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Characteristics Of School Success As Identified By School Leaders

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CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS AS IDENTIFIED BY SCHOOL LEADERS

by

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Dave Wheeler
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To my wife Carol – thank you for 36+ years of trust and faith. I haven't always made our life easy with decisions to chase dreams and change the course of our lives, but your trust and faith in me has allowed me to find my way and fall in love with the work of education and the value of continuing to grow myself. We started with little to nothing, and with your leadership, we built a family and a relationship that few people could ever have. You're my best friend and my soulmate. Thank you for loving me and supporting me for all these years. I love you!

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how school leaders in the state of North Dakota define success in their schools or districts without using test scores as a measurement. The information shared by these school leaders will be shared with other school leaders in North Dakota with the intent that test data becomes less of a driving force in schools and student engagement, while positive climate and culture become more emphasized for school and district leadership.

This study's purpose was to diminish the emphasis on state assessment as a singular resource that defines success in schools. Communities, staff members, and students should see their schools defined as successful because of what happens in the building daily rather than just the two weeks in the spring where assessment becomes the focus. While the federal legislation Every Student Succeeds Act mandates annual state assessment (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2015, p. 1826), this research focused on the daily work of school leaders and staff to prepare students for their future in society, including an emphasis on student engagement activities in K-12 schools in North Dakota. This study explored ways that school and district leaders strive to create a climate and culture that focuses on three aspects: (a) emotional safety and well-being for students and staff, (b) teaching and learning that create opportunities for collaboration among students, staff, and administration, and (c) the opportunity for students to consider and explore post-high school endeavors.

This study consisted of three focus groups composed of elementary principals, high school principals, and superintendents from schools across the state of North Dakota. The focus groups included leaders from school districts of various sizes of enrollment and various geographical locations.

The results of this study presented multiple examples from school and district leaders of different enrollments and geographic locations in North Dakota. These examples emphasized that student engagement is clearly a focus of instruction and formation in elementary and secondary schools. The results of this study also showed how a positive climate and culture among students and staff significantly impacts the day-to-day operations of schools and school districts within the state of North Dakota.

Keywords: Student engagement, climate, culture, career readiness, hands on activities, collaboration

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the educational system in North Dakota, according to Article VIII of the Constitution of North Dakota, is to preserve democratic government, provide for the "prosperity and happiness" of the people, and require students to have "a high degree of intelligence, patriotism, integrity, and morality" (North Dakota Legislative Branch, n.d., p.1). It is the responsibility of educators to uphold these values while recognizing that the educational system and its stakeholders continue to change. Preparing students to be prosperous and fulfilled citizens in a world that is ever-changing means that educational systems must also evolve to meet those changing needs.

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002) federal legislation passed on January 8, 2002, public schools have been held to a standard set by the federal government for proficiency scores in reading and math. For many years, schools were defined as successful or unsuccessful based on this limited information essentially ignoring several other ways schools strive for excellence.

The passing of Every Student Succeeds Act (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2015) in 2015 caused several changes in education law. It allowed states some flexibility in writing their own goals. The law addressed accommodations for students on 504 plans and Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Broader school accountability was one of the most significant changes caused by ESSA. While four academic factors must exist (reading and math

test scores, English-language proficiency test scores, high school graduation rates, and a state-chosen academic measure for grade schools and middle schools), school districts can add school quality as a fifth measure. The school quality factor could include kindergarten readiness, access to and completion of advanced coursework, college readiness, school climate and safety, and chronic absenteeism (ESSA, 2015, p. 1836).

Statement of the Problem

Standardized testing has come to dominate our views and opinions on the overall success of schools in our country. From kindergarten until high school graduation, students' reading and math skills are assessed, monitored, and ranked by percentiles based on age and grade. School leaders use factors other than test scores to assess success in their buildings and districts. This research study sought a variety of practices that are used to define schools as successful without considering test scores.

Need for the Study

This study examined a variety of resources used by school and district leaders to define school and district success. While test scores are still part of the data accumulated by the state, student engagement, climate, and culture are also important variables that can be used to define success. This research focused on those specific areas. Many practices regarding student engagement have been conducted in districts across the state, including a survey given by the state of North Dakota. Climate and culture can be changed by addressing several aspects of a school or district including: (a) school safety, (b) staff and student emotional support measures, (c) increase in collaboration among staff members, and (d) maintaining the resources of Response to Intervention (RTI)/Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) in order to support student growth. Social-emotional learning and college/career readiness are more recently

emphasized in K-12 public education. As a result, schools are designing plans that fit the needs of the students in their community.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to collect information shared by school and district leaders throughout North Dakota regarding the practices they use to foster successful schools without referring to state test scores. Focus groups included elementary principals, high school principals, and district superintendents from various enrollment sizes and different geographic locations throughout North Dakota. These groups used the platform Zoom, an online video conferencing platform, as a means to discuss what practices they have put in place to achieve school success. This study intended to give school leaders a voice regarding the evolution of school environment since the advent of standardized testing, specifically how student engagement and climate/culture have become more focal since the passing of ESSA. Although the state legislators have no control over NCLB and ESSA, some North Dakota school districts have shifted the focus from strictly standardized testing to the how and why of student learning.

The information obtained from the focus groups may be shared with all North Dakota school and district administrators, as well as the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), North Dakota School Boards Association (NDSBA), North Dakota Council Educational Leaders (NDCEL), and Educational Standards and Practices Board (ESPB).

Approach to the Study

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach. Focus group interviews with elementary principals, high school principals, and district superintendents from across the state of North Dakota were conducted in order to gather qualitative evidence specific to their district and their school. This study addressed one research question which is explored in

existing literature in Chapter II. The following chapters present the details of the qualitative research and results regarding how school leaders in North Dakota define success in their school and districts.

Over the last 10 years, the North Dakota legislative body has more than doubled its financial contribution to K-12 public education. According to Insights.nd.gov (2021), the average per pupil spending in the state of North Dakota for the 2017-18 school year was $11,606. That number increased to $11,837 for the 2018-19 school year. In the most recent data, North Dakota's standardized testing for ELA (reading and writing) has declined from 48% proficient to 42% proficient. Since 2019, math scores have declined from 45% proficient to 38% proficient in 2020-21. While the COVID-19 pandemic certainly must be considered for the decline in these scores, the per pupil funds are not assisting with academic growth when less than 50% of students are not proficient in ELA and math, two of the most important areas of academic assessment.

In this study, the qualitative research conducted through focus group interviews allowed administrators working in North Dakota K-12 schools to share the practices of their districts and their schools. They revealed similarities and differences that exist between schools of all sizes and geographic areas of the state. Superintendents, principals, and teachers acknowledge school success and student success differently. The focus group interviews allowed a variety of educators to share their voices with other administrators throughout the state.

This study focused on practices conducted in North Dakota schools regarding student engagement and climate/culture. The intention of this study was to create information for school districts that emphasizes student engagement and climate/culture in North Dakota schools. The literature presented in Chapter II reveals that emphasizing student engagement and

climate/culture can produce academic success for students. Insights.nd.gov (2021) shows that student engagement in the state of North Dakota has declined from 51% in 2018-19 to 44% in 2020-21. School and district administrators sharing their practices for attaining positive student engagement and climate/culture could improve student engagement data for the state of North Dakota. In turn, the hope is that improvement in student engagement data could produce better assessment data due to an increase in these positive practices.

The qualitative research allows those working in schools to develop a plan for better utilizing their finances which mostly comes from the state of North Dakota and the legislative body. Money currently spent on interim assessments to prep students for the larger assessment in the spring could be reallocated to focus on student engagement strategies or strategies to enhance the culture and climate of a school and/or district.

Research Question

Based on the intent of this study, the following research question was generated:

1. What are the characteristics of school success as identified by school leaders?

Conceptual Framework

Crotty (1998) defines constructionism as "the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context" (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). This research study was conducted upon the premise of this definition of constructionism.

Constructionism claims that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). The theory of constructionism rests on two main principles. First, knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the

cognizing subject (the learner), and secondly, knowing is active, individual, and personal. Constructionism is based on previously constructed knowledge (Pardjono, 2016, p. 172), and it is a process of building up structures of interpreted experience. Learners do not transfer knowledge from the external world into their memories as in traditional views; they create interpretations of the world based upon their experiences and their interactions in the world (Pardjono, 2016, p. 172). These theories of learning do not align with how standardized assessment are used in schools, in North Dakota or nationally. While schools have transitioned to a more standard-based curriculum while placing high expectations on learning from grade to grade, it is unrealistic to conduct assessments with the expectation that all children will learn successfully at each independent grade.

Crotty (1998) uses the term "reality" when referring to constructionism, stating how different cultures understand various phenomena (learning) differently (p. 47). The idea that a score defines "proficiency" for all third grade students in all schools across even one school district, regardless of any cultural differences that exist within the student body, is unrealistic and unfair. Defining student and school success with one standardized score does not seem reasonable. If learning is truly active, individual, and personal as constructionism states (Crotty, 1998), one standardized test score cannot produce sufficient information specific to overall student learning and success.

Research suggests that many teachers teach the way they were taught (Wilkes, 2019, p. 36), meaning teachers tend to teach according to how they were taught in their education programs in college. The developmental constructivist model includes a lot of direct instruction in theory and practice but very little opportunity for inquiry, discovery, or self-examination (Abdal-Haqq, 1998, p. 4). In order for the next generation of teachers to implement the practices

that define constructivism in the classroom, it is important that teacher education programs give pre-teachers opportunities to learn in the manner of inquiry, discovery, and self-examination, as well as problem solving and collaboration (Abdal-Haqq, 1998, p. 2). These activities are the norm in the constructivist theory but are not common in classrooms throughout K-12 education. Instructing pre-service teachers using these tools could normalize teaching practices that are consistent with the constructivism theory.

The constructivism theory is consistent with Piaget's belief that students come to school with ideas, beliefs, and opinions, and the role of the teacher is to alter or modify those components through tasks or questions that create dilemmas or force children to rethink what it is they thought they already knew (Abdal-Haqq, 1998, p. 3). Piaget stated that children construct knowledge out of their actions with the environment (Harlow et al., 2007, p. 45). The actions can be physical (changing an object) or cerebral (refining what is already known). Piaget thought that new knowledge could only be constructed when a learner is challenged with external experiences that could not be assimilated into prior knowledge (Harlow et al., 2007, p. 45). Teaching memorization instead of relating curricula to real-life situations could be a sign that students are not being taught in a way that leads to potentially greater engagement and success. Conversations among educators often center around the need for 21st century skills to be more of a focus within teaching, which is consistent with Piaget's belief regarding external experiences specific to learning. If standardized tests are used as a barometer for student and school success, perhaps those assessments should be less focused on memorized academic content and more focused on the application of academic content specific to real-world life. This is supported by Piaget who believes that learning that happens in the classroom should translate to skills being applied in real-life situations (Harlow et al., 2007, p. 45).

According to Williams (2017), John Dewey's idea of "progressive education" confirmed this belief by stating that education should include socially engaging learning experiences that are developmentally appropriate for the students' ages (p. 92). A typical Dewey classroom looked vastly different from the modern-day classroom where standardized content at each grade level is the focus of education. Dewey's classrooms suggested that students learning by doing and a hands-on approach to problem solving would be the norm (Williams, 2017, p. 93).

Piaget's assimilated experience of learning, which consists of allowing students to absorb learning and apply it to real-life situations, has diminished (Harlow et al., 2007). Instead, present day educators teach standards-based curricula that heavily focus on what the students need to know in order to score well on a state assessment year after year. Learning is often centered around memorization of information instead of using prior experience or life experience in the learning process as supported by the theory of constructionism, which supports culture and prior experience as key pieces tied to student learning. Cultural experiences should be incorporated into student learning so that the "one size fits all" mentality can be diminished for student learning and success.

In his book *Drive*, Pink (2011) discussed three key intrinsic motivational tools that stimulate employees in the 21st century. The first tool is autonomy, which is defined as "acting with choice" (Pink, 2011, p. 90). Giving students and staff more choice in course work or professional growth would be examples of autonomy in the K-12 education setting. The second intrinsic tool is mastery, which is defined as "the desire to get better at something that matters" (Pink, 2011, p. 111). Regarding this definition of mastery, some questions could be asked: In school today, does the work given to students matter to them? If not, does this cause an increase or decrease in student engagement? What could be done within education to create that sense of

mastery for students? Finally, the third tool is purpose which centers around how motivated and productive people "hitch their desires to a cause that is larger than themselves" (Pink, 2011, p. 133). The learning process should focus on the "big picture" rather than just the diploma students receive after thirteen years of school.

