notes were typed from the recordings. After interviews were conducted, interview summaries were authenticated with the teachers who volunteered to be interviewed.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data was gathered from educational websites, through surveys, observations and interviews. The observations were conducted at Professional Development meetings, grade level and department meetings. At these meetings, the researcher and the

participating teachers completed the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart. The researcher listened to hear teachers discuss shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, authentic assessments, self-directed reflection, stable setting and strong school-level administrative support. Validity of the Six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Charts was completed using the inter-rater procedure. The participating teachers and the researcher at the professional development, grade level and department meetings completed the Six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart. Quantitative analysis was presented based on written and coded responses.

The researcher listened to hear discussion of student performance on informal and formal evaluations and listened to hear teachers share the best practices used to help students struggling academically. Inter-rater reliability was used to ensure the accuracy of the collected data. The researcher and the participating teachers completed the Six Essential Criteria Check Off Chart during professional development, grade level and department meetings. The Frequency was analyzed using the Microsoft excel program. The qualitative analysis presented was based on written and recorded responses. Responses from surveys, observations and interviews were triangulated using all the participants' responses, which enhanced validity. Validated responses were summarized and presented in Chapter IV of the research study.

Quantitative analysis was conducted using IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Correlational techniques revealed that the survey questions were reliable. The SPSS descriptive statistics report was used to reveal the relationships evaluate teacher responses on the survey and present respondents' perceptions of administrative support, and the degree of implementation of the six PLC essential criteria

at their respective schools. The researcher predicted in Chapter One that when teachers perceive strong administrative school-level support, their responses to survey questions relating to the implementation of the six PLC essential criteria would be higher. Strong school-level administrators can provide an environment where teachers feel comfortable adopting common values and goals, assuming collective responsibility, creating authentic assessments, participating in self-directed reflection, and remaining in the stable setting that encouraged respect and complimented strong school-level leadership. In such an environment teachers feel safe sharing their best practices and providing constructive suggestions and receiving suggestions that can improve student achievement (Fullan, 2008 p.45).

Summary

In chapter three the methodology of the study was presented along with the research questions. This chapter described the teachers who volunteered to participate in this research study citing what each of them had in common and how they were selected. Additionally the validity and reliability of the instruments used were presented. Reliability was tested by two pilot groups one group of doctoral students and one group of anonymous K-12 educators. Their suggestions were used to revise the survey questions and the interview questions. Data collection procedures and response interpretations were also discussed. Lastly the method and tools used by the researcher to analyze data collected pertaining to the existence of the six essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community was presented.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

This chapter presented an analysis of the responses from the participants in relation to each of the three research questions:

1. How do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community?
2. How effective do the teachers perceive the Professional Learning Community when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are implemented?
3. Is there an increase in students passing their English-Language Arts and mathematics requirements? In graduating from high school ready for a career or college?

Presentation of the data gathered from the PLC Survey, the Six Essential PLC Criteria Observation Chart, the interview questions and published information by the allthingsplc website, the California State Department of Education and the local education agency reports provide evidence that the Professional Learning Community Model effectively increases student achievement in English Language Arts and mathematic requirements and increases the percentage of high school students graduating in four-years college and career ready. Each of the three research questions were addressed in the following order:

- a. Responses to the survey,
- b. Responses to the observation instrument (six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart),

- c. Responses to the interview questions, and
- d. Data published by the allthingsplc website, the California State Department of Education and the local education agency (LEAs) reports.

The researcher-designed instruments, including the survey, the observation chart, and the interview questions were validated by two different pilot study groups of educators. Data were collected in four stages:

Quantitative Data Analysis

The first stage teacher surveys.

Question One: how do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community.

The survey questions represent the foundation piece of this research and direct the expectations of the researcher. The ten volunteering teachers completed an anonymous survey (Appendix J, PLC Teacher Survey) during the Spring Semester 2015-16 school year. The PLC survey questions representing the foundation piece of this research was checked for reliability using the Spearman Brown Split Half Correction formula.

Table 3 Reliability

Hypothesis: Teacher perceptions of the PLC are more positive when all six PLC Essential Criteria are implemented.

		N	%
Cases	Valid	10	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	10	100.0

Table 4

Cronbach's Alpha Part 1	Value	.768
	N of Items	3 ^a
Part 2	Value	.669
	N of Items	3 ^b
Total N of Items		6
Correlation Between Forms		.697
Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Equal Length	.821
	Unequal Length	.821
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient		.821

Note. a. =The items are: Shared Goals, Collective Responsibility, and Authentic Assessment; b =The items are: Self directed reflection, Stable Setting, Strong Leadership

Table 5

Scale: Teachers Perceptions of PLC - Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Part 1	Value	.821
		N of Items	5 ^a
	Part 2	Value	.652
		N of Items	5 ^b
	Total N of Items		10
Correlation Between Forms			.403
Spearman-Brown Coefficient	Equal Length		.574
	Unequal Length		.574
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.565

Note. a. =The participants were: Mr. Reed, Ms. Kant, Mr. Aimes, Mr. Kropps, Mr. Johns; b =The participants were: Ms. Rice, Ms. Black, Mr. Lee, Mr. Green, Mr. Sams.

The tables presented show the reliability of the questions on the survey. The answers from respondents at each school were evaluated separately and their combined responses were evaluated. The evidence analyzed with the Spearman-Brown correlation formula gathered separately encouraged the researcher to involve the participating teachers in completing the Essential PLC Criteria Observation Check Off Chart.

Reviewing the responses separately revealed a higher correlation in the way the respondents from Sylvain Pilot High School (Part 1- .821) answered the four survey questions relating to each of the six essential PLC criteria and a lower correlation in the way Montrose High School respondents (Part 2- .652) answered the four questions. The Spearman-Brown Correlation Formula was also used to show the correlation of the combined responses from each school (equal length .821). The data analyzed using the Spearman-Brown Correlation Formula told the researcher that the questions on the survey were reliable (.821), but the responses to survey questions from the teachers at Montrose High School were not consistent.

Table 6

IBM SPSS Description of Data
Survey Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School
PLCs Essential Criteria

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SVG	10	10.00	17.00	13.2000	2.57337
CR	10	7.00	18.00	12.5000	3.43996
AA	10	12.00	19.00	14.3000	1.94651
SDR	10	7.00	13.00	11.0000	2.05480
SS	10	7.00	16.00	11.4000	2.95146
SL	10	10.00	16.00	12.3000	2.31181
Valid N (list wise)	10				

Note. SVG =Shared vision and Goals; CR= Collective Responsibility; AA= Authentic Assessment; SDR=Self-Directed Reflection; SS=Stable Setting; SL=Strong Leadership

Requesting the respondents to rate the six Essential PLC Criteria at professional development, grade level and department meetings and using the inter-rater technique served to validate the survey findings. Triangulating the responses to the survey, the completed observation charts and the answers to the interview questions enhanced the validity of the findings relating to the teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the six Essential PLC Criteria.

The second stage observations.

Question Two: how effective do the teachers perceive the Professional Learning Community when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are implemented.

The six Essential PLC Check Off Chart revealed that teachers at Montrose High School perceived higher frequencies of shared vision and goals (40%) than teachers perceived at Sylvain Pilot High School (26%). Teachers at Montrose High School perceived a lower frequency of collective responsibility (16%) than teachers perceived at Sylvain Pilot High School (38%). All teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School met twice weekly during the instructional day with administrative and support staff which facilitates collective responsibility. At Montrose High School the four small schools met separately. The principal leader prepared the meeting agendas. The agendas included local district information, mandates and announcements. There was very little evidence of collective responsibility at Montrose High School.

The second stage.

During the spring semester 2015-16 the six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart was completed at the two different schools participating in the research study. The researcher expected that in schools where the teachers perceived higher frequencies of strong school-level administrative support a higher frequency of the six essential PLC criteria required for an effective Professional Learning Community Model would be recorded. School-level administrative support is very important when implementing an effective Professional Learning Community Model. The school-level administrator must secure a safe and trusting environment to facilitate self-directed reflection.

Table 7**Survey Statistics Strong Leadership**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SL1	5	10.00	15.00	12.6000	2.40832
SL2	5	10.00	16.00	12.0000	2.44949
Valid N	5				

Table 7 shows little difference among the responses on the survey concerning the participating teachers perceptions of strong school-level administrative support. Participating teachers and the researcher also used the Six Essential PLC Criteria Check off Chart (see Appendix K and L) to record the frequency of the Six Essential PLC Criteria mentioned/discussed during the school's professional development, grade level and/or department meets. Completing the Six Essential Criteria Check Off Chart (see Appendix K and L) during the professional development, grade level and/or department meetings provided primary evidence of how the six essential PLC Criteria were implemented and practiced by the teachers at each school.

Montrose High School

The incidences of the six essential PLC criteria were relatively low which was consistent with the researcher's prediction. Montrose High School rated school-level administrative support at 13% on the Six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart and like wise incidences of authentic assessment and

stable setting was also low at 11% and 9%. The frequency in the essential criteria collective responsibility at Montrose high school was low at 16%.

Table 8

Observations: Essential Criteria Check Off Chart Montrose High School

Frequency of the six essential criteria observed at Montrose High School

Six Characteristics of PLCs	Date	Date	Frequency
	May 17, 2016	May 24, 2016	Percentage
Shared vision/goals	23	15	40%
Collective Responsibility	8	8	16%
Authentic Assessment	5	5	11%
Self-Directed Reflection	6	4	11%
Stable Setting	3	6	09%
Strong Leadership	6	7	13%

Sylvain Pilot High School

Sylvain Pilot High School rated school-level administrative support at 17%. Authentic assessment and stable setting were low at 7% and 12%.

Respondents from Sylvain Pilot High School reported no incidences of self-directed reflection. The four lead teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School chose to adopt the Professional Learning Community Model. The lead teachers and the principal at Sylvain Pilot High School worked together to provide common planning time during the instructional day for teachers to meet and to collaborate concerning the needs of the students. The frequency in the

essential criteria collective responsibility was high at Sylvain Pilot High School (38%).

There were no department meetings at Sylvain Pilot High School because the student population was small (360 students and 12 teachers). Only one teacher was required to teach the grade level content. Teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School met in professional development meetings and grade level meetings. The Professional Learning Community Model at Sylvain Pilot High School was organized around grade level meetings. Evidence gathered from the interviews provided the researcher with more information concerning the implementation of the six essential PLC criteria at Montrose High School and at Sylvain Pilot High School.

Table 9

Observations: Six Essential Criteria Check Off Chart Sylvain Pilot High School

Frequency of the six essential criteria observed at Sylvain Pilot High School

Six Characteristics of PLCs	Date	Date	Frequency
	May 5, 2016	May 6, 2016	Percentage
Shared vision/goals	8	3	26%
Collective Responsibility	7	9	38%
Authentic Assessment	0	3	07%
Self-Directed Reflection	0	0	0
Stable Setting	1	4	12%
Strong Leadership	6	1	17%

The six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart also showed a slightly higher frequency of stable setting at Sylvain Pilot High School (12%) then at Montrose high school (.9%). Teacher perceptions of strong school-level administrative support were slightly higher at Sylvain (17%) then at Montrose (13%). The frequency of authentic assessments were slightly higher at Montrose High School (11%) then at Sylvain Pilot High School (.7%) and the observed frequency of self-directed reflection at Montrose High School was (11%) but not observed during professional development meetings or grade level meetings at Sylvain Pilot High School.