The three elements of autonomy, mastery, and purpose (Pink, 2011) shed light on student learning and the effect of standards-based learning models on students and schools in 2021. Some of the focus group interview questions included how administrators give voice and choice to staff and the student body. Appendix A and Appendix B include questions that superintendents and principals can use to encourage discussions regarding the significant focus on standardized testing versus the trivial focus on student engagement and school climate/culture.

Assumptions

This research study was conducted exclusively with North Dakota superintendents and building principals from a variety of elementary schools and high schools throughout the state. The study focused on the topics of student engagement and climate/culture. The research study only focused on public education within the state of North Dakota. It is assumed that all respondents answered honestly when responding to qualitative questions.

Definitions and Acronyms

- *Administrator* – An individual who holds an administrator's credential and who is employed by the board of a school district for the primary purpose of providing administrative services to the schools of the district according to North Dakota Century Code 15.1-13 (State of North Dakota, 2012)

- *Education Policy Committee* – a committee of the North Dakota legislature tasked with reviewing educational policy at the state level
- *Elementary School* – Education building containing students in Kindergarten-Grade 5
- *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* – Federal legislation signed into law in 2015 that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2015)
- *Interim Assessments* – Assessments conducted throughout the academic year to gauge students' academic abilities in Grades 2-10
- *Middle School* – Education building containing students in Grades 6-8
- *Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS)* – A framework for providing support to students who show a deficiency in reading or math that is structured to get them to grade level skills
- *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* – Federal law that supports standard-based education reform. It is based on the premise that high standards and measurable goals can improve education in the United States. (NCLB, 2002)
- *North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA)* – An academic assessment conducted each spring for Grades 3-8 and Grade 10 or 11 in all public schools in North Dakota
- *North Dakota Century Code (NDCC)* – North Dakota state laws
- *North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI)* – The agency that oversees public instruction in North Dakota
- *NWEA/MAP* – An interim assessment tool given by many school districts within the state of North Dakota

- *Response to Intervention (RTI)* – A system of interventions designed to support struggling learners with specific academic and behavior skills when they are defined as performing below grade level
- *Secondary School* – Education building containing students in Grades 9-12
- *STAR* – An interim assessment tool given by many school districts within the state of North Dakota
- *Statute* – A written law
- *Student* – A person who is studying at a public, Preschool-12th Grade school
- *Student Achievement* – The measurement of what a student has learned during the course of a school year by the administration of standardized tests
- *Summative Assessments* – Assessments mandated by Federal Law such as the North Dakota State Assessment, National Assessment of Educational Progress, and American College Test
- *Teacher* – An individual who teaches in a public, Preschool-12th Grade school

Researcher's Background

The researcher graduated from Mayville State University with a bachelor's degree in education in 1988. He worked as a substitute teacher and coach in Fertile, MN, for three years before starting graduate school at the University of North Dakota in the fall of 1992. In the fall of 1994, the researcher accepted a teaching and coaching position in Lakota, ND, for three years. In the spring of 1997, he accepted the head men's basketball coaching position at Lake Region State College in Devils Lake, ND. He taught in the HPER department and coached the golf team as well. In the summer of 2000, the researcher started his education for a master's degree at UND in Education Leadership. In the summer of 2001, he accepted a position in Larimore, ND,

and taught and coached for the next six years. The researcher graduated from UND with a master's degree in the spring of 2004. In the spring of 2007, he accepted the principal position at Larimore High School and served as the principal for seven years. In 2014, the researcher was named North Dakota High School Principal of the Year. In the spring of 2014, he accepted the elementary principal position at Thompson Public School in Thompson, ND. In 2020, the researcher finished his sixth year in that role and accepted the superintendent position with Manvel Public School in Manvel, ND. At the time of this study, he was in his second year in that position.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provided the background and history of the problem, need for the study, purpose of the study, and conceptual framework. It also presented the research question, assumptions, definitions and acronyms, and the researcher's background. Chapter II consists of a review of literature related to the topic. Chapter III outlines the methodology used in the study. Chapter IV includes data results. Chapter V includes an interpretation of the finds, recommendations for future research, implications, and a conclusion.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to share the characteristics that school leaders use to define their districts or their schools as successful. Student engagement and then climate/culture within successful schools are discussed. Regarding student engagement, the research focuses on real-life learning activities, increased student motivation, and extra-curricular activities supporting student engagement. Regarding climate and culture, the research explores school safety, relationships, teaching and learning, the environment of the building(s), and the process of school improvement. Research on interim assessment is also included in Chapter II.

Further, characteristics of leadership within schools defined as successful is discussed. Additionally, this review explores the use of interim assessments within schools and how they are used to enhance intervention for struggling students. Finally, how schools use that growth indicator with their at-risk students to identify themselves as successful is explored. Additional information includes how interventions have grown within the K-12 education regarding testing.

Student Engagement

For the purpose of this literature review, Trowler's (2010) definition of student engagement is used:

> "Student engagement is the investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and

enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution." (p. 2)

This definition includes engagement with students, as well as engagement with school staff.

Consistent with this definition of student engagement, John Dewey believed that schools and classrooms should be representative of real-life situations which allow children to participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings (Williams, 2017, p. 92). While the term "engagement" was not used by Dewey, this definition fits naturally with teaching and learning that gives the student more control with their learning. However, in an age when standardized tests and school accountability are headlines in the news, educators are frequently stripped of their freedom to think for themselves, make professional judgments, and teach in ways that they consider are in the best interest of the students (Simpson & Jackson, 2003, p. 23).

Leonard's (2008) research is one of the first works that asserts that engagement matters in student learning. Through Leonard's research with middle school students' cognitive (effort) and psychological (flow) engagement, as well as math and reading scores, there was a significant relationship, greater than .05, between both forms of engagement and higher test scores in math and reading (Leonard, 2008, p. 40).

In Francis's (2017) research regarding student motivation, motivation and engagement can be defined in a similar manner, particularly regarding technology use in schools. In a question specific to how motivated students were when teachers utilized technology in the classroom, 73 out of 95 student responses were "very motivated" or "motivated" (Francis, 2017, p. 41). This response shows that when students are that motivated by technology, there is a higher probability that effective learning can occur, based on Leonard's (2008) research.

A detailed study by Lawson and Lawson (2020) on student engagement focused on high school students and their engagement in school and community-based extracurricular activities (ECAs) (p. 1). Lawson and Lawson (2020) found that student engagement-related dispositions or mentality affected their behavioral engagement in home, school, and community activities. Students were recruited into the educational longitudinal study (ELS) sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics. Data from 2002 was used to estimate behavioral engagement and engagement disposition profile models. Data was also collected from this same group in 2004 to analyze predictors of student membership in each behavioral profile group (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 8). From this point, the authors organized three conceptual groups based on the variables shared in the study. The first group consisted of items that measured student engagement in school-sponsored ECAs like sports, clubs, the arts, and community service (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 9). The second group included items that measured the intensity of student behavioral engagement in constructive and relaxed leisure activities at school, home, and the community (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 9). The third group included items that were indicators of student conduct like attendance, suspensions, or skipping class (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 9). From these three groups, the authors chose to create seven classes as the best model for classifying students' behavioral engagement (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 12). Those seven classes were: (a) student-athletes, (b) school-engaged, (c) multi-taskers, (d) troubled athletes, (e) homebodies, (f) non-involved, and (g) disaffected (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 14-15).

Four primary conclusions resulted from this research:

1) For many students, participation does not automatically lead to academic engagement or identification;

2) Student participation in ECAs all but eliminates the probability of school dis-identification, defined in this study as students who appeared cognitively and affectively detached from their current or future educational needs (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 6);
3) Although student participation in ECAs may not be by itself sufficient for academic identification, defined in this study as a student's perceptions of school belonging and a student's affective value of learning (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 4), it may act as a critical safeguard against the problems associated with disengagement like dropping out or other social withdrawal. While behavioral difficulty all but eliminates the prospect of academic engagement and identification, it seldom leads to school dis-identification. A large majority of disaffected students and troubled athletes belong to a disposition group other than the dis-identification class (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 23); and
4) With only a few exceptions, academic identification operates in synergy with participation. The data indicated that 83% of those in the academic initiative class belonged to a behavioral class characterized by participation in school-based ECAs (Lawson & Lawson, 2020, p. 24).

During the 2017-18 school year, while following the language in the consolidated application of ESSA required by the federal government, the state of North Dakota partnered with Cognia (AdvancEd) to establish a student engagement survey intended for all Grades 3-12 students in the fall of each school year (Baesler, 2018, p 47). The survey measures three indicators of student engagement. The first indicator is "Committed" which describes a student who willingly pursues a path to get the reward offered or designed. This indicator is also known

as authentic engagement. With the second indicator, which is “Compliant,” the student spends only as much time, energy, and resources as are required to get the reward offered or designed. The student is attentive to the task because they perceive the receipt of some desired extrinsic reward which is conditionally available to those who pay attention to the task and do what is required of them. As well, the student only accomplishes the specific tasks that must be done and does little or nothing outside the context of direct supervision by the teacher. The third indictor is “Disengaged.” In this case, the student does nothing and when forced through direct supervision to do the task, the student either engages in compliance or rebellion. The student employs strategies to conceal their lack of involvement, or the student overtly refuses to comply with the requirement of the task (e.g., cheating, refusing to do the work, or even doing other work in place of what is expected) (ND Insights, 2021).

According to the data collected in 2017-18 and 2018-19, the overall percentage of students who were “Committed” fell from 54% to 51%. The overall percentage of students who were “Compliant” rose from 30% to 31%, and the overall percentage of students who were “Disengaged” rose from 13% to 15% (ND Insights, 2021). The most recent survey data shows that the overall percentage of students who were “Committed” fell from 52% in 2019-20 to 44% in 2020-21. The overall percentage of students who were “Compliant” rose from 31% in 2019-20 to 43% in 2020-21. The overall percentage of students who were “Disengaged” fell from 15% in 2019-20 to 13% in 2020-21.

School Climate/Culture

School climate is a fluid concept, and there is not one clear definition of it in education. In 1978, Brookhaver stated that the greatest indicator of student achievement is the way students feel within themselves about the social environment in their school (Zullig et al., 2010, p. 140).

In 1995, research was conducted regarding school climate in individual classrooms versus entire buildings. The research concluded that students who spent most of their day in one single room would place an emphasis on the climate within that room and those who transitioned from room to room throughout the day, a middle school or high school student perhaps, would put more emphasis on the climate of the entire building (Zullig et al., 2010, p. 140).

In their research study, Moeller et al. (2020) reported that of the 21,000 students they surveyed, 75% reported negative feelings about school (p. 2). Just under 50% of the students labeled themselves as stressed (Moeller et al., 2020, p. 2). In Shah et al.'s (2018) research, 6,200 students were studied by the University of Michigan to gauge their level of curiosity and found that those students who asked the most questions performed the best (Shah et al., 2018, p. 383).

In August of 2012, the National School Climate Center published their School Climate Research Survey. Five essential areas of focus were discussed regarding school climate: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and the processes of school improvement (Thapa et al., 2012, p. 3). These components are discussed in this study regarding the importance of climate/culture in schools.

Safety

North Dakota Century Code 15.1-19-17 (State of North Dakota, 2012) defines bullying as:

> "(a) Conduct that occurs in a public school, on school district premises, in a district owned or leased school bus or school vehicle, or at any public school or school district sanctioned or sponsored activity or event and which:
>
> i. Is so severe, pervasive, or objectively offensive that it substantially interferes with the student's educational opportunities;

ii. Places the student in actual and reasonable fear of harm;

iii. Places the student in actual and reasonable fear of damage to property of the student; or

iv. Substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the public school; or

(b) Conduct received by a student while the student is in a public school, on school district premises, in a district owned or leased school bus or school vehicle, or at any public school or school district sanctioned or sponsored activity or event and which:

i. Is so severe, pervasive, or objectively offensive that it substantially interferes with the student's educational opportunities;

ii. Places the student in actual and reasonable fear of harm;

iii. Places the student in actual and reasonable fear of damage to property of the student; or

iv. Substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the public school; or

(c) Conduct received or sent by a student through the use of an electronic device while the student is outside a public school, off school district premises, and off school district owned or leased property and which:

i. Places the student in actual and reasonable fear of:

1. Harm; or

2. Damage to property of the student; and

iii. Is so severe, pervasive, or objectively offensive the conduct substantially interferes with the student's educational opportunities or substantially disrupts the orderly operation of the public school.

Conduct' includes the use of technology or other electronic media (e.g. cyberbullying)." (p. 5)

Making sure students feel safe is a priority in all schools. All 50 states have anti-bullying laws in order to protect students from physical and emotional harm. School climate is, at its core, about healthy, positive, and connected relationships (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013, p. 2).

As bullying prevention laws have emerged over the years, commercial bullying prevention programs have also become an important commodity for school districts across the country. These resources are meant to help teachers and staff deliver lessons on the physical and emotional harm that bullying inflicts on young people. However, these resources are worthless in eliminating or preventing bullying if the culture of the school itself is not constructed to promote positive relationships and eliminate mean-spirited behaviors (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013, p. 2). Cohen and Freiberg (2013) list certain elements that are necessary within the climate or culture of a school to prevent bullying behaviors.

First, the educational leaders of any district or school need to lead and execute the improvement plans within the district. The commitment to creating a culture that is free of bullying behaviors and creating and maintaining a safe and supportive culture that is respectful of all children and adults is an absolute necessity for making learning and social development a priority (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013, p. 2).

Secondly, creating a culture where safety and student learning is a priority needs to involve the students, parents, school personnel, and members of the community. When any of those constituents are disengaged from creating a safe and collaborative school environment, unacceptable behavior will persist (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013, p. 3).

Assessment is important to gauge engagement of the strategies being utilized within the school or district. Cohen and Freiberg (2013) recommend assessment at three levels:

1) Readiness assessments that support school leaders to determine how ready they are to start a school wide reform effort that addresses a safe and collaborative culture;
2) Comprehensive school climate assessments; and
3) More targeted bully-victim-witness assessments led by students participating in the process. (p. 3)

According to Cohen and Freiberg (2013), there are three essential aspects of day-to-day practice that support effective bully prevention efforts and school climate reform:

1) Creating and sustaining a school wide set of strategies designed to promote a safe, supportive prosocial-informed climate of social responsibility where students and adults think about "what is the right thing to do";
2) Integrating and sustaining quality teaching and learning. Promoting a prosocial theme in any school can be done using character education themes, social emotional learning, and promoting mental health efforts with students and with staff; and
3) Focus on one-on-one/relational practices. Educational leaders need to think about: (a) how to support educators while understanding how to respond to a perpetrator or target situation in a moment's notice, (b) how school leaders can support more effective mental health partnerships between teachers and parents, and (c) how educators and staff greet and treat one another every day in the building. (p. 3-4)

Relationships

Students effectively learn and are happier in school when they believe that their teachers care about them. Additionally, when students believe their class peers support their learning, they

perform better (Louis & Murphy, n.d., p. 1). Positive human interaction should be the foundation of teaching and learning in a school setting.

According to Ross and Cozzens (2016), two forms of relationships exist in schools, and both are important to creating a culture of success. The first relationship is the Principal-Teacher Relationship, and the other is Teacher-Student Relationship. The effect that school principals have on student academic achievement seems to be linked to the relationship they foster with school staff (Ross & Cozzens, 2016, p. 164). Ross and Cozzens studied the extent of teachers' perceptions of principal leadership behaviors using Green's 13 core competencies: assessment, collaboration, curriculum/instruction, diversity, inquiry, instructional leadership, learning community, organizational management, professional development, professionalism, reflection, unity of purpose, and visionary leadership (Ross & Cozzens, 2016, p. 164). Using Green's 13 core competencies, researchers have indicated that administrators who excelled in any number of the core competencies saw considerable development of specialized learning communities, enhanced teaching and learning, increased teacher motivation, and a higher likelihood that teachers would value the core competencies themselves relating to job satisfaction, self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, and intrinsic motivation (Ross & Cozzens, 2016, p. 165).

In Ross and Cozzens's (2016) study including 314 teachers, the highest ranked or most observable core competencies by teachers of building principals were professionalism, curriculum/instruction, diversity, collaboration, and assessment (Ross & Cozzens, 2016, p. 168). Ross and Cozzens's (2016) data supports the theme that the more teachers perceived that their school climate was positive, the more likely the school leader exhibited the core competencies (p. 169). Teachers recognized that the school's climate reflected the physical, social, affective, and academic environments of a school, and they perceived that their principals valued diversity

and empowered every stakeholder in a professional setting, which in turn led to quality professional development experiences that were directed by diverse professionals (Ross & Cozzens, 2016, p. 170).

School building principals can create a better culture with and among teachers by moving toward a "team learning" model of collaboration with the staff (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 59). When teachers embrace Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), a collective responsibility for student learning develops, the teachers help students achieve at higher levels, and the teachers express higher levels of professional satisfaction (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 59).

In order to create a school culture where PLCs develop and grow, building principals need to focus on these four key steps: (a) form teams in which members share responsibility to help all students learn new important content/skills, (b) provide teams with regularly scheduled and adequate time to collaborate, (c) allow sufficient time for appropriate clarifications regarding team work, and (d) make sure that collaborative teams have access to the resources and support they need to accomplish their objectives (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 60).

Finally, building principals can tap into a powerful tool when they include teachers in the development of the vision of the school in order to establish a positive climate or culture with the staff (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 60). The assumptions and beliefs that are built within the system run more deeply when everyone is invested in the process of development (Lewis et al., 2016, p. 61).

Teacher-Student Relationship

Students who feel like their teacher knows them and encourages them as a student or a learner value the relationship they have with their teacher (Gleason, 2019, p. 10). Culture can be enhanced in schools when teachers make the classroom or the content more personal to the students in the room (Gleason, 2019, p. 11).

In Florida, a program was introduced titled Personalization for Academic and Social-Emotional Learning (PASL). PASL was established to integrate academic and social activities like looping educators, teachers, and students over several years, middle school articulation, and explicit instruction on academic and social skills (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 632). The premise of PASL was that as school staff show interest and care toward students, they engage in practices that increase the students' non-cognitive skills including self-efficacy, self-regulation, and the development of personal agency (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 632). The philosophy of personalization is intended to enhance students' sense of belonging and engagement in the hope that their own learning improves.

For the schools in Florida that were successful with the implementation of PASL, there were characteristics within the staff and the application of the rollout that led to the success. Pedagogical principles, norms of personalization, and a focus on beliefs were shown to be important for effective work with PASL (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 636).

Pedagogical principles included routines, practices, and procedures that were directly related to PASL. Those principles included rapid check-ins, goal-setting activities, systematic use of data, and the creation of educator teams (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 636). Rapid check-ins were defined as teachers formally checking in with their PASL students in two-week intervals (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 632). Goal-setting activities involved teachers in the building who agreed to take on the role of teaching these lessons and doing so faithfully (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 632). Systematic use of data was completed by teachers, administrators, and counselors. The data included students earning Ds and Fs during a grading period, as well as students with poor attendance (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 632). The creation of educator teams was defined as a team

of teachers, administrators, and counselors who met regularly to discuss the students who were participating in the program (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 632).

In the most successful implementation, teachers were assigned a PASL classroom during first period, and they routinely conducted the rapid check-ins using a worksheet built by the school and kept in a binder (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 636). The goal-setting lessons were completed in what was known as "Quarterly Talks." These talks were identified by the students participating in PASL as a primary structure through which the adults in the school discussed and supported the PASL students (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 637).

Norms of practice/personalization speaks to the depth of implementation of the PASL program in the school. In one school that participated in the program, the staff completely rewrote their mission/vision statement to embrace the PASL program (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 638). Another school that successfully implemented PASL established what was known as "norms of engagement," and those norms were brought up at the beginning of every meeting that referenced the PASL program or students within the program (Rutledge et al., 2017, p. 638). Programs like PASL are designed to create a climate/culture within schools that allows students to feel like they belong and a place where school staff can care for and guide them throughout their academic years.

Teaching and Learning

The methods and practices that are used in schools, curriculum choices, evaluation tools, how teachers communicate expectations to their students, and the feedback they give their students are all important in the development of school culture (Singh & Dubey, 2019, p. 229). It is the role of district/building leaders to develop a plan for school improvement that includes

teacher collaboration in order to drive change in the teaching and learning that happens within a district or building (Lee & Louis, 2019, p. 85).

Teacher collaboration has been shown to have a positive effect on the decrease in student suspensions within a school (Ohlson et al., 2016, p. 114). In a study of 50 schools and 1,657 teachers, the research found that as teacher collaboration increased, school suspensions decreased by 6.7% (Ohlson et al., 2016, p. 119). This data suggests that Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) would be an effective resource for keeping tougher students in school and therefore increasing student achievement (Ohlson et al., 2016, p. 115).

Hiring teachers that are certified is also an attribute within school culture that enhances student learning (Ohlson et al., 2016, p. 120). The data from Ohlson et al. (2016) shows that student suspensions increased by 22% when there was an increased percentage of non-certified teachers (p. 120). This would be an example of hiring practices that deter culture and likely affect student learning.

High employee job satisfaction and work performance are important for an organization to function and achieve its goals. In a school setting, the job satisfaction experienced by teachers is crucial for schools to be successful in their operation (Duan et al., 2018, p. 17). In Beijing, 1,297 primary and secondary teachers participated in a study using three questionnaire-based surveys. The results showed that school culture, school effectiveness, and teachers' satisfaction were positively correlated with each other (Duan et al., 2018, p. 20). The survey results in this study showed that some schools scored significantly better on one or more of the culture traits, involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission (Duan et al., 2018, p. 22). Possible reasons for these higher scores could be supportive leadership, high rates of engagement among school

members, consistent rules and purpose, higher adaptability to new situations, and a clear mission for students and society (Duan et al., 2018, p. 22).

Much of what was reviewed regarding teaching and learning is also directly tied to engagement, but the data specific to job satisfaction and teacher investment in school culture is new and important when defining the teaching and learning that happens within the culture of schools.

Institutional Environments

The National School Climate Center defines institutional environments in two parts: (a) school connectedness/engagement and (b) physical layout and surroundings of school (Thapa et al., 2012, p. 9). The discussed literature provides many details regarding the research on engagement and its impact on schools. Similarly, the physical layout and surroundings of the school have an impact on the climate/culture.

In a mixed methods study of teachers and students (Scott-Webber et al., 2018), the following research question was asked: "Can we demonstrate that the design of the built environment for grades 9-12 impacts students' academic engagement levels?" (p. 62). The first part of the study included a site visit to view all the educational places, as well as focus interviews with architects, administrators, faculty members, and students (Scott-Webber et al., 2018, p. 62). From this work, a survey tool was built that noted a statistical significance in terms of students and faculty noting that the design of the building positively impacted student academic engagement factors (Scott-Webber et al., 2018, p. 62). The second part of the research included a survey that was given to students and teachers. The surveys were similar regarding engagement, but the types of questions were different. Both surveys focused on macro (overall

building) and micro (classrooms within the building) aspects of a school (Scott-Webber et al., 2018, p. 65).

The results showed researchers that space matters. Both students and educators agreed that the design of the built environment makes a difference relative to student academic engagement, and the results were the same whether the questions were specific to the building or the classroom (Scott-Webber et al., 2018, p. 66). The research revealed that teachers believe that building design has a real impact on their work, especially regarding their ability to move around and engage students (Scott-Webber et al., 2018, p. 67). Students reported that staying engaged within the classroom is difficult, and they also did not believe that the furnishings were comfortable (Scott-Webber et al., 2018, p. 68). The research showed that engagement affects culture. If the building or classroom limited engagement, culture was potentially hindered.

Change in pedagogy can sometimes be hindered by physical setting. Research suggests that different settings facilitate some pedagogical and social practices while hindering others (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 225).

Southside Primary School is a school in England that educates children ages 4-11. It is a school in a city that has experienced rising unemployment and a disappearance of industrialization. Roughly 50% of the students are eligible for free meals, and about 23% of the students are transient. There are as many as 23 different languages spoken within the school of about 420 students (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 228). In fact, there was an inspection of Southside by the UK's Office for Standards in Education in 2012, and it was determined that the building needed serious improvements (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 229).

In September of 2011, Southside began a two-year commitment to the Open Futures program, a skill and inquiry-based learning program. The Open Futures program consists of four

integrated strands: (a) growit, (b) cookit, (c) filmit, and (d) askit. In order for the Open Futures program to work, the interior and exterior facilities of Southside needed to be utilized differently. For the "growit" strand, growing areas were extended and developed on the school grounds. For the "cookit" strand, an existing mobile classroom became a cooking space/lab (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 229).