The third stage.

Teacher interviews were conducted during May and June of the 2015-16 school year. The responses to the interview questions reveal participant opinions regarding the frequency of the essential PLC criteria implemented at their individual schools (see Table 10).

Table 10

Frequency of Six Essential PLC Criteria

	Montrose High School Yes = 1, No = 2	Sylvain Pilot High School Yes = 1, No = 2
Self-Directed Reflection	1	2
Shared Vision and Goals	1	1
Collective Responsibility	2	1
Authentic Assessment	1	1
Stable Setting	2	2
Strong School-Level Leadership	1	1
Positive Perceptions of PLC	1	1

Question 3: is there an increase in students passing their English-Language Arts and mathematics requirements? In graduating from high school ready for a career or college.

The fourth stage.

Comparing federal, state and local education agency data that measure student achievement in English Language Arts and mathematics requirements and the percentage of students graduating career and college ready after completing the four-year high school graduation plan suggests that adopting a Professional Learning Community Model may increase student achievement and student high school graduation rates. Evidence gathered from allthingsplc.info show increased student achievement at 52 high schools in and out of the United States (see Appendix O, Evidence Table). At the two high schools participating in this study both the graduation rate and the proficiency rate in English Language Arts and mathematics increased after part of the six essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community was implemented. The data collected from the local education agency and the California State Department of Education provide evidence that the graduation rate at both schools is higher than the district average and has increased since the adoption of the Professional Learning Community Model. Over the last five years, after the adoption of the PLC model in both the comprehensive high school and pilot high school student achievement increased. The district average high school graduation rate reported in 2016 was 71%. The number of students successfully completing the English Language Arts and mathematics requirements, and graduating college and career ready has increased since the adoption of the Professional Learning Community Model.

At Montrose High School the graduation rate was 82%. The 82% graduation rate at Montrose High School increased over the last five years under the PLC model from a high school graduation rate of 68% in 2010 to a high school graduation rate of 82% in 2016.

The researcher chose to spotlight high schools listed on the allthingsplc website that are implementing all six essential criteria suggested by Richard Dufour. The schools spotlighted have similar demographics as the two schools participating in the research study. Testimonials from these high schools reveal 30% - 80% increases in student achievement and high school student graduation rates.

Table 11

Evidence: The PLC Increases Student Achievement (allthingsplc.com)

School Name	Location	Demographics	Ethnic Breakdown	State Achievement Test Data 2010-15
*Adlai Stevenson High School	Lincolnshire, Il.	3,881 Students 3.8% Title One 3% LEP 12% SPED	76% White 2% Black 5% Hispanic 16% Asian 2% Other	Reading: 81% Writing: 88% Math: 85% Science: 82%
Baldwin Park High School	Baldwin Park, CA.	1,950 students 90% Title One 20% LEP 10% SPED	1.8% White 0.7% Black 92.4% Hispanic 3.1% Asian 2% Other	Language Arts: 35.1% Math: 11.8% Science: 27.4% CST Life Science: 44.2% Social Science: 45.4%
Centennial High School	Corona, CA.	3,194 students 53.1% Title One 5.7% LEP 9.6% SPED	23% White 11% Black 53% Hispanic 10% Asian 3% Other	English Language Arts: 64% Math: 29% Science: 55% History: 55%
Sanger High School	Sanger, CA	2,758 students 72% Title One 8% LEP 6% SPED	13% White 1% Black 72% Hispanic 12% Asian 2% Other	Enrolled in college first year after graduation 79% Completed A-G course requirements 52%
Whittier Union High School District	Whittier, CA	13, 558 students 68% Title One 10% LEP 9% SPED	10% White 1% Black 86% Hispanic .2% Other 2.8% Other	ELA: 54% Math: 60%

Note: a = Adlai Stevenson represents the role model Professional Learning Community established by Richard Dufour in 2004. It continues to rank highest in the state of Illinois scoring 30% higher than the state average in student achievement over the last 12 years.

Table 11

PLC Increases Student Achievement at Montrose and Sylvain High School

School Name	Location	Demographics	Ethnic Breakdown	State Achievement Test Data
Montrose	District XYZ	2100 students 58% Title One 9% LEP 14% SPED	14% White 13% Black 65% Latino 6% Asian 1 % Filipino	Reading 33% Writing 36% Math Concepts 30% Math Problem Solving 17%
Sylvain	District XYZ	360 Students 60% Title One 12% LEP 18% SPED	4% White 1% African American 89% Latino 3% Asian 4% Filipino	Reading 24% Writing 36% Math Concepts 10% Math Problem Solving 7%

Findings of Qualitative Research**The third stage.**

Teacher interviews: Interviews were conducted during the spring semester 2015-16 school year. The interview questions and the six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart were based on Dufour's six Essential PLC Criteria required for an effective Professional Learning Community. Six of the ten teachers completing the survey and the six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart were interviewed; three teachers from each of the two schools in this study. The interview provided an assessment of teacher perceptions (see Appendix M, Teacher Interview Questions). The information collected from the interview revealed that during the first two years of the adoption of the PLC model at Montrose High School teachers perceived strong school-level

administrative support because the school principal provided monetary compensation for teachers to meet together either before or after school, and create SMART goals, content pacing plans and common assessments (see Appendix N).

In December 2014 the principal at Montrose High School was promoted to a new district level position. Beginning in January 2015 through June 2015 Montrose High School had four different principals. The financial support for teachers to meet before and after school waned and the focus of professional development and department meetings during the transition of the old principal leader and the selection of the new principal leader returned to the pre PLC adoption focus; professional development meetings and department meetings were scheduled to deliver local and central district mandates (Mr. Green). Teachers came to these meetings to hear announcements, not to work together to improve student achievement. The interview results were presented qualitatively and are included in the Appendices (see Appendix N).

Participating teachers interview discussions Montrose High School.

- a. Mr. Green said that he learns more from the informal conversation among his colleagues than from structured or formal mandated conversations,
- b. Mr. Lee stated that he would love to continue working within a professional learning community. He added that his preference is to work with the content specific Professional Learning Community Model. Mr. Lee from Montrose High School stated: “we have some bad teachers, but I believe that the majority of the

teachers at Montrose High School want the students to successfully complete the A-G requirements and graduate from high school, college and career ready”.

c. Ms. Rice told the researcher that she believes that working with other teachers to improve student achievement is the best strategy available and that the Professional Learning Community Model forces teachers to work together developing and implementing programs that increase student achievement. Ms. Rice stated “we collaborate and share a common goal: that all students can and will achieve”

Participating teachers interview discussions Sylvain Pilot High School.

In the interview one respondent from Sylvain Pilot High School (Mr. Kropps) stated that:

the four lead teachers were more concerned with attracting students to their school than increasing student achievement among the students at their school and therefore invested more time during professional development meetings discussing programs that could bring notoriety to the school and increase enrollment such as Linked learning, than in analyzing student data to improve student achievement. (Mr. Kropps, personal communications, May 22, 2016)

At the two high schools participating in this study both the graduation rate and the proficiency rate in English Language Arts and mathematics increased after part of the six essential criteria required for an effective professional learning community was implemented. The data collected from

the local education agency and the California State Department of Education provide evidence that the graduation rate at both schools is higher than the district average and has increased since the adoption of the Professional Learning Community Model. Over the last five years, after the adoption of the PLC model in both the comprehensive high school and pilot high school student achievement increased. At Sylvain Pilot High School the graduation rate was 74%. At Montrose High School the graduation rate was 84%. The district average high school graduation rate reported in 2016 was 71%. The number of students successfully completing the English Language Arts and mathematics requirements, and graduating college and career ready has increased since the adoption of the Professional Learning Community Model.

Additionally testimonials from the California high schools (allthingsplc) implementing all six Essential PLC Criteria and experiencing significant increases in student achievement and student high school graduation rates were presented in this chapter. Before presenting the testimonials from the California high schools its important to hear what happened at Adlai Stevenson high school. Adlai Stevenson is the role model for professional learning communities. Richard Dufour, who ultimately implemented all six Essential PLC Criteria at the school, increased student achievement in English Language Arts and mathematic requirements as well as student high school graduation rates, adopted the Professional Learning Community Model in 2004 at Adlai Stevenson high school.

Adlai Stevenson.

Although our school system did not originally provide time in the Day for teachers to collaborate, we began our transformation with the Ideal that we could create time after school for additional collaboration, And we began the process of narrowing our focus for school improvement into the Four Guiding Questions of a PLC:

1. What do we want students to learn?
2. How do we know they have learned?
3. What do we do when students don't learn?
4. How do we respond when they do learn?

We implemented an after school program, with a small bus route of pre-determined drop off locations after school to provide the transportation needed to make extended day for students mandatory when work was not being completed. Creating additional time has led to an improved focus on agreeing to our essential skills and assessing those skills in a common way. The improvements at Adlai Stevenson were accomplished with collective efforts.

Baldwin Park High School.

On Thursday's for example, same subject teacher meetings allow teachers who teach the same subject an uninterrupted two-hour block focused on a host of topics aimed at optimizing student learning. Teachers also collectively create and later analyze common formative

assessments and SMART goals, which help gauge student learning. Teachers focus their conversation on the four questions that guide collaborative meetings within a professional learning community structure:

1. What do we want students to know?
2. How do we know students have learned what we as educators deem is important for them to know?
3. What do we do when evidence of non-learning is present?
4. How do we enrich the learning students are demonstrating?

Academically at risk incoming ninth grade students receive the necessary intervention during the school day to accomplish the goal of completing their first year of high school credit. Creation of a new certificated position allowed for close monitoring of the school-wide student learning. The intervention coordinator acts to “keep a pulse” on our intervention efforts by making sure real time data is gathered and provided to a whole host of leaders within each house who actively work to implement action plans aimed at helping students who data suggest are not learning. Teachers at Baldwin Park high school work interdependently on common SMART goals and ensure that decisions made collectively are carried out independently.

Centennial High School.

Centennial’s API scores have increased by 118 points in the last 7 years, 688 API in 2004 compared to a 806 API in 2012, averaging 17 points

of growth per year. Three major themes emerged. First, the overall student achievement in all core content areas continues to show positive growth. Second, the staff and students continue to promote a rigorous course of study, as evidenced by the number of students satisfying UC/CSU eligibility, increased SAT participation and composite scores, and impressive gains in the number of AP exams administered. And lastly, it is evident that the staff at Centennial High School continues to do more with less when considering the reduction in both certificated and classified staff members along with an increase in student enrollment. The staff believes our actions need to be purposeful, data driven, and collaborative. Student achievement is significantly influenced by the teachers' perception and attitude towards his/her students, and student learning should be the central focus. During the past seven years, we have incorporated a teacher collaborative schedule on Monday mornings.

Health Sciences High and Middle College.

We wanted our graduates to be prepared for life beyond high school. Over the years, we have grown considerably and have grade level collaborative planning teams that meet weekly, for the entire day, to align their collective efforts. These teams examine their learning intentions, seek opportunities to integrate the curriculum across traditional disciplines, and develop assessments to monitor students' understanding.

San Clemente High School.

San Clemente High School-and the Capistrano Unified School District-are committed to being a Professional Learning Community (PLC)-a culture that allows time for teachers to analyze data, discuss current “best practices,” and pursue new ideas for educating students.

Sanger High School.