Both staff and students were enthusiastic about Open Futures. Students commented that they valued learning new skills for use at home and in the future. They often referred to the strands as "fun," "exciting," "different," and "messy" (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 229). After two years of implementation, Southside's school test scores rose slightly, and attendance increased (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 230). Southside's experience with the Open Futures program shows how a culture can be changed as a result of new and creative pedagogy. It also shows that it is possible to effectively establish a completely new, positive environment for staff and students (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 232).

Town End Academy's experience is an example that includes a negative cultural shift and change in environment. Town End Academy is a secondary school in northeast England educating children ages 11-18. There are two sites: one with children ages 11-14 and the other with children ages 15-18. Town End is different than Southside in that the demographics are more affluent and less diverse (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 233). The school began experimenting with inquiry-based learning in order to provide the students with a more engaging curriculum. The hope was to connect the students with the local area in which they lived. The school leader felt that the behavior and emotional maturity of the students was less than acceptable and that it could be tied to a lack of interest in learning (Woolner et al., 2018, p 233). The decision was made to create a new vision for the school, and a team of teachers was built by the school leader

with an initial question: “What kind of children do we want and how do we get this?” (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 233). They decided to use the Building Learning Power program to create a culture in the classrooms and buildings that would create habits and attitudes that allow young people to work through difficult times and uncertainty in a more calm and confident manner. They decided on a cross-curricular content theme and titled the program “Inspiring Minds” (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 234).

To build a culture from ground zero, professional development of the staff included the creation of mentorship programs and instructional coaches that could support teachers with the changes in content. An “open door” policy was established so that teachers could visit other classrooms and observe teaching in other content areas. The policy was established so teachers could better understand what was being done in other classrooms and to develop a system of modeling within the staff. All new furniture was ordered for the building so that collaboration among students was easier. The staff was told that desks in rows and students looking at the back of each other’s heads was not permissible (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 234).

Although off to a great start, Town End’s approach ended up with roadblocks that created a stall in the movement of culture. By 2013, key staff members who had led the change had moved on to other positions. The government of the UK had created a new secondary curriculum that specifically required more direct content time in some subject areas which made cross-curricular time challenging (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 235). The lack of ownership by teachers of their own teaching spaces posed a significant environmental challenge for executing the cross-curricular theme (Woolner et al., 2018, p. 235). Many of the teachers taught in both buildings in four or five different classrooms each day. Workspaces were divided by content areas rather than cross-content areas. In turn, collaboration time for staff fizzled.

Finally, when discussing environment and culture in a school setting, the physical health and social health of the children are essential. Consistent research on school environment specific to physical activity shows the importance of: (a) activity settings within school for physical activity; (b) the creation of a "culture" of physical activity within the school; (c) teaching behaviors that support a positive climate for physical activity promotion, both within P.E. and beyond; and (d) the availability of intramural opportunities for all students (Morton et al., 2016, p. 153).

More specifically, activity settings are defined as space for specific activities like softball fields, soccer fields, and an indoor gym (Morton et al., 2016, p. 147). The social environment piece includes the focus on teaching P.E. and the behaviors of promoting physical activity versus competition (Morton et al., 2016, p. 150). An emerging theme from this research indicated that when a competition-focused climate existed within a school, participation was reduced, especially among girls (Morton et al., 2016, p. 150). Teachers that provided encouragement and support of physical activity, including role modeling as a teacher behavior, definitely enhanced student participation and positively influenced student motivation for P.E. and other activity (Morton et al., 2016, p. 151). When the culture of the school influences student activity with policies supporting intramurals and an emphasis on inclusion rather than elitism, there becomes a connectedness among the students to their sense of belonging within the school (Morton et al., 2016, p. 154).

School Improvement

The National School Climate Center finishes the conversation of school climate/culture with a focus on school improvement or school reform programs by stating that relational trust is the "glue" or the essential element that coordinates and supports school improvement (Thapa et

al., 2012, p. 10). There are three components of organizational learning that can allow successful and sustainable school improvement: professional community, deprivatization of practice, and reflective dialogue (Lee & Louis, 2019, p. 86).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) improve teachers already in the profession. The most common way to build this type of community is through the use of collaborative teams within a building organized by grade level or content area. This research is important for the schools that cannot build multiple teams within the building because of the size of student enrollment and staff. Teachers from rural or small schools could benefit from gathering with teachers from other districts using a variety of platforms in order to participate in professional communities.

A strong professional community has a collective sense of contributing to the learning opportunities that exist for the students in the long run (Lee & Louis, 2019, p. 86). There is plentiful research on PLCs regarding professionals already in the field, as discussed throughout the writing on culture in this chapter (Ohlson et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2016; Ross & Cozzens, 2016). However, professional communities can exist in the pre-service teacher education programs in higher education.

A study was conducted with college students in an elementary education program while they were completing their math methods course just prior to starting their field experience work (Savard et al., 2016, p. 41). The study aimed to determine how much knowledge the students possessed regarding content (math) and how much knowledge they had regarding how to teach (pedagogy) (Savard et al., 2016, p. 42). More succinctly, there is knowing content, and there is also knowing strategies for teaching content. This group of pre-service teachers were placed in

an online professional community to address two questions: (a) What mathematical knowledge for teaching emerged in novice teachers' discussions as they participated in online professional community during their field experience? and (b) Which epistemological (method of teaching) might be highlighted by this knowledge? (Savard et al., 2016, p. 43).

Twenty-three students participated in the online community and discussion threads with topics that included "Introduction," "Mathematics Questions," "About Teaching," and "Random." This community was set up for the students to participate in as much or as little as they chose. There was no obligation on the amount of time or the number of times students participated. There was also a journal space titled "Share," where students could deposit resources they found of value in their teaching, as well as a blog site titled "Open Mic," where students could share information about their day or keep a journal that could be shared with the others in the community (Savard et al., 2016, p. 43).

The study, where only 99 pieces of information were collected over three weeks of offering the various platforms within the community, showed a couple of clear pieces of evidence. First, from the data collected, there were more questions and interest regarding pedagogy than content. (Savard et al., 2016, p. 48). Students were more concerned with the skills of teaching than they were about knowledge of the content of math. Secondly, the emphasis among the participants of talking about the "how" (teaching math) more than the "what" (content of math itself) indicates that there may be some issues of practice within the teacher education program (Savard et al., 2016, p. 49). Finally, a noticeable observation from inspection of the discussion boards was that the pre-service teachers were clearly excited to be in the classroom and doing the work of a teacher (Savard et al., 2016, p. 49). The transition from being a "student" to being a "teacher" is unique. One of the observations from this professional

community was how students continued to fall back in the role of student quite often while working in the role as a teacher (Savard et al., 2016, p. 49).

Deprivatization of Practice

Deprivatization of practice involves the philosophy of making the art of teaching a more transparent experience where teachers share what is going on in their classroom(s) with fellow teachers (Lee & Louis, 2019, p. 86). In a study of middle school math teachers using participant-observer practices, the researcher aimed to deprivatize the teaching within a math team in a southeastern United States school (Weinberg, 2019, p. 237). The focus of the participant-observer journals was specific to the leading of group discussions in class. The hope was that the observation work and journaling would lead to more trust within the math team, especially when the focus was work that is commonly done by math teachers (Weinberg, 2019, p. 240).

One teacher from the team was designated to play the role of a student and attend three math classes each day. From a student's perspective, that teacher was told to journal about the realities of being a student and moving from class to class. This teacher also took notes within the math room specific to the leading of whole group discussion (Weinberg, 2019, p. 241). In a pre-interview with the teacher assigned to complete the observations, it was noted that peer observations had never been done within this group and that discussions of practice within each other's classrooms had also never occurred in any formal matter. There was a definite feel of each classroom being more privatized (Weinberg, 2019, p. 244).

According to Weinberg (2019), this study provided two clear themes: (a) problems within practice and learning from those practices can take place when artifacts (peer observation) are established and focused on a specific piece of teaching (group discussion), and (b) this work supported the development of many teaching practices that were central to leading group

discussions, such as teacher revoicing, transitioning between activities, eliciting more student thinking, and procedural fluency (p. 253). At the end of the study when the journaling teacher shared all of her information, the team members were allowed the opportunity to reflect more deeply on their work and challenge one another regarding their teaching practices (Weinberg, 2019, p. 254). Said in another way, the opportunity to deprivatize the teaching within this math team became a real possibility.

Reflective Dialogue

Reflective dialogue is the third component of building a professional community within a school, and it is the deep conversation of what works well and what needs to change in classrooms as a means of improving student learning (Lee & Louis, 2019, p. 86).

The practice of reflective dialogue within a professional community does not only improve student learning, but it can also improve the skills of veteran or novice teachers. This practice challenges teachers to share stories with one another about what works well and what does not work well in their classrooms (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 74).

A study focusing on reflective dialogue included nine math teachers who were purposefully selected to participate in one-on-one open-ended semi-structured interviews (Mohan & Chand, 2019). In the interviews, the teachers were asked about their perceptions on how story sharing of classroom experience and reflective dialogue impacted their professional growth as well as their practice (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 75). The first story came from an experienced teacher who discussed what he did to prepare his calculus students for the external (national) exam by giving them questions from exams going back the last 10 years once they completed their work assigned for the day. The teacher's theory was that allowing students to become familiar with the language that exists in the state exam would make them more

successful when taking the exam at the end of the year. Teachers who listened to this story appreciated the "collegial" teaching that came from the story, and it forced them to rethink what they did with their students at the conclusion of their teaching and the completion of their daily work (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 76). After putting this tactic into practice, the teachers discussed that they found the same success with their students. The research concluded that teachers who appreciate and practice collegial sharing will be apt to try new ideas in their classrooms (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 76).

The second story from this study was told by a teacher with 40 students in his class in which about nine of the students were very challenged academically. The teacher shared that when he was spending a lot of time with the challenging students, his best students became distracted and talkative once they had completed their work (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 76). To more effectively manage his classroom, he began to give his students examples of questions they would see on the national test at the end of the school year. Two younger teachers, one in their second year and another in their first year, both found this story to be a great resource for them as they both worked with similar sized classrooms and experienced similar discipline problems (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 76). One of the teachers commented, "I teach a class in the forties, so I found it difficult to control my class, especially during class activities but after experimenting with the shared strategy, I am able to manage my class better" (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 76).

Finally, a third story was told by a second-year teacher. He shared how he has been more successful with his students than teachers with more experience. He stated:

> "This was only possible because I have been observing 2 of my colleagues who have more than ten years of teaching experience. I have learned a lot from them. The shortcuts to get to the answers instead of my boring long methods, student engagement techniques,

class management techniques, and more. What we learn in teaching is sometimes not enough to face the reality of actually teaching." (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 78)

This story illustrates the power of teachers observing the teaching of others, which reiterates previous discussion about Professional Learning Communities and collaboration being effective tools.

Reflective dialogue is a powerful tool in professional communities and has been shown to enhance professional growth within a professional community (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 78). This research can be a valuable resource or tool for school leaders and how they build the communities within their district/building with the goal of growing their teachers (Mohan & Chand, 2019, p. 79).

Another aspect of reflective dialogue is "descriptive feedback" (Rogers, 2020, p. 2). In an educational setting, this can be defined as feedback given by teachers to students and vice versa. In a research study in a PreK-5 grade charter school in New York, Rogers (2020) intended to explore the place of that descriptive feedback, which was defined by Rogers as students' description of and inquiry into their own cognitive and emotional experiences as learners (p. 5). This is then revealed to teachers and other students in structured, reflective dialogue. Rogers believes student learning happens when descriptive feedback of learning starts with the students sharing what they believe they learned or what they know. Teachers and students then work together using the descriptive feedback of the students to engage in reflective dialogue (Rogers, 2020).

The research consisted of nine teachers, five educational leaders, and 50 students in Grades K-5. The feedback sessions, known as "3rd space" in this study, were held between teachers and students. They lasted 20 minutes or less each time. The teachers were given a set of

prescribed questions: (a) “What did you learn?”, (b) “How do you know you learned it?”, (c) “What helped you learn it?”, (d) “What got in your way?”, (e) “How do you feel?”, and (f) “What else do you want me to know?” (Rogers, 2020, p. 15). Teachers were given permission to rewrite the questions to suit the ages of the students from whom they would be eliciting feedback (Rogers, 2020, p. 14). For example, the first question “What did you learn?” was modified by the teachers of the youngest learners to say “What can you do now that you couldn’t do at the beginning of the lesson?” (Rogers, 2020, p. 15).

The research and process of this study led to the following discoveries. A reflective 3rd space created a special domain where both teachers and learners could be mutually vulnerable (Rogers, 2020, p. 32). The 3rd space allowed students to share their academic struggles in a face-to-face format with their teachers. This allowed the teachers to better understand why a student labeled as a “behavior problem” is just frustrated with their inability to read and keep up with the others in the class. The dialogue between a teacher and student in response to the question “What got in the way of your learning?” included phrases from the student like, “Not knowing the words. I try to pronounce it and pronounce it and I got angry with myself cuz I want to know more” (Rogers, 2020, p. 25). The teacher asked, “How did you feel before the lesson?” The student responded, “I felt angry because I didn’t understand the words.” The teacher asked, “Is there anything else you want me to know?” The student responded, “I want to read the chapter before we meet in groups” (Rogers, 2020, p. 25). This language from a student to a teacher allows the teacher to better understand a student’s vulnerability, and therefore, the teacher becomes more vulnerable too (Rogers, 2020, p. 26).

Another discovery that came from the reflective dialogue process was that teaching is largely an unconscious matter of getting students to point X, fixating on the arrival, staying on

the major highways rather than exploring the backroads and the complexity of the journey (Rogers, 2020, p. 32). This research study provided insightful examples from the 3rd space interviews that allowed teachers to better understand that learning comes from giving their students more control of the learning by simply changing the way questions are asked (Rogers, 2020, p. 29). When a kindergarten student asked the teacher, "How much is a nickel worth on the tail's side?", the teacher responded with, "What do you think?" (Rogers, 2020, p. 29). Another teacher watching this interaction said she would have phrased the question as, "Is it still a nickel?" In the second teacher's question, the teacher waits for the student's answer rather than her own answer (Rogers, 2020, p. 29). Another positive example of how teachers learned from participating, observing, and discussing their experience in this study was how they phrased their questions by personalizing the questions as opposed to constructing them for a whole group. When comparing the questions "What did you learn?" versus "What did we learn?", the word "you" shifts the experience to each individual student, not the experience of the whole group (Rogers, 2020, p. 30).

School Improvement Summary

The three organizational learning components of professional community, deprivatization of practice, and reflective dialogue can allow successful and sustainable school improvement (Lee & Louis, 2019, p. 86). The research regarding these strategies holds great value for learning communities in districts/schools.

Creating district-wide professional communities or collaborating with neighboring rural districts by using discussion boards or blog spots could be beneficial for teachers. Teachers observing and learning from other teachers through deprivatization of practice could cultivate a collaborative culture in any school building. Finally, reflective dialogue, propelled by open

communication among teachers and students, allows both parties to share responsibility in the learning environment. All three of these learning components are promising tools that can improve a school's teaching and learning practices, and each one speaks directly to cultivating positive school climate/culture.

RTI/Interim Assessment

When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2002) came into law, school accountability became based on large scale assessments given once a year in all public schools in the United States (Sebastian, 2020, p. 2). In 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB, but most of the expectations for schools remained the same. Math and ELA assessments were administered to all students in Grades 3-8 and Grade 10 or 11, while breaking down the assessments by demographics (race, income status, and English learning status) (Sebastian, 2020, p. 3).

As schools received the large-scale assessment scores, knowing the students' level of learning seemed to be a missing thread in schools. The pressure of increasing test scores was real, and schools needed to have a support tool in place when students fell behind. Response to Intervention (RTI) became a popular addition to elementary schools and some middle schools. The RTI process starts with high-quality instruction and screening of all students in the classroom. Then struggling learners are provided with interventions at various levels of intensity to enhance their learning (National Center for Learning Disabilities, n.d.). While the idea of RTI was initially established for students with learning disabilities, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 emphasized that RTI should be in place for all students struggling to learn (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 156).

There are four essential components in a strong RTI program: (a) high-quality, research-based classroom instruction; (b) ongoing student assessment and progress monitoring to develop an understanding where each child is with their learning; (c) tiered instruction, differentiated for all students; and (d) parent involvement that lets parents know where their child is with their learning, what instruction or interventions are in place, and which staff members are working with the child and delivering the instruction for their child (National Center for Learning Disabilities, n.d.).

In a Hong Kong study, the role of leadership, similar to culture discussed earlier in this chapter, is a crucial piece when it comes to implementing an intervention program (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 156). In the study, Principal Tam adopted a three-stage process for full and complete implementation within his school: (a) communicating and building a schoolwide vision and mission, (b) negotiating a flexible funding model to maximize resources, and (c) developing a conducive structure to facilitate the implementation (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 162).

In communicating a successful vision, Principal Tam first built a leadership team of administration, curriculum leadership, and counseling. He worked to strengthen their knowledge of his vision and mission so that they could then reinforce and cultivate that vision and mission within the rest of the staff (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 162). Using morning assemblies allowed Principal Tam the opportunity to share the big picture of his vison and mission, and then the leadership team could break the vision and mission down to their areas of emphasis, teaching pedagogies, curriculum development, and counseling of parents and students (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 162).

Principal Tam used money from the federal government to create a flexible funding model for his school. The extra finances allowed additional staff for the school, as well as

software that allowed the school to track student performance and the possibility of a better assessment plan. The new software created professional development opportunities for the staff as they learned the model of RTI, as well as the opportunity to implement new practices in reading improvement programs and parent counseling (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 163).

In developing a conducive structure for implementation, Principal Tam brought four strategies to the building:

1) Empowerment of teacher leaders. The vice principal served as the special education coordinator and had authority of hiring more staff for special needs students, building the student support team, sharing relevant professional development for teachers, and facilitating resource usage for support services (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 164). The curriculum director guided teachers in curriculum design and led instructional and assessment adaptations with the power over budget for curriculum resources (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 164).
2) Timetabling and resource use were aimed at organizing planning time for staff, core subject teacher consultations, and class-based support meetings. Teachers felt the structure of timetabling made for consultations and the discussion of students to be better. The funding from the federal government allowed a workload reduction for teachers, more prep time, and professional development time (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 164).
3) Professional development and a culture of lifelong learning were built as a result of Principal Tam believing that onsite coaching was the best form of professional development. He also believed in creating a lifelong learning culture in order to sustain quality instruction for all the students (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 164).

4) Early identification approaches are a fundamental key to RTI programs within a school, and Principal Tam and his leadership team placed great emphasis on the Learning Achievement Measurement Kit (LAMK) to identify low academic achievers. Low academic achievers are defined as students being two years behind grade level in Chinese, English, or Math (Poon-McBrayer, 2018, p. 165). The results of this test were a topic of conversation in the class-based support meetings that occurred two or three times a year. The use of LAMK in Hong Kong is their version of interim assessment to monitor student growth over a period. In this instance, according to the study, student growth is monitored two or three times a year.

In a study in an inner city school, RTI services were utilized for five 4th-grade students who scored below the 10th percentile on the Universal Screener, easyCBM. The goal of this research was to determine if the students' math abilities could improve (Kane, 2016, p. 44). The easyCBM assessment is like DIBELS, STAR, and MAP in that it is an interim assessment used to determine at-risk students and the level of tier instruction the students should receive (Kane, 2016, p. 45).

The students in this study received 90 minutes of quality math instruction in a whole group setting each day. They were also taught supplemental lessons in a small group setting for 20 minutes each day. Each supplemental lesson contained direct instruction, guided practice, and independent practice (Kane, 2016, p. 46). Each student was given a quiz at the end of the week to progress monitor their learning (Kane, 2016, p. 47). After six weeks, each student was given a score based on the cumulative total of quiz questions answered correctly. The quizzes were multiple choice and had only one correct answer (Kane, 2016, p. 47).

After reviewing the weekly data quiz scores, the mean scores did not show any strong results. There were many ups and downs for many of the students (Kane, 2016, p. 48). However, when a trend line was added to the data collection, there was evidence of growth among these five students. This data suggests that the RTI model in place was successful for this group of students (Kane, 2016, p. 48).

In the United States, a popular assessment to monitor student growth is the Standardized Test for the Assessment of Reading (STAR), created and distributed by Renaissance (Sampson, 2018, p. 2). STAR assessments are short, computer-adaptive (adjust to student answers) assessments that provide teachers with data specific to student learning. These assessments allow teachers to better understand what a student knows and what they are ready to learn next. They also monitor student growth and assist in identifying which students may need additional help (Renaissance, 2020).

A study was conducted using STAR to determine if there was a correlation between STAR scores and the state assessment for the state of Tennessee in math and reading for students in Grades 3-5 (Sampson, 2018, p. 2). Research question 1 was: “Is there a significant correlation between the STAR Reading test scores and the Tennessee state assessment for reading in 3rd grade?” The results suggested that 3rd graders with high STAR scores in reading also have high state assessment scores (Sampson, 2018, p. 62). The same results were true for 4th and 5th grades (Sampson, 2018, p. 63-64). Regarding STAR math assessments, high scores for all three grades resulted in high scores on the state assessment for math (Sampson, 2018, p. 65-67).

This study allows schools in the state of Tennessee to know that the STAR assessment scores are indicative of student success when taking the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) in math and reading. In other words, working throughout the year to move

students from “Urgent Intervention” or “Intervention” to “At/Beyond Benchmark” in STAR assessment by using research-based teaching practices and intervention programs like RTI, teachers and school districts can have an idea of how many of their students will succeed when taking the TCAP for reading and math.

Another interim assessment that is widely used in public education is the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), an interim assessment created by Northwest Evaluation Association in 1973. Like the STAR assessment, the goal of the MAP assessment is to measure student growth and proficiency in learning (NWEA, 2020).

In a study conducted in two middle schools in a Pennsylvania school district, Finnerty (2018) explored the use of MAP as an interim assessment tool to determine student success on the Pennsylvania System of School Achievement (PSSA). The study presented the following research questions: (1) “Do NWEA MAP mathematics and reading interim assessments scores differ significantly over time?”, (2) “To what extent do repeated administrations of NWEA MAP mathematics and reading assessments contribute to the overall utility to predict performance on the mathematics and reading PSSA?”, and (3) “Do the changes in NWEA MAP scores over time and the predictive utility of NWEA MAP scores vary by subject?” (Finnerty, 2018, p. 14). For this literature review, research question 2 is examined: “To what extend do repeated administrations of NWEA MAP mathematics and reading assessments contribute to the overall utility to predict performance on the mathematics and reading PSSA?”

In order to provide some context to this research, it should be noted that there are a couple of differences between the MAP test and the PSSA. The MAP test for both reading and math is a computer-adaptive test. The PSSA is not; it is a pencil/paper exam (Finnerty, 2018, p. 45). The MAP test tends to give questions that cross grade levels while the PSSA is strictly a

grade-level, content assessment based on the standards specific to the state of Pennsylvania (Finnerty, 2018, p. 45).

In the two middle schools, students in Grades 6-8 were given the MAP reading and math assessments three times a year: fall, winter, and spring. (Finnerty, 2018, p. 44). Like most interim assessment organizations, NWEA developed predictors of proficiency with their assessments to align to state assessments, namely the PSSA. For students in Grades 6-8, if they scored between the 50th percentile (6th grade) and the 52nd percentile (8th grade) on the MAP assessment for reading, NWEA expected those students to be proficient on the PSSA (NWEA, 2016). Students in Grades 6-8 had to score between the 65th percentile (6th grade) and the 82nd percentile (8th grade) to be identified as a student that would be proficient on the PSSA for math (NWEA, 2016).

In both math and reading, this study found that each interim assessment that was given using MAP did significantly improve the predictive model in relation to the PSSA. However, the gains from test to test created minimal changes in the predictive model so the number of assessments given to the students could be questioned (Finnerty, 2018, p. 94). The question from this study that focused on predicting success on the 7th grade PSSA presented better data when it looked at student demographic information and the 6th grade PSSA (Finnerty, 2018, p. 94). In other words, 74.5% of the students who were successful on the 6th grade PSSA math test were also successful on the 7th grade math test. Additionally, 65.4% of the students who were successful on the 6th grade PSSA reading test were also successful on the 7th grade math test (Finnerty, 2018, p. 94).

In reviewing this research, it would be beneficial for schools to assess how many interim assessments are necessary for students. While the students show growth from assessment to

assessment, that growth does not necessarily mean students will be successful on the state assessment. If schools are interested in student growth, these assessments can show that, but that growth may not be enough to satisfy the goal of proficiency regarding a summative assessment from the state.