Sanger High School (SHS) was a low achieving high school that was not competitive with other schools in neighboring school districts during the 1998-99 academic school year, The Academic Performance Index measure SHS at a 576 at the beginning of our academic journey. This academic measurement highlighted the need to address the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students. One solution that has the most impact on both teacher and student learning was the implementation of Professional Learning Communities. Since the introduction of PLCs in 2004, teachers have embraced the opportunity to collaborate, lead and learn. Over the years, teachers went from teaching in isolated silos, with their doors closed, to working in collaborative teams sharing best practices and student data. Teacher leaders were identified and trained. Protected time was provided for teachers to meet on a regular basis, this was one key element that

helped move teachers. Teachers began to take ownership of their PLCs. With the support of a strong PLC network, Sanger High has been able to continue to increase its graduation rate to 98.6%, increase its API score from 576 in 1999 to 794 in 2014 and decrease the achievement gap between white and Hispanic students.

Whittier Union High School District.

Virtually every measure we have access to indicates that the use of Professional Learning Communities is having a most positive impact upon students and teachers. In 2005-06, the “percent proficient” as measured by the California High School Exit Exam was 47% in English Language Arts and 45% in math. Those numbers increased to 54% and 60%, respectively in 2009-10.

Quantitative analysis of descriptive statistics was conducted using IBM’s Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical analysis revealed the relationship between teacher perceptions’ of administrative support and the degree that the six essential criteria were implemented at their school. The researcher predicted that the more teachers perceived strong administrative school-level support the higher their responses on the survey relating to the implementation of the six PLC essential criteria necessary for an effective Professional Learning Community Model. The data collected on the survey demonstrated how comfortable teachers felt adopting common values and goals, assuming collective responsibility, creating authentic assessments, participating in self-directed reflection, and maintaining a stable setting that encouraged respect and complimented strong school-level leadership.

The data gathered on the survey showed no significant difference in teacher perceptions of strong school-level administrative support. Likewise responses to interview questions relating to strong school-level administrative support (see Appendix N) from respondents at Sylvain Pilot High School and Montrose High School were very similar. But a difference was noted on the six PLC Essential Check Off Charts gathered at professional development, department meetings and grade level meetings.

The teacher leaders at Sylvain chose to adopt the Professional Learning Community Model. The Professional Learning Community Model adopted at Montrose was a district mandate. As with other mandated changes at Montrose High School, commitment to the Professional Learning Community Model fluctuated each year with the new administrative staff and the new district mandates.

Participant Demographics

Participating in this research study were three female teachers, six male teachers and one homosexual teacher. The core subjects taught by these teachers included mathematics, English, Social Studies, and Chemistry. There was also a Special Education Resource Specialist and a Physical Education instructor. Most of the teachers volunteering to participate in this study had taught 11 – 20 years (50%) three had taught more than 20 years (30%) and two had taught less than ten years (20%). Fifty-percent of the participants were African American, forty-percent were Caucasian American and ten-percent were Latino. All but three participants were married and all but two participants were parents.

The PLC Survey Findings

The findings of the Professional Learning Community Survey are shown below.

Survey responses were collected and evaluated using the IBM SPSS program. Data collected represents the teacher's perception relative to the PLC essential criteria being implemented at Montrose high school and Sylvain Pilot High School. Descriptive analysis was used to present the data gathered from the survey at both high schools. The last table shows how Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School perceived strong school level administrative support at their school.

There was little difference noted in the teacher perceptions of strong school-level administrative support. The data collected from the PLC survey indicated a large standard deviation, which told the researcher that the observed frequency of the six PLC essential criteria would be different between the schools. The data gathered from the Essential Criteria Observation Chart validates the data collected on the PLC survey. On both the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart and the PLC Survey the data collected show that collected responsibility was practiced more at Sylvain than at Montrose. The PLC survey responses and the frequency observed on the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart also substantiated that no self-directed reflection was practiced at Sylvain but a small amount of self- directed reflection was practiced at Montrose.

The Observation Findings

Data gathered from the observations using the Essential Criteria Check-off Chart from both schools are presented below. Two different observations were recorded at Montrose High School by the researcher. The essential PLC criteria were observed ninety-six times. Twenty-five percent of the observations indicated that teachers shared vision and goals, twenty percent agreed that teachers assumed collective responsibility, ten percent agreed that teachers produced authentic assessments, thirteen percent

demonstrated that teachers participated in self-directed reflection, fifteen percent showed there was a stable setting and seventeen percent showed there was strong school-level administrative support.

The researcher observed forty-two incidences of the six PLC essential criteria at Sylvain Pilot High School from two different professional development and grade level meetings. The frequency of incidences of

- a. Shared vision and goals was twenty-six percent,
- b. Collective responsibility was thirty-eight percent,
- c. Authentic assessments was seven percent,
- d. Stable setting was twelve percent, however,
- e. There were no incidences of self-directed reflection,
- f. Strong school-level administrative support was seventeen percent.

The researcher observed 96 incidences of the six PLC essential criteria at Montrose High School from two different professional development and department meetings. Frequencies of the six essential PLC criteria is listed below:

- a. Shared vision and goals was forty percent,
- b. Collective responsibility was sixteen percent,
- c. Authentic assessment was eleven percent,
- d. Self-directed reflection was eleven percent,
- e. Stable setting was nine percent,
- f. Strong school-level administrative support was thirteen percent.

The data collected from the observations showed a small difference in the frequency observed by the participating teachers and the researcher regarding strong

school-level administrative support being implemented at their school (Montrose 13%, Sylvain 17%). The data observed by the participating teachers and the researcher showed a significant difference in the frequency of collective responsibility (Sylvain- 38% and Montrose- 16%) and self-directed reflection (Montrose- 11% and Sylvain- 0%). There was also a significant difference in the frequency observed of shared vision and goals (Montrose- 40%, Sylvain- 26%). There was little difference in frequency observed in authentic assessments (Montrose 11%, Sylvain 7%), and stable setting (Montrose 9%, Sylvain 12%). The results of the Observation Check Off Charts, the surveys, and the interviews served to validate the findings of this research study. The data agreed with the presentations of Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano specifically that the Professional Learning Community Model is more effective when all six of the essential PLC criteria are implemented. The sixth essential criteria strong school-level administrative support is required for the implementation of all six PLC essential criteria (Hall, et all, 2016).

Summary of Interview Findings

The perception data of the participants collected in the interviews suggested that not all six of the PLC essential criteria were implemented in either school and the level of strong school-level administrative support was low. Each school made a beginning step to implement the six criteria, and student achievement and high school graduation rates as reported by the local education agency and the California State Department of Education had increased since the adoption of the Professional Learning Community Model. Over a two-year period (2011 – 2013) Montrose was introduced to the Professional Learning Community Model. Teachers who participated in the study at Montrose High School were paid to meet before school and after school by department. Teachers at Montrose

High School created SMART (specific measurable attainable relevant time-bound) goals, pacing plans and common assessments. Students completed the assessments collaboratively created by their teachers, teachers reviewed the results of the student assessments enhanced their instructional strategies and student achievement increased. The respondents from Montrose High School shared with the researcher that they wanted to continue working within the Professional Learning Community Model to improve student achievement, however, their professional learning community lost school-level administrative support when the principal of the school transitioned.

The lead teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School chose to work within a professional learning community but did not implement all six PLC criteria. The lead teachers at Sylvain failed to maintain a stable environment by changing instructors sometimes during mid-school year, but definitely each school year. As many as 50% of the instructional staff changed during 2014-15 year, and this situation was repeated 2015-16 year. The teachers at Sylvain did not practice self-directed reflection. The four lead teachers and the school principal did not create an environment in which all teachers felt comfortable sharing their accomplishments and challenges. During the interview Mr. Kropps told the researcher that “the school leader must create an environment where looking at yourself and sharing both strengths and weakness leads to growth. An atmosphere of safety and trust must be nurtured. Sharing with others may not be safe, acknowledging that you are doing something that is not working is ego deflating and can be discouraging”. Another respondent stated “the lead teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School were focused on new programs that could bring notoriety to their school instead of student achievement.” (See Appendix N)

The participants from Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School respected, appreciated working within the Professional Learning Community Model and the students prospered when their teachers worked together to address their instructional and socio-emotional needs. The participating teachers shared with the researcher that they preferred to work in a professional learning community and not in an isolated classrooms (see Appendix N).

The data collected from the local education agency and the California State Department of Education provided evidence that the student graduation rate and the student achievement proficiency rate in English Language Arts and mathematics increased after the Professional Learning Community Model was implemented at Montrose High School. The graduation rate at Montrose High School increased from 78% reported in 2011-12 to 82% reported in 2015-16. This was after a decline in the graduation rate reported in 2012-13 of 70.94%. There was also a significant increase in student achievement in English Language Arts and mathematics. The English Language Arts proficiency rate increased from 33% reported in 2012-13 to 56% reported in 2015-16. The mathematics proficiency rate increased from 16% reported in 2012-13 to 66% reported in 2015-2016.

In 2014 California, created a new assessment to measure proficiency in English Language Arts and mathematics the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC). High school students in the eleventh grade took the SBAC in English Language Arts and mathematics. The scores earned by eleventh grade students at Montrose High School are shown in the Appendices (see Appendix O - U). The baseline for students at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot

High School were established in 2015 when eleventh grade students piloted the SBAC. No scores were published in 2015. This year 2016 the scores earned by eleventh grade students were published. The scores showed 67% of the eleventh grade students at Montrose High School scored proficient or above in English Language Arts and 52% of eleventh grade students scored proficient or above in mathematics.

At Sylvain Pilot High School the data collected from the local education agency and the California State Department of Education provided evidence that the student proficiency rate in English Language Arts and mathematics increased under the Professional Learning Community Model. There was no previous year graduation rate data available. The first four-year graduating class at Sylvain was June 2016. Seventy-four percent of the students entering the 9th grade in 2012 graduated from the 12th grade in 2016. The available data showed student proficiency in English Language Arts increased from 56.5% reported in 2014-15 to 66% reported in 2016 and in mathematics the proficiency rate showed an increase from 13% reported in 2014-15 to 16% reported in 2016.

Summary

In Chapter IV the data analysis was presented. The data were gathered from educational websites, the PLC survey, the six Essential PLC Criteria Check Off Chart, the interview and reports compiled by the California State Department of Education and local education agency reports that addressed the three research questions. The data analyzed indicated that although the Professional Learning Community Model exists at the two schools participating in this study, neither school is implementing all six of the Essential Criteria suggested by Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano. The data showed

that implementing all six of the essential criteria suggested by Richard Dufour brings about the greatest increases in student achievement and high school student graduation rates. It also shows that student proficiency rates in English Language Arts and mathematics and student high school graduation rates are higher than the district average with a significant increase at Montrose high school in graduation rates from 68% reported in 2011 to 82% reported in 2016 after implementing some of the six Essential PLC Criteria required for a successful Professional Learning Community Model suggested by Richard Dufour.

Based on the perception of participants at Sylvain Pilot High School there was a higher frequency of Collective Responsibility (39% at Sylvain), but no Self-Directed Reflection (0%). Sylvain teachers appeared to be more invested in collective responsibility because time was provided during the instructional day for teachers to meet and collaborate. Based on the perception of participants at Montrose High School there was no time provided during the instructional day to meet and collaborate, therefore the frequency of a collective responsibility in the form of teachers consistently working together to improve student achievement was not high (16%). Teachers at Montrose High School made attempts to meet before school and after school without success, meetings before school were too early and teachers often arrived late to the meetings and at after school meetings teachers were tired and often left the meetings early (see Appendix N).

The frequency of Authentic Assessments at both schools was low (11% at Montrose and 7% at Sylvain). At Montrose the frequency of Authentic Assessment was low because teachers did not structure time during the instructional day to meet and

collaborate. At Sylvain the frequency of Authentic Assessment was low because teacher attention at professional development meetings was distracted to identifying trending programs that could bring the school notoriety instead of being focused on creating common assessments (See interview responses Appendix N).

There was no difference in the data collected from the survey relative to strong school-level administrative support at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School. At Sylvain Pilot High School the teachers supported the implementation of the professional learning community with the support of the school principal. At Montrose High School the teachers did not support the implementation of the Professional Learning Community. At Montrose High School the local district mandated the implementation of the Professional Learning Community Model to address low student achievement in English Language Arts and mathematics that was measured by norm referenced tools provided by the local education agencies and the California State Department of Education. The office of the principal at Montrose High School was in a state of transition during the five years of PLC implementation. Some of the principals supported the Professional Learning Community Model by providing monetary resources to teachers who chose to meet before school or after school and some of the principals did not support the Professional Learning Community Model with monetary resources. There were five different principals at Montrose High School, which contributed to the absence of a stable setting.

The Professional Learning Community Model encourages and supports members who examine their practices, try out new ideas, and reflect together on what works and why it works. The PLC model provides opportunities for the collective construction and

sharing of new knowledge as educators identify and solve problems and together build the capacity and collective will to move forward the equity agenda of their schools and districts and enhance the learning and achievement of all students (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). A Professional Learning Community facilitates the system change necessary to improve student achievement among all student groups. K-12 schools cannot grow weary in their efforts to help all students' graduate college and career ready. It can and will happen if educators continue to work together to achieve this goal. The focus of this research was on how teachers' perceptions of administrative support impact the effectiveness of the professional learning community. Implementing all six of the essential PLC criteria at once was not completed future research may focus on which essential PLC criteria when implemented generates the greatest increase in student achievement. Implementing one essential PLC criteria each year over a six-year span may serve prove effective in establishing a permanent systems change by adopting an effective Professional Learning Community Model at the school site.

The next chapter discusses the conclusions of this research study and the recommendations for additional research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the analysis of the descriptive data, and the literature on Professional Learning Community Models related to this study. Suggestions and implications for K-12 educational organizations seeking to increase student achievement and promote high school graduates who are college and career ready by implementing the Professional Learning Community Model was also discussed. This chapter offers recommendations for improving student achievement using the Professional Learning Community Model.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of the six essential PLC criteria as it relates to the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Community Model in two urban high schools. The theoretical framework of this study was built upon two concepts a) collective responsibility and b) strong school-level administrative support, including the principal and the teacher leaders. Specifically, this research study was designed to answer the following three questions:

1. How do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community?
2. How effective do the teachers perceive the Professional Learning Community when all six of the Essential PLC Criteria are implemented?
3. Is there an increase in students passing their English-Language Arts and mathematics requirements? In graduating from high school ready for a career or college?

Methodology

This research study utilized a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative) phenomenological research design. The researcher-designed the survey, observation chart and the interview questions based on the six Essential PLC Criteria suggested by Richard Dufour for implementing an effective professional learning community. The data collected focused on a four-pronged approach: educational websites, a survey, observations, interviews, and school reports on student achievement from the California State Department of Education and local education agency (LEA) reports. The surveys, observations and interviews were used to triangulate the data, indicating that the study was robust, valid and reliable.

There were four stages of data collection in the research study. The researcher-designed survey instrument was piloted by two different groups of K-12 educators and modified to elicit accurate responses to the research questions. The observations were based on the six Essential PLC Criteria required for a successful professional learning community suggested by Richard Dufour and observed at professional development meetings and department meetings. The suggestions from the pilot groups led to the interview instrument containing open-ended questions. Data were reviewed using norm referenced test scores in English Language Arts and mathematics provided by the local education agency and the California State Department of Education.

A total of ten teachers, five from two different high schools: Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School participated in this research study. Of the ten teachers participating in this research study only six teachers participated in the interviews.

Survey Findings

Strong School-level Leadership

The survey showed that there was no difference between the teachers' perceptions of strong school-level administrative support at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School. At Montrose High School the school-level administrator was the principal. From 2012–2014 the principal supported the Professional Learning Community Model. In 2014 the principal transitioned to another school. Within the 2012-15 school years, Montrose High School experienced five different principals only two who supported the Professional Learning Community Model.

From 2012-2014 there were three different principals at Sylvain Pilot High School who worked collaboratively with the four lead teachers. The four lead teachers chose to work within the Professional Learning Community Model.

Collective Responsibility, Shared Vision and Goals and Authentic Assessments

The survey indicated no difference in the teachers' perceptions of collective responsibility, shared vision and goals and authentic assessments at both schools. However, there was a significant difference in the teachers' perceptions of self-directed reflection and stable setting.

Self-directed Reflection and Stable Setting

The teachers at Montrose High School reported a low level of self-directed reflection, whereas the teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School reported no self-directed reflection. The Montrose survey results regarding stable setting showed that the teaching staff was stable, while the teaching staff at Sylvain was not stable.

Observation Findings: Essential Criteria Chart

Strong school-level Leadership, Shared Vision and Goals

The observations from the professional development, department and grade level meetings showed little difference between Montrose and Sylvain on the Essential Criteria Chart as it relates to strong school-level administrative support (13% frequency at Montrose and 17% frequency at Sylvain). There was a significant difference gathered on the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart relative to shared vision and goals (40% at Montrose and 26% at Sylvain).

Collective Responsibility

Teachers at Sylvain appeared to be more highly invested in the frequency of the collective responsibility criteria. There was a notable difference between Montrose and Sylvain as it related to collective responsibility (16% at Montrose and 38% at Sylvain). Time was structured during the instructional day for teachers at Sylvain to meet and collaborate regarding student achievement. No time was scheduled into the instructional day for teachers at Montrose to meet and collaborate regarding student achievement.

Self-directed Reflection

Respondents at Sylvain did not believe that the school-level administrator encouraged an environment of trust and support so they were not willing to participate in formal self-directed reflection sharing their strengths and weaknesses. Montrose respondents believed that the school-level administrator encouraged a safe environment where teachers could participate in formal self-directed reflection. Data collected on the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart noted a self-directed reflection frequency of 11% at

Montrose and 0% at Sylvain. The respondents at Montrose shared with the researcher that they felt safe engaging in formal self-directed reflection, but they didn't have time during the instructional day to meet and collaborate with other teachers and engage in formal self-directed reflection.

Authentic Assessments

There was also a small difference in the frequency of authentic assessments (11% at Montrose and 7% at Sylvain). At both Montrose and Sylvain teachers developed individual assessments to measure student content knowledge. At Montrose, teachers worked together in a content-based professional learning community to develop common assessments. Sylvain, a small pilot school only employed one teacher per grade level content area therefore no common assessments were developed. Teachers at Sylvain worked together in a grade level-based professional learning community and focused on student behavior and attendance.

Stable Setting

At Sylvain two days per week during the instructional day, time was allocated for teachers to meet and collaborate. The modified instructional schedule adopted at Sylvain did not require teachers to miss instructional time with their students, come to work early or stay at work late for meetings. Including time for professional learning community meetings during the instructional day is creating a stable setting that provides an opportunity for teachers to share best practices. However, the instructional staff at Sylvain changes each year.

At Montrose there is no time during the instructional day for teachers to meet and collaborate. The meetings during the instructional day are planned by the school

principal and require teachers to discuss and implement directives from the district office. But the English Language Arts and mathematics teachers at Montrose remain the same from year to year. The stability among the English Language Arts and mathematics teachers at Montrose created a stable setting for teachers and students to achieve consistency.

Interview Findings

Shared Vision and Goals

When the instructional staff shares the same vision and goals student achievement increases. During one of the interviews, Mr. Green shared that the professional learning community that he was a part of shared the same vision and goals. They wanted to improve student writing. This professional learning community was composed of all the teachers in the core subject areas required for high school graduation: English Language Arts, mathematics, social studies and science. They developed rubrics, pacing plans and common assessments to use with the students in their respective disciplines. This is an example of a group of professional educators who adopted collective responsibility. But due to the transitioning administrators their efforts were not supported and some of the teachers at Montrose reported being skeptical about how shared vision and goals were being implemented.

The three teachers interviewed at Sylvain reported that they all share the same vision and goals, which is that all students successfully complete the career pathways identified and implemented at their school site. The four lead teachers at Sylvain had the flexibility to change school level administrators, and the instructional staff did not adhere

to the school plan which emphasized the three career pathways; theater arts, stage management and history.

Collective Responsibility

The teachers interviewed at Montrose and Sylvain shared that the entire staff accepts responsibility for student achievement and they cited the mandatory staff tutoring schedules to document that all staff assume responsibility for student learning.

Authentic Assessments

The teachers at Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School create their own assessments, however the assessments are no longer collaborative among all teachers within specific content areas. At Montrose when content areas organized professional learning communities common assessments were created and evaluated, but then the composition of the professional learning community changed to be housed within small learning communities and magnet schools. When the PLC composition changed there was no longer time available for teachers in the same content areas to meet together and create common assessments.

At Sylvain High School there was only one teacher teaching the content for specific grade levels because there were only 360 students. Sylvain was not a comprehensive high school because it had low student enrollment. For example there was one, ninth grade English Language Arts teacher and one ninth grade Algebra I teacher. Therefore, there were no other teachers with whom to collaborate.

Stable Setting

More than fifty percent of the teaching and administrative staff at Sylvain change annually. Although time was scheduled for teachers, parents and administrative staff to

meet weekly during the instructional day, each year the new staff needed to be trained. The lack of consistency within the instructional and administrative staff limited the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Community Model. The instructional staff at Montrose was constant so that goals established in one year could be successfully implemented the following year, but not having consistent support from the school-level administrator (principal) limited the effectiveness of the professional learning community. One year the principal focused on the Professional Learning Community Model. The next year the principal focuses on instructional rounds.

Strong School-level Leadership

There was no distinction between the way that the teachers at Montrose and Sylvain responded to the questions regarding strong school-level leadership. At Montrose the school principal was the primary leader. At Sylvain the four lead teachers were the primary school leaders. At each school the teachers interviewed stated that the leadership fails to make decisions that support teachers' efforts to improve student achievement.

Self-directed Reflection

There was low level of frequency regarding formal self-directed reflection at Montrose, but none at Sylvain. The three teachers interviewed at Montrose stated that they reflect on their instructional strategies as they review student assessment results. At the Professional Development and department meetings the researcher observed teachers at Montrose sharing with the group how they had to change an instructional practice that wasn't achieving the instructional goals and other teachers shared similar experiences. The teacher shared that she would host a "fifty-four percent" party. Students had to earn

sixty percent to receive a passing grade in her class. The teacher ordered pizza, chips, beverages and sweets and invited students with fifty-four percent or less to come for lunch. Once the students arrived they'd receive their lunch and a list of assignments to complete to bring their percentage points at sixty or above. The students were not coming and the teacher heard that the students didn't like the negative stigma associated with fifty-four percent. At the suggestion of another teacher in the meeting the teacher renamed the party to "We Succeed". The students came and made up their missing assignments. The teachers interviewed at Sylvain stated that they were not comfortable participating in formal self-directed reflection. One teacher stated "self-directed reflection in isolation turns into blame." This teacher also stated that, "the school-level administrator at Sylvain has not created a safe environment for formal self-directed reflection."