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the DIBELS Math program are both very popular tools that are used as interim assessments to measure student growth and skills (Center on Teaching and Learning, n.d.). Both tools are designed to support early learners who have been identified as at-risk with current and future math or reading content. The tools then assist teachers in identifying individualized, targeted support (Gonser, 2018, p. 3). Gonser's research (2018) examined the use of DIBELS Math with 4th grade students in 2015-16 in an unnamed school district in the Midwest to see if its implementation would improve the MAP Math test scores of the 4th grade students in 2014-15 (Gonser, 2018, p. 4). Scores were compared for the entire 4th grade class including males, females, minorities, as well as low socioeconomic and non-low socioeconomic students. Scores were compared for students who received consistent progress monitoring and those who did not receive consistent progress monitoring in the 2015-16 school year (Gonser, 2018, p. 5).

Throughout the 2015-16 school year, DIBELS Math was used in the 4th grade consistently except for a small subgroup. The students took the MAP test in the fall and spring just like the students in the 2014-15 school year (Gonser, 2018, p. 42). There were very small differences in student population for the comparison between the two years (Gonser, 2018, p. 44).

The following are the results for the research questions of Gonser's (2018) study:

1) To what extent was there a change in scores on the NWEA MAP Math assessment after one year of DIBELS Math implementation? (Gonser, 2018, p. 47)

The mean score for the students in 2015-16 was lower than the mean score for the students in 2014-15, the year that no DIBELS Math was used with the 4th grade (Gonser, 2018, p. 55).

2) To what extent was there a change in NWEA MAP Math assessment for 4th grade males and females after one year of DIBELS Math implementation? (Gonser, 2018, p. 47)

For males, the mean score was higher for the students in 2014-15 than it was for the 4th grade students in 2015-16, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 57). For females, the mean score was higher for the students in 2014-15 than it was for the 4th grade students in 2015-16, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 57).

3) To what extent was there a change in NWEA MAP Math assessment for 4th grade students based on ethnicity (white, black, Hispanic, and other)? (Gonser, 2018, p. 48)

For white students, the mean was higher for the students in 2014-15 than it was for the 4th grade students in 2015-16, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 59). For black students, the mean was higher for the students in 2014-15 than it was for the 4th grade students in 2015-16, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 60). For Hispanic students, the mean score was lower for the students in 2014-15 than it was for the 4th grade students in 2015-16, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 60). For students labeled as other, the mean score was higher for students in 2014-15 than it was for the 4th grade students in 2015-16, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 61).

4) To what extent is there a change in scores on the NWEA MAP Math assessment for low SES and non-low SES after one year of DIBELS Math implementation? (Gonser, 2018, p. 49)

For low SES students, the mean change was higher for students in 2014-15 than it was for 4th grade low SES students in 2015-16, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 63). For non-low SES students, the mean change was higher for students in 2014-15 than it was for 4th grade non-low SES students in 2015-16, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 64).

5) To what extent was there a change in scores on the NWEA MAP Math assessment for 4th grade students who received consistent progress monitoring and those who did not receive consistent progress monitoring after one year of DIBELS Math implementation? (Gonser, 2018, p. 50)

For students who did not receive consistent progress monitoring, the mean score was higher than for the 4th grade students who did receive consistent progress monitoring in 2015-16 school year, the year DIBELS Math was implemented (Gonser, 2018, p. 66). The evidence shows that the implementation of DIBELS Math in 2015-16 had a significant impact on students' NWEA MAP math assessment scores.

North Dakota Century Code 15.1-17-21 (State of North Dakota, 2012) states:

"Each school district shall administer annually to students in grades 2 through 10 interim assessments are required for all students in grades two through ten the Measures of Academic Progress Test (MAP) or any other interim assessment approved by the Superintendent of Public Instruction." (p. 11)

These tests have been used to monitor student learning and observe growth relative to learning at each grade level. The assessments are aligned to the state standards of North Dakota in order to provide evidence of student success relative to the summative assessment given by the state in the spring of each school year.

Summary

There is a plethora of research that exists in this chapter specific to the different forms of interim assessment and the success that can come from using interim assessment to grow test scores within a school district or, at the very least, within subgroups of a population of students within a school district. For the last generation of students, schools have too often been defined as successful or unsuccessful based on the test scores of their students. Students in this generation see themselves being measured and progress monitored so regularly that they also begin to define themselves as successful or unsuccessful based on their test scores.

For the purpose of this study, the researcher built the focus group questions around the research presented in the literature review regarding student engagement and climate/culture. The conversations resulting from the focus group questions are the focus of this research. Chapter III presents the methodology of the study, which includes the research design, the research methods, the data analysis, and the validation techniques. Chapter IV shows the study's findings, which are categorized by the two main topics of the research and the subgroups that existed within each main topic. There is some interpretation of the data included within these topics as well. Chapter V includes an interpretation of the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to research and share how school leaders in North Dakota are enhancing student engagement and climate/culture within their buildings or school districts. A review of the literature in Chapter II revealed that students who are engaged in their school are more successful in the classroom, and students and staff who feel they are working in a safe and collaborative environment are more likely to enjoy their tasks and be successful. This chapter describes the procedures used in this study, selection of participants, research plan design, instruments used to collect data, data collection, analysis of data, validation techniques, and a summary.

For this study, it is the researcher's intent to provoke conversations among legislative members regarding the methods they use to define successful schools versus how district and school leaders themselves define successful schools. These discussions between government and school leaders would ideally lead to the creation of a common vision for schools across the country.

Research Question

Based on the intent of this study, the following research question was generated:

1. What are the characteristics of school success as identified by school leaders?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative research method by utilizing three separate focus groups of superintendents and principals. One focus group included superintendents, one included elementary principals, and the third one included high schools principals. The focus group research was conducted in the spring of 2021. Approval to conduct this research was obtained from University of North Dakota's Institutional Review Board (Appendix C).

The purpose of the focus groups was to allow superintendents and building principals to share their ideas and thoughts on how they address student engagement and climate/culture in their buildings and school districts. Schools administrators are striving to implement new ways to engage their students. The following are just a few areas of concern for administrators: (a) identifying how learning is attached to real-life experiences, (b) creating college and career ready coursework for students, and (c) adding a variety of extracurricular activities to serve as many students as possible. Climate/culture is about building relationships, and in order to do so, schools and school districts need to focus on the emotional safety of students and staff, create a more collaborative environment for staff, and effectively support students with their learning early and with as many resources and strategies as possible. As student engagement has become a priority in the state of North Dakota, a survey is given by the state each school year. The survey elicits responses to questions regarding professional development for staff that focuses on student engagement and how that applies in the classroom. The survey addresses whether a school offers courses that are appropriately aligned with college and/or career readiness to better engage students as they near graduation.

A second purpose of the focus groups was to answer questions specific to how school districts have begun to prioritize the climate/culture of their schools or their school districts.

School safety, teaching and learning, collaboration opportunities for staff, PLCs, and measuring student growth to alter teaching are all topics for discussion regarding climate/culture in a school and/or district. The creation of focus group interviews allowed school leaders to share their unique ideas or thoughts as to what they are currently doing in their districts and buildings, apart from an emphasis on standardized testing. Focus groups gave the participants a chance to define what they feel are important elements to their school success and climate/culture.

Due to COVID-19, these focus group interviews were conducted using Zoom, an online video conferencing platform. Focus groups were established to bring a variety of educational leaders together to discuss a set of topics from an activity and to make explicit use of the group interaction to generate data (Roulston, 2010, p. 35). As stated earlier, the intentions for these conversations held among school leaders was to create research information that can be shared with school leaders throughout the state of North Dakota. In turn, school/district administrators can explore the resources and strategies the study participants are using to address student engagement and the climate/culture of their schools or school districts.

Each focus group session consisted of six or seven participants. The researcher organized and led three focus groups: one of superintendents, one of elementary principals, and one of high school principals. Each focus group was established with a variety of school leaders from around the state of North Dakota and from various sized school districts. It was the expectation of the researcher that focus groups built with representation of all geographic regions and various school enrollments would lend itself to a variety of answers to the questions within the group. What works in large districts in terms of student engagement may not work in small districts. However, small districts do need to strive to engage their students and so they may attempt other

strategies, which need to be discussed and shared with others as well. Roulston (2010) states that the creation of focus groups is the best approach for this type of study (p. 39).

The intent of the focus group questions for the building principals was to elicit specific feedback and ideas regarding their definition of success within the framework of the research provided in Chapter II. The focus group questions for principals can be seen in Appendix A. In addition to the definition of success, the focus group also addressed what is being done to achieve this success.

The three focus group discussions led to a series of themes which is discussed in the research. These themes will be shared with school leaders throughout the state of North Dakota at the conclusion of the research. The purpose of this is to highlight the practices of school leaders for other school leaders in North Dakota who may benefit from what is already being practiced.

Giving school leaders a voice in this study was crucial, especially as student engagement and climate/culture have become a focal point regarding school success. It seems leaders are considering Piaget's theories (Harlow et al., 2007) when implementing strategies for school success instead of focusing only on assessments. Questions that could be asked in schools today regarding success: Are schools creating internships for students so that what is taught in schools is being applied in a work environment? Are lab-based classes where hands-on activities becoming more popular or being emphasized by school leaders? Does that emphasis or student choice then detract from some of the coursework that may be more applicable to success on standardized testing? NCLB and ESSA are federal laws that our state legislators have no control over. However, the transition from NCLB to ESSA has created some opportunities for school districts in North Dakota to focus on what is taught and how it is taught rather than continue to

focus on standardized testing. The researcher's expectation with this qualitative study was that North Dakota school administrators would have a voice in changes happening in schools today.

Participants

This research study's participants included superintendents and principals from a variety of school enrollments and from all over the state of North Dakota. For the selection criteria, the researcher utilized the North Dakota High School Activities Association (NDHSAA) guidelines used for football alignment to identify the various superintendents and principals who would be invited to participate in the focus groups. According to a document on the NDHSAA website *Football Plan Guidelines* that was approved on January 18th, 2018, and then amended on September 27th, 2018, the criteria for alignment is as follows:

1. Fall 2017 male enrollments for Grades 7-10 as provided by the Department of Public Instruction.
2. The enrollment reported in step 1 is multiplied by the percentage of the student body that qualified for free and reduced meals during the 2016-17 school year according to Department of Public Instruction data. That number will be multiplied by 50%.
3. The number derived in step 2 is subtracted from the total 7-10 grade enrollment reported in step 1. The remainder number will represent the total school enrollment for classification purposes during the 2019 and 2020 football plan.

Four divisions of football are created from these criteria: AAA, AA, A, and 9-man. The researcher invited superintendents, elementary principals, and high school principals from a variety of AAA, AA, A, and 9-man schools. The elementary principal group was the largest with seven participants. The high school principal focus group and the superintendent focus group each had six participants.

Research Population

North Dakota school leaders including superintendents and building principals from school districts of various populations and geographical diversity participated in a series of focus groups in May of 2021. An invitation via email was sent four times to a variety of district/school leaders in late April 2021 for recruiting purposes for each focus group. Emails were sent with geographic and enrollment diversity as the main purpose and with the expectation of recruiting six or seven leaders to participate in each focus group. The focus groups were divided by positions: superintendents, high school principals, and elementary school principals. When recruiting was completed, there were seven elementary principals. Four were from eastern North Dakota, two from western North Dakota, and one from central North Dakota. Four of the elementary principals worked in rural districts, and three worked in larger (Class A) districts. There were six high school principals. Three were from eastern North Dakota, and three were from western or central North Dakota. Three of the high school principals worked in rural districts, and three worked in larger (Class A) districts. Of the six superintendents who participated, three worked in rural districts, and three worked in larger (Class A) districts. Two superintendents were from the eastern part of North Dakota, and four were from western or central North Dakota. One superintendent scheduled to participate had to attend an unexpected meeting before the focus group met. Thus, the researcher gave permission for the assistant superintendent of that district to participate knowing they were from the same district. The focus groups were completed using Zoom. Each focus group meeting lasted between one hour and 20 minutes and one hour and 40 minutes. The superintendent questions (Appendix A) are slightly different than the elementary and high school principal questions (Appendix B) due to the nature of their role and position.

Data Collection

The focus group questions were shared with those who agreed to participate about one week prior to the focus group meeting. For both the superintendents and the building principals, the focus group conversations revolved around the specifics of how district and school leaders strive to improve student engagement and build a climate/culture that makes their school or school district a setting they are proud to lead. They were asked to share what resources and tools they use in order to create positive 21st century learning environments for their teachers and students personally, socially, and collaboratively.