On-line Data

Data gathered from allthingsplc provided evidence that in high schools implementing all six of the essential criteria suggested by Richard Dufour for an effective Professional Learning Community Model increases in student achievement and student high school graduation rates were highest. Although Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School were not implementing all six essential criteria, student graduation rates and student proficiency rates in English Language Arts and mathematics had increased as reported by the California State Department of Education and the local education agency (LEAs) reports. The data collected showed that the graduation rate at Montrose had increased from a low of 70% in 2012-13 to 82% in 2014-15. At Sylvain 85% of the 2012 freshmen class graduated college and career ready on June 10, 2016.

Based on the latest assessment adopted by the California Department of Education, CAASPP SBAC, more than fifty percent of the eleventh grade students at both Montrose and Sylvain test at or above proficiency level in English Language Arts. The percentage of eleventh grade students testing at or above proficiency level in mathematics was lower. At Montrose fifty-two percent tested at or above proficiency and sixteen percent tested at or above proficiency in mathematics at Sylvain. The teachers interviewed at Sylvain attributed the low-test scores on the SBAC to the high turnover among math teachers each year and sometimes during the same school year at Sylvain.

The data gathered by the local education agency and the California State Department of Education showed increased proficiency in English Language Arts from thirty-three percent in 2013-14 at Montrose to fifty-six percent in 2014-15. Proficiency in mathematics increased from sixteen percent in 2013-14 to sixty-six percent in 2014-15. At Sylvain the local education agency and the California Department of Education showed proficiency in English Language Arts at fifty-six percent and in mathematics at fifty-five percent in 2014-15.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Problem and Purpose

In general, any change needs three to five years to become sustainable. Around the country districts are introducing many different programs to improve student achievement and promote high school graduates who are college and career ready. Many of today's high school graduates are not able to successfully enter a four-year college or entry-level career job. Transforming the isolated classroom in K-12 schools into an

effectively functioning professional learning community requires the implementation of six essential criteria:

1. Shared vision and goals,
2. Collective responsibility,
3. Authentic assessment,
4. Self-directed reflection,
5. Stable setting, and
6. Strong school-level administrators.

This research study revealed the importance of changing the current system in schools where students fail to graduate college and career ready. A systems' change is required to improve student achievement. A systems' change that focuses on developing many leaders working in concert instead of relying on key individuals (Fullan, 2008) is necessary. A laudable study in the future would be to compare principal leadership with teacher or community leadership. As individual leaders come and go the school engages in episodic ups and downs (Fullan, 2008), therefore implementing a systems' change based on the shared vision and goals of the parents, teachers, students and school-level administrators is tantamount to establishing a system that will continue to encourage and enhance increased student achievement.

Dufour and Marzano (2011) list "21 Responsibilities of the School Leader" and their impact on student achievement. This list closely aligns with the sixth essential criteria (strong school leadership) of the effective PLC established by Dufour in 2004. Another important publication *The Principal Influence* (Hall, et al., 2016) reinforces the necessity for the school leader to possess the characteristics listed in the "21

Responsibilities of the School Leader”. These characteristics are an integral part for developing leadership capacity in principals and teacher leaders.

A principal leader was present at Montrose High School. The Professional Learning Community Model at Montrose High School was adopted when the principal leader provided monetary compensation for teachers to meet in content areas to develop SMART goals, pacing plans, and common assessments. The interview respondents wanted to continue to work together to analyze student data and share best practices (See Appendix N). Their work together was not supported when the principal leader transitioned to another school.

Four teacher leaders were present at Sylvain Pilot High School. The lead teachers supported common planning time during the instructional day but they did not focus on student data during the common planning time (See Appendix N). The vision and attitude of the school leader can enhance or deteriorate the work of the professional learning community (Gruenert, Whitaker, 2015). One respondent at Sylvain Pilot High School commented that the lead teachers were more focused on trending programs that could bring notoriety to the school and to them personally, then evaluating student data to increase student achievement (See Appendix P)

The Professional Learning Community Model is a systems’ change that works best when all six essential criteria are implemented (shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, authentic assessment, self-directed reflection, stable setting and strong school-level administrative support). In addition to implementing the six essential PLC criteria the following strategies consistently applied over a three to five-year period of time will increase student achievement (Fullan, 2008):

- a. Collaboration- Encourage peer interaction that is purposeful and characterized by high capacity knowledge and skills. High capacity knowledge and skills provide their own built-in accountability, which does not require close monitoring by leaders, but does benefit from the participation of the leader. When teachers within a school collaborate they begin to think not just about their individual classroom but also about the success of the entire school.
- b. Build capacity to support the PLC Model - PLC members (teachers) must feel valued and be valued. The school-level administrator can create an environment that encourages formal self-directed reflection. Problems get solved when people believe that they will not get punished for taking risks. When people fear for their jobs, their futures, or even their self-esteem it is unlikely that they will fear someone enough to do anything but what they have done in the past (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). The No Child Left Behind Act was punitive. Imposing the Professional Learning Community Model onto schools that didn't meet the AYP and API sanctioned by the No Child Left Behind Act did not encourage success. Any system change works best when the ideas are generated and adopted by the teachers with the support and encouragement of the school-level administrator.
- c. Connect peers with purpose- Peers are more effective than random individuals at work and more effective than managerial groups at the top working by themselves to develop strategic plans. Establishing peer

groups with common purpose helps generate good ideas and facilitate peer interaction (Fullan, 2008). Establishing content based professional learning communities works best to increase student achievement in the content area. When peers interact purposely, their expectations of one another create positive pressure to accomplish goals important to the group (Fullan, 2008).

- d. Transparency rules – being transparent allows people to learn from each other. The Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) is an attempt by the Federal Government to help move public K-12 schools toward transparency, however there is still fear from school-level administrators that teachers will misappropriate funding or that the local district will take the money. Could this fear be the result of not forming purposeful groups or not establishing shared vision and goals? Change works best when it's generated from the teacher and supported by the administrator.
- e. All systems learning - For public schools to change many people need to be motivated to do something different (Fullan, 2008). Leaders have to provide direction, create the conditions for effective peer interaction, and intervene along the way when things are not working as well as desired. Leaders can encourage a system change by attracting talented people and helping them to continually develop individually and collectively on the job.

Discussing the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Community Model presented in this mixed methods study substantiates clearly and concisely that a system

change is required to improve student achievement. Data collected at the federal level agrees with the evidence collected by the California State Department of Education and the local education agency reports; implementing all six of the essential PLC criteria effectively increases student achievement and high school student graduation rates. Comparing increases in student achievement and high school student graduation rates at schools implementing all six criteria suggested by Richard Dufour for an effective Professional Learning Community Model with Montrose and Sylvain High Schools who have implemented some of the six essential PLC criteria required for an effective Professional Learning Community Model presented in this mixed methods study substantiates clearly and concisely that a system change is required to improve student achievement. Facilitating this systems change requires a strong school-level administrator who is able to support the implementation of all six essential criteria required for an effective Professional Learning Community Model. An effectively working PLC changes the system to increase student achievement.

In the book *School Culture Rewired, How to define, assess and transform it*, 2015 Steve Gruenert and Todd Whitaker emphasize the importance of identifying the prevailing school culture before any systems' change can be made. In their book they distinguish between the school's personality (culture) and the schools attitude (climate). The school's attitude is malleable. The school's attitude can be encouraged or discouraged by the school's culture and the school's attitude can be changed. Changing the school's climate (attitude) and reinforcing the change will supplant the change into the culture and change the culture. A strong school-level administrator (principal or teacher leader) can create a culture by bringing a cause to the attention of a group of

people, developing a following, identifying an enemy, imposing rules and recruiting more members (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Leaders who are knowledgeable about the school's traditions and attuned to its cultural nuances can positively address the school's climate by employing specific leadership strategies. For example rewarding the behaviors desired that increase student achievement. Toxic school cultures encourage individuals to see failures as the inevitable result of circumstances outside of their control rather than as opportunities for improvement. Educators in healthy school cultures understand the power of failure and will actively search for opportunities to overcome the failures, even if it means confronting their own disappointments (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015)

Summary

The expected outcomes of this research study were that administrators and teachers realized that implementing a Professional Learning Community Model involves a systems change requiring the collaboration and support of all stakeholder group members in order to increase student achievement. The establishment of an effective Professional Learning Community Model is influenced by the characteristics of the school-level administrator. The school leader who embodies and supports the six essential criteria required for an effective Professional Learning Community Model facilitates increased student achievement. Administrative and instructional team collaboration is paramount. Educational failure puts the United States' future economic prosperity, global position, and physical safety at risk (Kirp, 2013). Emerging research indicates that instructionally focused, transformational leadership affects teachers' instructional practices (Goddard, Neumerski, Salloum, Berebitsky 2010). The

Professional Learning Community Model will not work as effectively as promised and demonstrated by Dufour and Marzano if any piece of the implementation model is left out. The school-level administrator must make time during the instructional day for subject-alike and/or grade level teachers to meet and collaborate about student data so that the needs of students can be addressed. Teachers must be willing to develop as critical friends, listening to each other and implementing the suggestions made by their colleagues that improve student achievement. The entire school community or village must be willing to self-reflect, assume collective responsibility and focus their attention and efforts on achieving a common goal. When the six essential criteria necessary for an effective professional learning community are in place student achievement increases,

All students can learn and become proficient in their English Language Arts and mathematics requirements. All students can graduate college and career ready, but they don't. Students fail to achieve because they are educated in a school system (culture) that allows them to fail. The educational system must change so that failure is discouraged. When the researcher was obtaining her Masters in Counseling Degree, she was surprised to learn that failure is a constitutional right possessed by each individual. The researcher will not deny anyone the constitutional right to fail, and she will not condone failure. K-12 educational organizations were created to prepare children for successful adult lives. Within the educational structure young minds are molded to assume the responsibilities that old minds are vacating. This country needs to graduate students who are college and career ready. A beginning has been initiated with the Professional Learning Community Model. Continuing to implement the Professional Learning Community Model with all

six essential criteria will facilitate the change necessary to establish an educational organization of learning where all students attending graduate college and career ready.

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APPENDICES

- A. Site Authorization Montrose High School
- B. Site Authorization Sylvain High School
- C. University IRB Authorization to conduct research study
- D. District XYZ Authorization to conduct research study
- E. Teacher Consent Form
- F. Pilot Survey Questions #1
- G. Responses to Pilot Survey Questions
- H. Pilot Survey Questions #2
- I. Responses to Pilot Survey Questions
- J. Teacher Survey
- K. Essential Criteria Check Off Chart School One
- L. Essential Criteria Check Off Chart School Two
- M. Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Questions
- N. Summary of Interview Responses Montrose and Sylvain
- O. Evidence Table the PLC Model Works

Appendix A

Site Authorization Montrose High School

Appendix A: Site Authorization Form

Title of the Study	How do teacher's perceptions of administrative support impact the effectiveness of professional learning communities
Researcher(s)	Sharon Lee Davis
Researcher(s) Affiliation(s) with Site	Employee
Researcher(s) Phone Number(s)	323-455-0277 (h) 310-502-8599 cell
Researcher(s) E-mail(s)	Sharon.davis@eagles.cui.edu
Researcher's University Supervisor	Dr. Cheryl Lampe
Supervisor Phone Number & E-mail	(949) 606-6988 cheryl.lampe@cui.edu
Location(s) of Site where Study will Occur	Montrose High School District XYZ

Purpose(s) of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to examine teacher perceptions on the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities in two urban high schools. Specifically, this research study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community?
2. How effective do the teachers perceive school-level administrative support for their Professional Learning Community?
3. In what ways has the Professional Learning Community had an influence on academic performance?
4. Has the percentage of students passing their English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics requirements and graduating from high school career and college ready increased?

Procedures to be followed: Introduction – Survey – Observation – Interview – Summary – Triangulation - Report

Time and Duration of the Study: One school year

Benefits of the Study: Establishing professional learning communities that contain the critical elements discussed by Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano have increased both student achievement and teacher instructional quality. Teachers will leave their isolated islands to work together enhancing the learning and achievement of all students.

Persons who will have access to the records, data, tapes, or other documentation:

Principal researcher and University staff overseeing the research

Date when the records, data, tapes, or other documentation will be destroyed:

On or before December 31, 2016

Appendix B

Site Authorization Sylvain Pilot High School

Appendix B: Site Authorization Form

Title of the Study	How do teacher's perceptions of administrative support impact the effectiveness of professional learning communities
Researcher(s)	Sharon Lee Davis
Researcher(s) Affiliation(s) with Site	Employee
Researcher(s) Phone Number(s)	323-455-0277 (h) 310-502-8599 cell
Researcher(s) E-mail(s)	Sharon.davis@eagles.cui.edu
Researcher's University Supervisor	Dr. Cheryl Lampe
Supervisor Phone Number & E-mail	(949) 606-6988 cheryl.lampe@cui.edu
Location(s) of Site where Study will Occur	Sylvain High School District XYZ

Purpose(s) of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to examine teacher perceptions on the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities in two urban high schools. Specifically, this research study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community?
2. How effective do the teachers perceive school-level administrative support for their Professional Learning Community?
3. In what ways has the Professional Learning Community had an influence on academic performance?
4. Has the percentage of students passing their English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics requirements and graduating from high school career and college ready increased?

Procedures to be followed: Introduction – Survey – Observation – Interview – Summary – Triangulation - Report

Time and Duration of the Study: One school year

Benefits of the Study: Establishing professional learning communities that contain the critical elements discussed by Richard Dufour and Robert Marzano have increased both

student achievement and teacher instructional quality. Teachers will leave their isolated islands to work together enhancing the learning and achievement of all students.

Persons who will have access to the records, data, tapes, or other documentation):

Principal researcher and University staff overseeing the research

Date when the records, data, tapes, or other documentation will be destroyed:

On or before December 31, 2016

Appendix C
Concordia University IRB Approval

Appendix C: University IRB Approval

On Dec 21, 2015 @ 09:10 pm Michael Schulteis wrote:

Ticket closed: Approved

**CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY IRVINE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
PROTOCOL REVIEW**

IRB Protocol Number: 1991

IRB Approval Date: 12/21/2015

Sharon Lee Davis,

Congratulations! Your research proposal has been approved by Concordia University-Irvine's IRB. Work on the thesis research indicated within the initial e-mail may begin. This approval is for a period of one year from the date of this e-mail correspondence and will require continuation approval if the research project extends beyond a year.

If you make significant changes to the protocol during the approval period, you must submit a revised proposal to CUI's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Please write your IRB protocol # and "EDD IRB Application Addendum" in the subject line of any future correspondence.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB's decision, please contact me by replying to this e-mail or by phone at [949-214-3351](tel:949-214-3351).

**Kind Regards,
Michael W. Schulteis, Sc.Ed.D.
EDD IRB Reviewer**

On Dec 21, 2015 @ 09:10 pm your ticket was marked as closed,

This means your request was considered resolved. If it has not been resolved to your satisfaction, simply reply to this message to automatically reopen your ticket. Please do not reply to this email unless your issue has not been resolved to your satisfaction. Any reply to this message will automatically reopen your ticket.

Appendix D

District XYZ External Research Review Approval

Appendix D: District XYZ External Research Review Board Approval

DISTRICT XYZ External Research Review

January 11, 2016

Ms. Sharon Davis
8467 S 11th Ave., Apt. D Inglewood, CA 90305

Dear Researcher:

The DISTRICT XYZ Committee for External Research Review has approved your request to initiate the research study entitled "How teacher's perceptions of administrators impact the implementation of Professional Learning Communities." This action by the committee is an approval to conduct your study in DISTRICT XYZ schools according to the terms presented in the Statement of Agreement for External Researchers and signed on July 6, 2015. This letter does *not*:

Create any obligation for district personnel, students, or parents to participate. All participation must be completely voluntary and the confidentiality of all sources must be maintained.

Create any obligation on the part of the principal or staff to engage in research activities that occur during instructional or work time.

The approval is valid for one year from the date of this letter. At the conclusion of your study or within a year of the date of this letter, whichever comes first, please send an executive summary of your findings and copies of any reports to my attention. I wish you the best of luck in your research endeavors.

Sincerely,

Coordinator

Chair, Committee for External Research Review
Executive Director

Appendix E

Teacher Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study

Appendix E: Teacher Consent Form

Teacher Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study**Concordia University**

Title of Study: **How do teachers' perceptions of administrative support impact the effectiveness of professional learning communities?**

Researcher's Name: ShaRon Davis

Researcher's Contact Information: 310-502-8599

sharon.davis@eagles.cui.edu

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by (ShaRon Davis). **The purpose** of this research study is to examine teacher perceptions on the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities in two urban high schools.

WHY I AM DOING THIS STUDY?

This research study was designed to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers within the Professional Learning Community perceive their community?
2. How effective do the teachers perceive school-level administrative support for their Professional Learning Community?
3. In what ways has the Professional Learning Community had an influence on academic performance?
4. Has the percentage of students passing their A-G courses and graduating from high school career and college ready increased?

HOW LONG IS THE STUDY?

This study will take approximately two semesters. There are four parts to this research: Introduction and Recruitment, Survey, Interview and Observation. All parts of this research will take place during non-instructional time. The introduction and recruitment will take approximately 15 minutes. The survey will take 15 to 30 minutes and the interview will take 30 to 60 minutes. The observations will occur during regularly scheduled Professional Development and or Department meetings totaling approximately 10 hours.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to complete a survey, respond to interview questions and participate in Professional learning Community discussions at your regularly scheduled professional development meetings. You will also be asked to complete the Essential Criteria Check Off Chart at your regularly scheduled professional development meetings.

Risks and discomforts

Potential risks may include negative perceptions of administrative support as well as the potential blaming of different stakeholder group members. Adhering to all the rules and regulations set forth by the National Institute of Health and Extramural Research minimizes the risk. No identifiable information will be presented referencing the state, district, school or teachers participating in the study. Additionally, no student data will be collected and all subjective data collected will be triangulated with participants.

Potential benefits

The benefits to the participant and to others that may reasonably be expected from the research include helping teachers enhance their instructional strategies by sharing best

practices, sharing responsibility for all students learning and building camaraderie between the instructional and support staff.

Protection of confidentiality

Everything that can be done to protect your privacy will be done including coding all of your responses obtained in the survey and the interview, and not mentioning your names or the name of the school/district in which the study is conducted. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or to withdraw from this study.

Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact ShaRon Davis, Principal Investigator at Concordia University at 310-502-8599. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Concordia University Institutional Review Board irb@cui.edu.

Consent

I have read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

I give my consent to participate in this study. A copy of this consent form will be given to you.

Participant's signature _____ Date: _____

Appendix F
Pilot Survey #1

Appendix F: Pilot Survey #1

Survey - Professional Learning Communities

How do the teachers' perceptions of administrative support impact the effectiveness of the professional learning community?

This survey will help you think about and evaluate the extent to which each of the major factors associated with the professional learning community; critical elements, human resources, and structural conditions are currently present at your school. On a scale of 1 - 5 with 1 being not at all, 2 being rarely, 3 being sometimes, 4 being often and 5 being always, please select the response that you agree with most. Thank you.

Reflective Dialogue

Faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face related to instruction and curriculum

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

De-Privatization of Practice

Teachers share, observe, and discuss each other's teaching methods and philosophies

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Collective Focus on Student Learning

Most teachers assume that all students can learn at reasonably high levels and that teachers can help them

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Collaboration

Teachers not only work together to develop shared understandings of students, curriculum and instructional policy, but also produce materials and activities that improve instruction

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Shared Norms and Values

Through words and actions teachers affirm their common values concerning critical educational issues and support their collective focus on student learning

1 2 3 4 5

Supportive Leadership

The school leadership keeps the school focused on shared purpose, continuous improvement, and collaboration

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Socialization

The staff imparts a sense that new teachers are an important and productive part of a meaningful school community

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Time to Meet and Talk

There is a formal process that provides substantial and regularly scheduled blocks of time for educators to conduct on-going self-examination and self-renewal

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Physical Proximity

Teachers have common spaces, rooms, or areas for discussion of educational practices

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Interdependent Teaching Roles

There are recurring formal situations in which teachers work together (team teaching, integrated lessons, etc.)

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Teacher Empowerment and School Autonomy

Teachers have autonomy to make decisions regarding their work guided by the norms and beliefs of the professional community

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all Always

Submit

100%: You made it.

Appendix G
Responses to Pilot Survey #1

Appendix G: Responses to Pilot Survey #1

RESPONSES TO PILOT SURVEY #1

Yearlong	Effective Dialogue	De-Professionalization of Prof.	Selective Focus on Stu.	Collaboration	Shared Norms and Value	Openness to Improvement/Trust and Respect	Cognitive and 21st-Cent. Supportive Learning	Socialization	Time to Meet and Talk	Physical Flexibility	Interdependent Teacher	Teacher Empowerment	Trust and Respect
12000'S F 09 02	4	4	3	5	5	4	3	5	5	5	5	4	4
12000'S R 22 11	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	2	2
12000'S R 23 21	4	3	5	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	4	2	3
12001'S R 19 02	2	3	3	2	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3
12001'S F 28 22	4	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	4	4	4
12001'S R 24 22	3	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	3
12100'S F 10 02	4	2	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
12001'S R 07 14	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	1
12001'S F 20 02	2	2	3	4	3	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2

Appendix H
Pilot Survey #2

Appendix H: Pilot Survey #2

How do the teachers' perceptions of administrative support impact the effectiveness of the professional learning community?***Professional Learning Communities Survey**

This survey will help you think about and evaluate the extent to which each of the major factors associated with the professional learning community; critical elements, human resources, and structural conditions are currently present at your school. Please circle the response that you agree with most.