The focus groups occurred during the 2nd and 3rd weeks in May. The researcher met with the elementary principals and the secondary principals in the 2nd week and then met with the superintendents in the 3rd week. The researcher followed the script of questions as closely as possible. Some questions were answered in the discussions that occurred throughout the meeting. The researcher paraphrased some of the questions in order to maintain an environment where everyone felt comfortable. The questions were covered completely, but the two principal sessions went longer than planned. The elementary principal session lasted one hour and 40 minutes, the secondary principal meeting lasted just over one hour and 30 minutes, and the superintendent focus group met for about one hour and 20 minutes.

Not only did the focus group interviews consist of in-depth question-and-answer between the researcher and the participants, but it also consisted of conversations where participants asked other participants questions. The researcher's questions often led to follow up questions posed by participants among themselves.

In the summer of 2021, the researcher transcribed the three focus group interviews verbatim, which took roughly 25 hours. While transcribing, the researcher determined the speaker of each statement.

Creating qualitative questions created a sense of completeness for this study. Robson and McCartan (2016) value completeness because "combining research approaches produces a more complete and more comprehensive picture of the topic of the research" (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 179). The creation of focus group interviews allowed school leaders to share their ideas or thoughts as to what is being done in their school or district to engage students and build climate/culture. The focus groups facilitated the opportunity for administrators to share different and unique practices that do not focus on standardized testing, while hearing the stories of other administrators as well. The researcher collected this data along with noting any disconnect between what is valued in one school or district compared to others in the state.

The three different focus groups included a total of 19 leaders from North Dakota public schools. Of the 19 participants, 11 were male, and eight were female. The researcher sent the focus group questions to each of the three focus group participants one week prior to the session. The Zoom meetings were recorded, transcribed, and coded for common themes and quotes to enforce those themes. All transcription and coding were completed manually by the researcher. The names of the participants and their school districts were not used. All leaders who participated were coded as E 1 through E 7, HS 1 through HS 6, and S 1 through S 6 in the transcripts for coding.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the focus groups of superintendents, elementary principals, and high school principals was recorded, transcribed, and coded to search for various themes that

emerged from the dialogue within all three focus groups. Roulston (2010) asserts that the facilitator's role in leading focus groups is to encourage participants to talk to one another, ask questions of each other, exchange stories, and comment on each other's experiences (Roulston, 2010, p. 35).

Regarding student engagement, the superintendents were asked if they have added any extracurricular activities in their districts to get more students involved in a variety of activities (Appendix B). As stated in the review of literature, students who are involved in extracurricular activities tend to be more engaged in school, and therefore, are more successful academically. Given the variety of the superintendents' schools and districts, the answers were anticipated to be very mixed.

The same process of recording, transcribing, and coding occurred with both focus groups of building principals as well. The researcher sought to gather data from the building principals regarding Dewey's ideas of schools having real-life learning attached to the content (Williams, 2017). They were asked what is being done in their schools to promote the philosophy of Dewey (Appendix A). Similar to the superintendent focus group questions, the principals' answers were coded, and themes were created.

All focus groups were asked about safety of staff and students in their building or district regarding emotional and mental health. The data was coded and themes emerged, showing evidence of how school leaders are striving to create climates of safety, beyond fire drills and weather safety.

School and district leaders were not identified by name but were coded using letters in the alphabet and a numeral. As questions were asked at the beginning of each meeting, the researcher designated a letter and a number to each speaker. For example, the first superintendent

to answer the first question of the meeting was coded as “S 1” for the entire focus group meeting. The next superintendent to speak was coded as “S 2.” This practice continued throughout the transcribing process for all three focus groups. Elementary principals were designated as E 1, E 2, and so on, while high school principals were designated as HS 1, HS 2, and so on.

Validity

For this qualitative research study utilizing focus groups, the researcher audio recorded, transcribed, and coded the information that was shared by the members of each focus group. Within each focus group, the researcher searched for themes and then compiled the data into three to five themes. The researcher compiled the variety of ideas generated in the focus groups and discussed them in relation to student engagement, as well as the areas of climate/culture, safety, teaching and learning, PLCs, and RTI/interim assessment. By collecting all the shared stories from superintendents and building principals, the research created a level of trustworthiness and triangulation among all of the administrators who participated in the study. Since each member of a given focus group worked in the same position in different districts, the researcher believed that the participant answers could be corroborated or reinforced.

There is no doubt that reflexivity exists in this research. Reflexivity is defined as the researcher’s ability to be able to self-consciously refer to him/herself in relation to the production of knowledge about the research topic (Roulston, 2010, p. 116). In qualitative research, reflexivity has become a defining practice because there are some researchers who unintentionally influence the direction of their studies (Lear et al., 2018, p. 3). In order for trustworthy research that is void of the researcher’s preconceived ideas of standardized testing and defining successful schools, the researcher constructed the focus group questions in a way that would elicit open-ended responses. Finlay (2012) referred to reflexivity as “perilous, full of

muddy ambiguity and multiple trails" (p. 212). The researcher tried to ensure that his personal opinions about standardized testing as a resource for defining school success did not skew the questions and discussions in the focus groups. The purpose of this research was to focus on characteristics of successful schools and highlight what is being done in districts and school to emphasize student engagement and climate/culture. Additionally, during the focus group meetings, the researcher avoided discussion that could incite negativity regarding standards-based assessment.

Summary

Chapter III focused on this study's research procedures such as the design of the study, selection and population of participants, data collection, data analysis, and validity. Chapter IV presents the results from the analysis of the data. Chapter V includes an interpretation of findings, implications, recommendations, and a summary.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the research regarding this study's research question: What are the characteristics of school success as identified by school leaders? The purpose of this study was to bring awareness to North Dakota policy makers and other school leaders about what defines school success beyond strictly standardized assessments and proficiency designations. This chapter is divided into sections consisting of student engagement and climate/culture. Within the climate/culture section, there are subsections that include safety, relationships, teaching and learning, PLCs, and RTI/interim assessments. The RTI/Interim assessment section discusses which resources are utilized and not specifically whether they are successful in identifying student success with standardized testing. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of sections for student engagement and climate/culture.

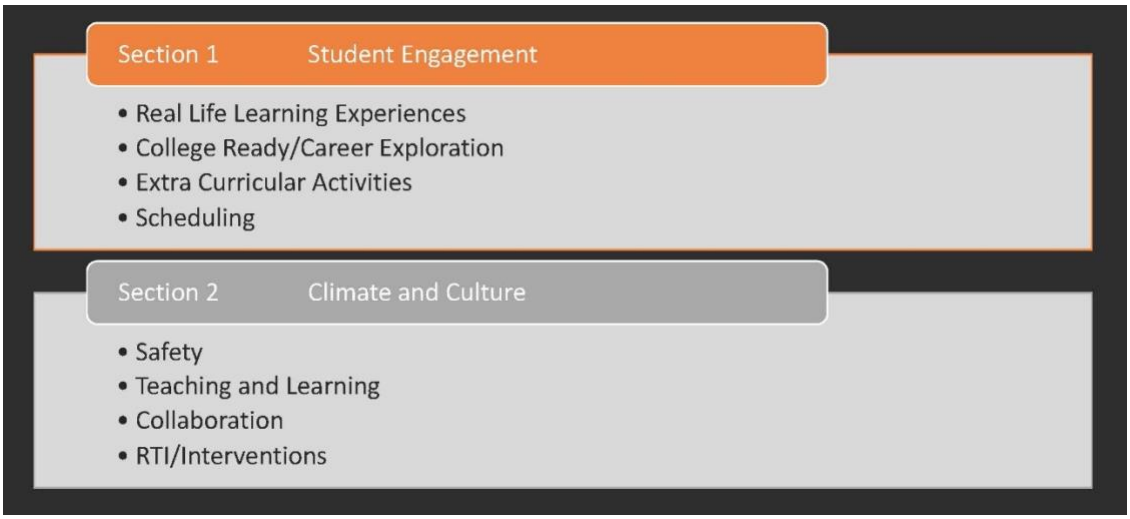

Figure 1. Breakdown of sections for student engagement and climate/culture.

This research study initiated conversations among school districts regarding ideas for student engagement in Grades K-12. These conversations show the practices used in North Dakota school districts to create a climate/culture that supports student and staff mental health, as well as enhances staff voice and choice for learning and decision making within the district. The role and effective use of RTI/MTSS at the district level were discussed in each focus group.

Stories were shared by elementary and high school administrators about the activities that can assist with student learning which include: (a) student learning that applies to real-life situations, (b) career planning, and (c) internships and dual credit/AP coursework that allow students a head start on their career goals prior to entering higher education.

A variety of North Dakota superintendents, elementary principals, and high school principals participated in three separate focus groups. They shared what is done within their buildings or districts to address this study's research question:

1. What are the characteristics of school success as identified by school leaders?

Student Engagement

The three focus group interviews intended to gather information about the practices that are being implemented by school leaders in North Dakota regarding student engagement. The following information contains direct quotes from the focus groups meetings. These quotes from superintendents and principals present examples of how student engagement is being addressed throughout schools in the state.

Real-Life Learning Experiences

This section discusses practices implemented in districts and schools in order to make classroom learning applicable to the outside world. The school leaders' quotes from each focus

group show evidence of these practices that encourage student engagement in schools of various sizes and in different geographic regions in North Dakota.

One of the questions in the focus groups focused on John Dewey who was a proponent of engagement in schools. He believed student engagement was enhanced when teachers allowed students to explore real-life situations so they could participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings (Morgan, 2017).

In the focus group of elementary principals, there were many examples of the application of classroom learning to real-life situations. A math teacher in one district was teaching measurement to her class, and she asked the class, “Why is this important for you to know?” A child responded, “Because it helps us know if we are tall enough to ride the rides at the fair.”

Another elementary principal talked about using Newsela as a resource for students to read current event articles at their reading level. This tool allows students to comprehend the reading of current events. In turn, the students become engaged in world happenings.

An elementary principal in a rural North Dakota community shared how they use members of the community in educating the younger students. Farmers go to the school with their equipment and teach farm safety skills. Also, volunteer firemen from the community go to the school for Fire Safety Week. These are examples of learning that are unique and engaging.

Genius Hour, a classroom lesson that began as a work strategy with Google, gives students a chance to develop their own ideas of their choosing, just like the employees at Google. It is practiced in one elementary school in a mid-sized district in North Dakota. The principal shared that the students who utilize Genius Hour are expected to use it one hour per week and give two presentations per year. Students feel this is their chance to work creatively and express themselves through self-made projects.

An elementary principal in a mid-sized district in western North Dakota shared a variety of STEAM activities that happen in her building each year involving Lego challenges, bridge building challenges, and coding activities with robots.

High school principals shared how work experience or job shadowing have become very popular in rural and large community high schools. One high school principal talked about how his district uses Golden Path Solutions, based out of NDSU, as a tool to help students in their job exploration. Businesses in the community create one-minute videos with titles like "One Day in the Life of…" that can be shared with students who may be interested in dental hygiene, auto mechanics, among many other professions. This tool has created job shadowing opportunities for students, sometimes leading to legitimate careers for students once they finish college. A dentist office in the community hired two dental hygienists, and Butler Machinery supported students who used this program. The principal said as many as seven or eight students in the past three years have found compatible businesses within the city that have paid for their education so they could bring them back home to work. One other school principal mentioned Golden Path and how they introduced this program to their 9th grade students. The emphasis on getting students to enroll in classes that support the career path they considering allows students in high school to see more value in the classes they are taking. In the spring of 2021, a student from this rural school was awarded a $10,000 scholarship to Sanford for its surgical tech program.

A superintendent from a rural western North Dakota school district also talked about the value of having cooperative work experiences in his district. In 2020-21, they had 60 juniors and seniors participate. These students made up half of the junior and senior classes. The course offers students a chance to leave the building and spend part of the day in a workplace setting, which in turn, landed them internships for the summer where they earned a wage. This same

superintendent also started the only FAA drone pilot certification program in the state for his high school students. In 2020-21, the district had 13 junior and senior students take part in the program, and the students took the certification test to be pilots. This superintendent noted that 25% of their students do not go to college, so the CTE programs in his district are full all the time. Students want to get those trade skills and work on the family farm. Courses like this allow the school to broaden a student's horizons.

Another superintendent from a larger school district talked about how the CTE administrators are very purposeful in looking at tracks beyond what is currently available and trying to create relevant tracks for as many students as possible. In this district, they have introduced a dual credit Intro to Education class for students who are interested in education as a career. By offering dual credit composition courses and other courses that exist in their Medical Careers track, a student can take two years of an RN degree, shortening their years in college.