1.0 Critical Elements**1.1 Reflective Dialogue**

a. Faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

1.2 De-Privatization of Practice

b. Teachers share, observe, and discuss each other's teaching methods and philosophies.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

1.3 Collective Focus on Student Learning

c. Teachers assume that all students can learn at reasonably high levels and that teachers can help them

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

1.4 Collaboration

d. Teachers not only work together to develop shared understandings of students, curriculum and instructional policy, but also produce materials and activities that improve instruction, curriculum, and assessment

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

1.5 Shared Norms and Values

e. Through words and actions teachers affirm their common values concerning critical educational issues and support their collective focus on student learning

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

2.0 Human Resources

2.1 Openness to Improvement

a. Teachers take risks in trying new techniques and ideas and make efforts to learn more about their profession

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

2.2 Trust and Respect

b. Teachers feel honored for their expertise within the school as well as within the district, the parent community and other significant groups

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

2.3 Cognitive and Skill Base

c. Within the school there are formal methods for sharing expertise among faculty members so that marginal and ineffective teachers can improve.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

2.4 Supportive Leadership

d. The school leadership keeps the school focused on shared purpose, continuous improvement, and collaboration.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

2.5 Socialization

e. The staff imparts a sense that new teachers are an important and productive part of a meaningful school community

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

3.0 Structural Conditions

3.1 Time to Meet and Talk

a. There is a formal process that provides substantial and regularly scheduled blocks of time for educators to conduct on-going self-examination and self-renewal.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

3.2 Physical Proximity

b. Teachers have common spaces, rooms, or areas for discussion of educational practices

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

3.3 Interdependent Teaching Roles

c. There are recurring formal situations in which teachers work together (team teaching, integrated lessons etc.)

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

3.4 Communication Structures

d. There are structures and opportunities for an exchange of ideas, both within and across such organizational units as teams, grade levels, and subject departments

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

3.5 Teacher Empowerment and School Autonomy

e. Teachers have autonomy to make decisions regarding their work guided by the norms and beliefs of the professional community.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

***This survey is based on the article: Building Professional Communities in Schools by Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis and Anthony Bryk**

Appendix I
Responses to Pilot Survey #2

Appendix I: Responses to Pilot Survey 2

	Critical Elements					Human Resources					Structural Conditions				
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5
Charlie	4	2	3	3	2	3	2	3	3	4	2	3	3	2	3
Sandra *	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Larry	4	2	3	3	4	3	2	2	4	4	3	2	2	2	4
Sylvia	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	3
Rene **	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4
John	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
Avg Score	3.83	2.66	3.5	3.5	3.66	3.5	3.3	2.83	3.6	4	3.5	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.6

Appendix J

Profession Learning Community Survey

Appendix J: Professional Learning Communities Survey

This survey will help you think about and evaluate the extent to which each of the six essential criteria associated with an effective professional learning community based on an article: Building Professional Communities in Schools by Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis and Anthony Bryk* (shared vision and goals, collective responsibility, authentic assessment, self-directed reflection, stable setting and strong leadership support) are currently present at your school. Please circle the response that you agree with most.

Years in the teaching profession ____ **Years at the school site** ____

1.0 Shared vision and goals

a. Teachers work together to produce materials and activities that improve instruction, curriculum, and assessment.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

b. Teachers work together to develop shared understandings of students, curriculum and instructional policy.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

c. Terms (words) used by teachers affirm their common values concerning critical educational issues.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

d. Actions by teachers affirm their common values concerning their collective focus on student learning.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

2.0 Collective Responsibility

a. Teachers believe that all students can learn and successfully complete the A-G courses requirements, district high school graduation requirements and state mandated course requirements

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

b. Teachers help all students develop the critical thinking skills they need to successfully complete the A-G course requirements, district high school graduation requirements and state mandated course requirements.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

c. The staff imparts a sense that new teachers are an important and productive part of a meaningful school community

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

d. Teachers share, observe, and discuss each other's teaching methods and philosophies.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

3.0 Authentic Assessment

a. Teachers take risks in trying new techniques and ideas

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

b. Teachers make efforts to learn more about their profession

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

c. Teachers have autonomy to make decisions regarding their work

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

d. Teachers instructional decisions are guided by the norms and beliefs of the professional community.

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

4.0 Self-directed Reflection

a. Faculty/staff members talk with each other about their situations and the specific challenges they face

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

b. Teachers feel honored for their expertise within the school

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

c. Teachers feel honored for their expertise within the district

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

d. Teachers feel honored for their expertise within parent community and other significant groups

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

5.0 Stable Setting

a. There is a formal process that provides substantial and regularly scheduled blocks of time for educators to conduct on-going self-examination and self-renewal.

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

b. Teachers have common spaces, rooms, or areas for discussion of educational practices

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

c. There are recurring formal situations in which teachers work together (team teaching, integrated lessons etc.)

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

d. There are structures and opportunities for an exchange of ideas, both within and across such organizational units as teams, grade levels, and subject departments

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

6.0 Strong Leadership Support

a. The school leadership keeps the school focused on shared purpose

Not at All	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	2	3	4	5

b. The school leadership keeps the school focused on continuous improvement

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

c. The school leadership keeps the school focused on collaboration.

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

d. Within the school there are formal methods for sharing expertise among faculty members so that marginal and ineffective teachers can improve.

Not at All Rarely Sometimes Often Always

1 2 3 4 5

*Kruse, S., Seashore Louis, K., & Bryk, A. (2009). Building Professional Community in Schools. 13 Parameters: A Literacy Leadership Toolkit, Research Resource Book. Pearson Education Canada

Appendix K

Essential Criterion Chart for characteristics of PLCs with frequency

Mentioned in meetings

School One

Appendix K: Essential Criterion Chart

Characteristics of PLCs with frequency mentioned in meetings

School One

Six Characteristics of PLCs	Date	Date	Frequency
	May 17, 2016	May 24, 2016	Percentage
Shared vision/goals	23	15	40%
Collective Responsibility	8	8	16%
Authentic Assessment	5	5	11%
Self-Directed Reflection	6	4	11%
Stable Setting	3	6	09%
Strong Leadership	6	7	13%

Appendix L

Essential criterion chart for characteristics of PLCs with frequency

Mentioned in meetings

School Two

Appendix L: Essential Criterion Chart

Characteristics of PLCs with frequency mentioned in meetings

School Two

Six Characteristics of PLCs	Date	Date	Frequency
	May 5, 2016	May 6, 2016	Percentage
Shared vision/goals	8	3	26%
Collective Responsibility	7	9	38%
Authentic Assessment	0	3	07%
Self-Directed Reflection	0	0	0
Stable Setting	1	4	12%
Strong Leadership	6	1	17%

Appendix M

Semi Structured Interview Questions

Appendix M: Semi-Structured Interview

Teacher Perceptions on the Effect of Professional Learning Communities on Student Achievement

- Introduce myself
- Thank you for your willingness to participate in the interview.
- Purpose of the interview is to learn more about your perceptions of the effectiveness of professional learning communities on student achievement at your school.
- Please remember that your responses from this survey are confidential and your participation in this survey is voluntary.

Do you have any questions before we begin the interview? We will have 20 minutes to answer the interview questions. I will be audio recording the interviews. I will also be writing a brief answer to each question.

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your current position and responsibilities at your school. How long have you been a teacher at this school and the teaching profession in general?
2. Describe the time during the instructional day for you to collaborate with other teachers regarding student achievement.
 - How is the time spent?
 - What is discussed?
3. Has working with other teachers who teach the same subject as you had an effect on student learning?

4. How has collaboration developed between the magnet schools and/or the small learning communities as a result of the professional learning community process?
How so or how not – please explain:
5. Tell me how you as an individual teacher and as a member of your professional learning community assume responsibility for all students acquiring academic proficiency?
6. Tell me what each of the six essential criteria of an effective professional learning community looks like at your school: Please include in your discussion the advantages and/or disadvantages you encountered working within a professional learning community:
 - Shared vision and goals
 - Collective responsibility
 - Authentic assessment
 - Self-directed reflection
 - Stable setting
 - Strong leadership
7. In what ways do your school administrators support your efforts to improve student achievement? In what ways could they be more supportive of your efforts?
8. Discuss the impact that changes within the instructional staff and/or leadership team had on student learning?
9. Describe the type of support you receive from parents, the community and District offices to improve student achievement.

10. Discuss any changes you made to your instructional strategies as a result of working within a professional learning community and the impact the changes you made had on student learning.
11. When the idea of working with other teachers to improve student achievement was presented to you, what were your initial reactions?
12. Describe your impressions about working within a professional learning community now.

Appendix N

Summary of Interview Responses

Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High School

Comparison Chart

Appendix N: The Summary of Interview Results

Comparison of Teacher Interview Responses from Montrose High School and Sylvain Pilot High regarding the Six Essential Criteria of Professional Learning Communities

<p align="center">Montrose High School</p> <p align="center">Self-Directed Reflection</p>	<p align="center">Sylvain Pilot High School</p> <p align="center">Self-Directed Reflection</p>
<p>Mr. Green</p> <p>Impromptu meeting during the school day provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on their strategies and to share best practices with each other.</p>	<p>Mr. Kropps</p> <p>Collaboration does not occur on a daily basis. It happens during cycles of professional development meetings.</p>
<p>Ms. Rice</p> <p>Discussing our strengths and challenges with other teachers usually occurs in the hallway as we are passing. Self-directed reflection can improve instruction because it can enhance the services teachers provide to students. But there is not time to complete self-directed reflection formally at this school. At my other school we constantly looked at instructional strategies and brainstormed to help students learn</p>	<p>Self-directed reflection should happen within the group, not in isolation. But, sharing with other teachers may not be safe. Acknowledging that you are doing something wrong is ego deflating and can be discouraging. The school leader must create an environment where looking at yourself and sharing both strengths and weakness leads to growth. An atmosphere of safety and trust must be nurtured.</p> <p>Ms. Kant</p> <p>I co-teach. I always collaborate and try to</p>

Montrose, Continued	Sylvain, Continued
<p>more. I brought these strategies with me to this school. I always look to see how my instructional strategies impact student learning in my class.</p> <p>Mr. Lee</p> <p>Presently, I don't have much collaboration with my colleagues unless I run into someone in the copy room or signing in/out in the main office. There isn't time to collaborate because we have other duties.</p> <p>When we met in departmental PLCs we would discuss our strengths and challenges and share our best practices. I would look at each quiz to see how students were receiving material. I would make adjustments accordingly. I taught lessons assessing them with a rubric that the PLC group created and used the results to clear up student misconceptions. Student achievement was greater when teachers worked with PLC groups. Working in a PLC provided time for teachers to meet</p>	<p>see what is good for the students during class time as well as before and after class.</p> <p>Reflection does provide an opportunity to make improvements. As a result of self-directed reflection, I incorporated visual aids.</p> <p>Reed</p> <p>I collaborate with other teachers throughout the school day either inside the classroom or outside the classroom. I review student assignments. I am always making adjustments to my teaching strategies and I believe that it's important for every teacher to do so in order to meet the needs of the students. Working with other teachers also provides insight when I want to improve my teaching strategies to help struggling students increase their achievement.</p>

Montrose, Continued	Sylvain, Continued
<p>with colleagues. I've learned more from my peers than any instructor or book.</p>	
<hr/> <p>Shared Vision and Goals</p>	<hr/> <p>Shared Vision an Goals</p>
<p>Mr. Green</p>	<p>Mr. Kropps</p>
<p>We all want students to achieve. But we cannot assume that everyone who teaches on this campus is striving for the same goal</p>	<p>Allows us to move forward with a like mind, but it also stifles our individual creativity.</p>
<p>Ms. Rice</p>	<p>Ms. Kant</p>
<p>All the staff at the school shares values and goals theoretically. The STEMM goal is for all students to succeed and graduate</p>	<p>We are a linked learning school. The founding teachers agreed upon career pathways. All teachers work together to</p>
<p>We collaborate and share a common vision and goal: that all students can and will achieve.</p>	<p>make sure that students are matriculating through the career pathways. Sharing the same goals and values makes it easy to</p>
<p>Mr. Lee</p>	<p>introduce new techniques.</p>
<p>I don't believe that every teacher wants the same thing for every student. I believe the goal for every teacher in the math department is for students to increase their knowledge of mathematics</p>	<p>Mr. Reed</p> <p>We have a vision and a mission statement, but our vision and mission statements do not drive our professional development meetings.</p>

Montrose, Continued	Sylvain, Continued
<p data-bbox="396 415 734 447" style="text-align: center;">Collective Responsibility</p> <p data-bbox="284 485 818 957">Mr. Green - Cultural bias has prevented anyone from taking responsibility for leading teachers in this area. We began this school year focusing on the one thing we wanted to improve; however the administration wanted us to discuss other things.</p> <p data-bbox="284 999 402 1031">Ms. Rice</p> <p data-bbox="284 1073 805 1398">I don't see formal collaboration being developed. The two magnet schools and the two small learning communities continue to operate separate from each other.</p>	<p data-bbox="984 415 1321 447" style="text-align: center;">Collective Responsibility</p> <p data-bbox="870 485 1021 516">Mr. Kropps</p> <p data-bbox="870 558 1360 663">At this school all teachers assume responsibility for student achievement</p> <p data-bbox="870 705 992 737">Ms. Kant</p> <p data-bbox="870 779 1425 1251">The advantage of collective responsibility is that introducing new concepts for students to learn is easy because all teachers focus on the same concept in different classes. I find myself changing and adopting teaching styles to avoid negative judgment from student complaints</p> <p data-bbox="870 1293 1409 1472">I think new teachers to the pilot school need more collegial support. Everyone appears to be in agreement about changes.</p> <p data-bbox="886 1514 1417 1619">Outspoken teachers dominate discussions and it feels like they are imposing their</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Montrose, Continued</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sylvain, Continued</p> <p>ideas on other teachers who are penalized for not doing the work associated with their ideas</p> <p>Mr. Reed</p> <p>The staff takes responsibilities for the operations and the instruction at this school. We implement instructional strategies that help us to achieve new certifications.</p>
<p>Authentic Assessments</p> <p>Mr. Green</p> <p>Working with other teachers who teach the same subject as I teach has helped me to improve the achievement of students in my class. But there hasn't been enough time committed to this endeavor to make a big difference. I create my own assessments.</p> <p>Creating common assessments must be teacher driven if teachers are going to use</p>	<p>Authentic Assessments</p> <p>Mr. Kropps</p> <p>I create my own assessments so that I can identify and address student weakness.</p> <p>Ms. Kant</p> <p>I consult with the other math teacher at our school. At my previous school we worked in PLCs. The geometry teachers met regularly deciding on a topic and making handouts and assessments that we gave to</p>

Montrose, Continued	Sylvain, Continued
<p>them. Administration must support the assessments that teachers develop.</p>	<p>our students. We discussed the results; identifying common mistakes and common strategies to address the student needs.</p>
<p>Ms. Rice</p>	
<p>At the previous school where I taught for 15 years we created common assessments.</p>	<p>Teachers working together increased student achievement and provided an in</p>
<p>We trained together and borrowed best practices helping us to provide better</p>	<p>depth understanding of selected topics/concepts. I don't collaborate with</p>
<p>instruction. Currently, I work a little with another Spanish teacher sharing some of</p>	<p>other teachers at Sylvain Pilot High School because do we don't</p>
<p>the strategies I use. There is a tendency to do project based learning which is</p>	<p>teach the same math courses. However, when I worked at a comprehensive school</p>
<p>authentic, teachers are not collaboratively creating and implementing assessments</p>	<p>teachers met over the summer to plan for the upcoming school year.</p>
<p>Mr. Lee</p>	<p>We divided units and each teacher created</p>
<p>Ten years ago I was given a copy of the department assessment. Today, each</p>	<p>questions for the assessment. All our students took the same chapter test and the</p>
<p>teacher creates his/her own assessment</p>	<p>same final exam.</p>
<p>When we met with PLCs we developed common assessments and we continue to</p>	<p>Mr. Reed</p>
<p>use those assessments in our small learning communities. We review the student</p>	<p>Working with other teachers who teach the same subject as I has positively affected student learning.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Montrose, Continued</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sylvain, Continued</p>
<p>outcomes on the assessments and make changes that improve student achievement.</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Stable Setting</p> <p>Mr. Green</p> <p>In my classes there were less fails. I believe it is due to a stable department staff that met and discussed student achievement.</p> <p>Ms. Rice</p> <p>Our core content teachers remain the same year after year, so we are able to accomplish our long-term goals.</p> <p>Mr. Lee</p> <p>New common core standards have caused flux. There is no department final exam. Some mathematic concepts are being covered and some are not. We do not have a stable setting at Montrose High School.</p>	<hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Stable Setting</p> <p>Mr. Kropps</p> <p>If defined as consistency, the only stability at Sylvain Pilot High School is flux. Instead of new programs Sylvain needs to focus on students.</p> <p>Ms. Kant</p> <p>Although we have time built into the instructional schedule we do not always devote this time to the discussion of student and teacher achievement and improvement</p> <p>Student learning is disrupted when there are changes in the instructional team.</p> <p>New teachers need to be informed of the procedures and practices</p> <p>The same groups of students have different teachers and counseling each year.</p> <p>Students compare the teachers either with</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Montrose, Continued</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Sylvain, Continued</p> <p>blame or praise which makes it difficult for the new teacher.</p> <p>Mr. Reed</p> <p>Our setting is not very stable.</p> <p>The instructional and support staff are displaced annually sometimes during the school year. Different teachers have different methods of teaching. One student was distraught because she earned an A from the first teacher and a D from the second teacher.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Strong Leadership</p> <p>Mr. Green</p> <p>Sometimes the administration is overbearing. They come into our meetings with personal agendas. It would help if they were more in tune with what teachers deal with. The leadership doesn't look at what teachers are doing, they reason that what we do is not good and give us books</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Strong Leadership</p> <p>Mr. Kropps</p> <p>A strong leader can unify the school, but under a weak leader the school can dissolve into chaos. Although we meet almost four hours a week we don't know what's going on. The administrators need to be supportive to new teachers to the pilot school environment and to the district.</p>

Montrose, Continued	Sylvain, Continued
<p>to read and request that we do things the way the book outlines. We've lost staff that accused the principal of bullying them.</p> <p>We need more support for teacher created authentic assessments. The principal is very dismissive of teacher recommendations. Student needs are not being addressed.</p>	<p>Ms. Kant</p> <p>In a pilot school the teachers make executive decisions that are not always in the best interest of the students. A strong leadership helps the teachers that are not successful without punitive measures.</p> <p>Right now the administration doesn't do anything to support the teachers efforts to improve student achievement</p>
<p>Ms. Rice</p> <p>Leadership is shared between a couple of teachers in biomedicine and engineering</p> <p>The leadership doesn't encourage differences in opinions. The leadership supports the department and the professional learning community.</p> <p>We need more support in addressing the needs of learning disabled students.</p> <p>We need more common planning time.</p>	<p>Mr. Reed</p> <p>Many opinions that drive our instructors who will go to any length to educate the students. Lead teachers select the principal whom I believe limits the authority that the principal exercises.</p>
<p>Mr. Lee</p> <p>We function well without a strong leader.</p> <p>Each teacher is his/her own leader</p>	

Montrose, Continued	Sylvain, Continued
<p data-bbox="284 415 617 447">My perceptions of PLCs</p> <p data-bbox="284 485 418 516">Mr. Green</p> <p data-bbox="284 558 836 1766">I learn more from informal conversation than from structured or formal mandated conversations. Over the last few years receiving pay to attend PLC meetings that were dominated by one or two persons was not beneficial. If PLCs are going to work there must be more meeting norms. We produced some decent products but it took over three months to develop one essay question. PLCs are worthwhile but they need to be more structured. We need structured time during the instructional day to meet, if PLCs will work and PLCs must be teacher driven. Completing the PLC within small learning or magnet schools that share the same campus does not unify the different small schools. Each small</p>	<p data-bbox="868 415 1201 447">My perceptions of PLCs</p> <p data-bbox="868 485 1019 516">Mr. Kropps</p> <p data-bbox="868 558 1409 1325">I was excited, about the idea of working within a PLC, but when I found that nothing was different, I was disappointed. After the initial camaraderie teachers retreated into their individual classes. A professional learning community requires a delicate balance. When all essential criteria are implemented teachers and students thrive. If any element is missing there is a domino effect and things go down quickly.</p> <p data-bbox="868 1367 992 1398">Ms. Kant</p> <p data-bbox="868 1440 1414 1766">I like the idea of working with other teachers; one mind is good, two minds are better. Minds working together can put their best together to help improve student achievement and help students be</p>

Montrose, Continued	Sylvain, Continued
<p>learning community continues to operate within a vacuum.</p> <p>Ms. Rice</p> <p>Initially I wondered when is there time to meet within a PLC? I do believe that working with other teachers to improve student achievement is the best strategy available. At the other school where I taught we worked in department PLCs. The PLC at the other school was very strong with lots of collaboration, common assessments, and common strategies. I don't see formal collaboration being developed at Montrose High School. The small learning communities continue to operate separately from each other.</p>	<p>successful.</p> <p>Mr. Reed</p> <p>I was elated when presented with the idea of working with other teachers. I welcome the opportunity to work with other teachers. I think that feedback and sharing ideas promotes teaching effectiveness.</p> <p>When teachers collaborate, they build a sense of community taking steps that help them accomplish their goals. At this school I don't feel stagnant. I am constantly learning and I am better prepared to meet the needs of students because I meet and discuss ways to help the students with my colleagues.</p>

Appendix O

EVIDENCE TABLE PLCs WORK

Appendix O: Evidence Table: PLCs Work

School Name	Location
Adlai Stevenson High School	Illinois
Albemarle High School	Virginia
Arlington High School	Washington
Baldwin Park High School	California
Bayside High School	Florida
Bloomington High School South	Indiana
Blue Valley High School	Kansas
Blue Valley Northwest High School	Kansas
Centennial High School	Virginia
Centerville High School	Virginia
Chapman High School	Kansas
Chardon High School	Ohio
Cinco Ranch High School	Iowa
Clinton High School	Iowa
Denver Secondary School	Iowa
Dublin Jerome High School	Ohio
Eastview High School	Minnesota
Edgewood Jr/Sr High School	Florida
Evansville Central High School	Indiana
Fairdale High School	Kentucky
Fern Creek High School	Kentucky
Francis Howell High School	Kentucky
Germantown High School	Tennessee
Hallsville High School	Texas
Health Sciences High and Middle College	California
Jakarta Intercultural School (High School)	Indonesia
James Bowie High school	Texas
James Madison High School	Virginia
Klein Oak High School	Philadelphia
Lafayette High School	Missouri
Lower Merion High School	Philadelphia
Metro Tech High School	Arizona
Minot High School Central Campus	North Dakota
Mission Secondary	British Columbia
Montezuma High School	Iowa
Papillion-La Vista South High school	Nebraska
Plattsburg High School	Missouri
Riverside Brookfield High School	Illinois
Rutland High School	Vermont
Name of School	Location

San Clemente High School	California
Sanger High School	California
Satellite High School	Florida
Seneca High School	Kentucky
Singapore America School High School Division	Singapore
Solon High School	Iowa
South Kamloops Secondary	British Columbia
Southmoreland High School	Pennsylvania
Taroona High School	Tasmania
U.S. Grant High School	Oklahoma
White Pine High School	Nevada
White River High School	Nevada
Whittier Union High School	California