Finally, another superintendent from a larger district talked about the relationship they have created with a college in their community to partner with them in every class. Regardless of a student being on a vocational track or going through another institution, stacking elements of courses together to earn credits is a goal of the school district. Getting students out of the two-year college track more quickly is the goal, and it may allow the student to then explore a four-year track if desired.

The evidence in these quotes show us that regardless of the age of the students, North Dakota public schools are making efforts to tie the real world to student learning. An elementary school is utilizing Genius Hour to allow students to work on personal interests and potential career interests. High school students are being given opportunities to get a head start on

potential careers by accelerating college coursework. From flying drones to CNA courses, students are given the opportunity to experience high school in a unique and resourceful way.

College Ready/Career Exploration

Discussions regarding college readiness and career exploration did not pertain to the elementary schools, but high school principals and district superintendents shared how they strive to facilitate real-life experiences in order to prepare their students for life after graduation.

The high school principals talked at length about making the coursework, or course offerings, more relevant to students as they begin preparing for college and exploring careers. Superintendents from rural schools emphasized dual credit coursework as an effective mode of student engagement. One superintendent shared how many of the teachers in their building have a master's degree which allows them to teach English and math courses through an agreement with one of the colleges in North Dakota. A second rural superintendent talked about how the school offers dual credit courses to students in the junior and senior classes through a two-year and a four-year school in the state. Students are enrolled in seven classes a day with no study halls, which makes scheduling these courses much easier for their district. This district also pays for the credits for the students enrolled in dual credit coursework. These students graduate with as many as 15 completed credits of college work.

Coursework for high school students is not just about preparation for college. High school principals and superintendents are working not only to prepare students for higher education but also to prepare students to enter the workforce as quickly as they want. This data shows that smaller school districts may not be able to offer the variety of course work for their students, but there are means available to offer students a strong head start for their college career.

Extracurricular Activities

In this theme, high school principals and superintendents discussed the importance of students being attached to an extracurricular activity and how participation in those activities keeps students engaged in their school and learning.

The question about extracurricular activities was geared toward the superintendents and high school principals. They were asked what specific strategies they use to enhance student engagement regarding extracurricular activities.

A superintendent from a mid-sized district in North Dakota said:

> "Extracurricular activities and co-curricular activities are all opportunities for them (students) to be able to be engaged, and we have a population of students that don't participate in extracurricular, don't participate in co-curriculars and, as a result, have those academic struggles."

Offering a variety of activities cultivates a well-rounded school, so one superintendent talked about not just having athletic teams, but also having speech, debate, chess clubs, and fine arts options, which allows every student to participate with the set of skills they possess.

A building principal talked about how one of her teachers started a cybersecurity team, and they participate in the Air Force Associations CyberPatriot program. Participating teams act as newly hired IT professionals who are managing the network of a small company (CyberPatriot, 2013).

School leaders in high schools and districts understand the importance of having as many activities as possible in order to keep students involved and engaged. The focus groups discussed how academic success is tied to extracurricular participation, especially when students have several types of extracurricular activities from which to choose.

Scheduling

Scheduling, which is how administrators arrange students' classes throughout the day, was not mentioned as an engagement tool. Block scheduling, which consists of longer class periods but fewer classes during the day, was shared in this theme.

The conversation regarding block scheduling suggested that student engagement was enhanced by offering a day or two each week with block scheduling rather than traditional scheduling. In a typical or traditional schedule, there are seven periods, each one made up of 50 minutes of time. In block scheduling, there are four periods in a day, and each one would last 85-90 minutes. One principal mentioned how block scheduling tended to put "a little less on the student's plate," and the consensus was that stress among students was lowered on these days. All three high school principals, one from a large district and two from smaller districts, stated that when this is done in their buildings, students really enjoy the switch and hope for more block scheduling days in each week. The positive attributes of block scheduling are less time in the hallways, fewer teachers, and the ability to finish school work while at school. One principal from a rural school shared that they first utilized block scheduling one day a week a few years ago, and presently the school uses block scheduling four days a week and the traditional schedule one day a week. One rural principal stated that each year the student surveys have shown that students want more block scheduling rather than traditional scheduling.

According to the high school principal focus group, block scheduling is very well received by the students in small districts as well as large districts. Students seem to embrace the idea of longer class periods allowing them to finish their classwork during the school day. Principals shared how this is being done five days a week in some districts and one or two days a week in smaller districts.

School Climate/Culture

As reviewed in the literature, the National School Climate Center listed five areas essential to school climate: safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environment, and the processes of school improvement (Thapa et al., 2012, p. 3). These topics were discussed by the focus groups in this study.

Safety of Students

The questions regarding safety pertained to the emotional health and safety of students attending K-12 schools. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) has become a critical focus within K-12 schools over the last few years and was discussed in both principal focus groups.

Schools are well-versed in fire drills and other emergency response situations, but in 2021, there is an emphasis on keeping students and staff socially and emotionally safe and secure. Regarding students, the question was, “Where is your school/district right now with respect to Social Emotional Learning (SEL)?”

Elementary school principals shared the SEL curricula that they are using. Zones of Regulation and 2nd Step were the most popular. One rural elementary principal mentioned a local program that they called “Best Friends Mentoring,” and this program partnered juniors and seniors from their high school with elementary age students. The high school students work with the elementary students as mentors. The high school students are trained, the school pays for background checks, and the program is structured to attend to some of the more “at-risk” students in the elementary building.

Another rural elementary principal talked about how the focus in her building is to teach children how to make “good choices.” Being kind to others is an emphasis of this work. When problems arise between students, it is understood that mistakes are made. However, when a

similar situation comes up again, there is a review of what would be a better choice to make instead of the one that was made initially.

Finally, an elementary principal from a mid-sized school district talked about the emphasis on morning meetings that happen in every classroom in the building. The focus is on all the positives that are happening within the school and the classroom. Each teacher is encouraged to make a "Good News Call of the Day" and share with parents something their child is doing well, along with telling the student what they are doing well. Positive feedback, as often as possible, is the goal; consequences are not necessarily given the first time that mistakes or errors in judgment are made.

A high school principal from a rural school district, where students enrolled are in Grades 7-12, talked about the mentorship program started a few years ago. In a mentorship role, every adult in the building meets weekly and one-on-one with about 10 students. Using the 7 Mindsets SEL curriculum, this principal and the staff focus on how intrinsic motivation can lead to a growth mindset in the student population (7 Mindsets, 2021). After two years with the same mentors, students switch to a new mentor.

A high school principal from a mid-sized school district talked about how he created the theme of "This is Your School" about five to seven years ago. It is an ongoing theme throughout the school year starting on the first day of school and during assemblies. The idea he shares with his 9-12 grade student population is "what you allow matters." What the students allow to be said or done sets the culture and the mindset for the building, from the hallways to the classrooms to the locker rooms. He shared:

> "It's about being the best you that you want to be and how we, as a school, can help you get there. I use the word 'advocate' a lot for self and for others. I talk about resilience,

perseverance, and having a growth mindset. There is a mirror on the wall in the commons area, an idea I stole from a principal in another district, and on the mirror, the words, 'your image is not complete yet' are written to remind our students that they are never done growing."

Another mid-sized high school principal shared how a former football coach would say, "Viking Pride" with his athletes. That same message began to filter throughout the student body, and it became a mantra that still runs through the school to this day. Over the years, the school has defined what it means to have Viking Pride, to show your Viking Pride, and how people with Viking Pride would carry themselves in the building. This is now part of every classroom in the high school, and the culture of the building starts with what a teacher expects and accepts from students.

This principal referenced in the previous paragraph challenges his teachers each year to learn more about their students than first names, last names, or parents' names. He does this with his staff and strives to create the same "family" feel for all the students as well.

A principal from a large high school in a large district talked about using "advisory" every day in their building. They use the Ramp-Up to Readiness curriculum from the University of Minnesota for this work. The Ramp-Up to Readiness curriculum is made up of five pillars of readiness: academic, admissions, career, financial, and social emotional readiness (Ramp-Up to Readiness, 2019). An emphasis with high schools throughout North Dakota over the last five to eight years has been to better prepare and plan with all their students in Grades 9-12 for what they can do after high school graduation. This advisory time at this large high school addresses that important step, and the SEL component is a mental health tool that is good to have as well.

A principal from another large high school in North Dakota shared how his school uses "minute meetings." Once every two weeks, teachers are expected to connect with a student and review their academic progress first. Then they work to build rapport with the students so they know they have an adult in the building they can contact when things are difficult. His counselors do this at least once each quarter with the purpose of building trust and creating a relationship with the students. This principal believes that the tone of a building starts in the classrooms within the building. He reiterated the theme of another principal: "what you allow and accept will continue." That is how culture is created.

The minute meetings method does not follow a theme. It allows teachers to coach each other on what works best for them. In turn, new teachers have the freedom to develop their own style. This principal spoke of the success with this program by sharing that one of the questions within their senior survey asks, "How many adults in the building would you say you have a good relationship with?" The principal stated that by the end of a student's time at this high school, the average response is five to seven adults.

There is a clear emphasis on the emotional health and well-being that is being addressed in elementary schools and high schools in North Dakota. Whether it is an established curriculum or some other means of allowing students to feel safe and secure, school leaders understand that emotional health is important to student success and learning.

Safety of Staff

The social and emotional well-being of school staff was also addressed in this research, especially with an awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic's effect on staff. In the focus group, the building principals were asked, "Do you guys do anything for mental health with your staff? What are you doing to support your staff?"

An elementary principal from a large district talked about how their district conducted a 10-week book study on compassion fatigue. Compassion fatigue is a term that describes the physical, emotional, and psychological impact of helping others, often through experiences of stress or trauma. Compassion fatigue is often mistaken for burnout, which is a cumulative sense of fatigue or dissatisfaction. This elementary principal mentioned how the counselors and social workers in the district get so overwhelmed regularly that she is concerned it is becoming a problem in their district.

Another elementary principal shared that their district is receiving additional emotional support in their building by using The Village in Fargo. Rather than students and staff leaving the building for half a day to get support, this district brings an on-site counselor to the building two days a week. The counselor is also available through the summer for any staff or students.

The high school principals approached this question differently. One principal shared how teachers are allowed to choose the color of their room when it is due to be painted. His goal with this: (a) relationship building and giving ownership to the person who is in that room for eight hours a day, and (b) allowing the staff member to feel comfortable and confident in their place of work.

Another high school principal talked about how she works very hard to not catch her staff "doing anything wrong." She talked about how the minute she enters a classroom, teachers appear to think they have to be perfect. She makes a concerted effort to treat them with kindness and support when the teachers share their concerns of failed lessons or parts of lessons. She mentioned the difficulties of the 2020-21 school year; it was incredibly hard for teachers and evaluations of teachers because of the constraints that existed in classrooms because of COVID-19 protocols. She stated, "Taking the pressure off is a good relationship building tool."

Finally, a high school principal shared how her school is striving to make the school days more personalized for the students, as well as making professional development for staff more personal. Voice and Choice has become a popular program for students as personalized learning has grown in the last five to seven years. This principal mentioned how giving teachers the same voice and choice with their learning throughout the year has been a great addition to her building. She is in the process of opening a new building in her district. During the hiring process, the conversation of philosophy and building culture has been very important to her and her associate principals.

For superintendents, the question regarding safety referred to district staff rather than students. In the conversation with superintendents, the researcher focused on social and emotional safety for staff with the question, "Does your district have a team that addresses school safety?"

A superintendent from a mid-sized district stressed the importance of having a school safety team in all districts. Whether it is a team at the building level or the district level, there must be an opportunity for staff to openly share and engage in the decision-making process to build a strong culture. This superintendent used a medical term to help answer this question. He stated:

> "I think as you go up the chain you have a 'distal' impact. That doesn't mean it's not an important impact because I think everybody in the chain of that continuum has responsibilities for your school system. School boards draft policy, set directions, and give the mission and vision as a community. As an organization, as superintendent, I see it being a lot about resource allocation and support, coaching and redirection, especially regarding the mission or vision. Principals create conditions for success. They're looking

at their individual buildings and their individual teachers and students and taking what they need to create successful conditions. Then, teachers are on the ground floor; they conduct the heavy work."

A superintendent from a mid-sized district stated that he spends most of his time working with his building leaders and district committees. His district does have a "safety committee," and prior to COVID-19, it met monthly. He stated that he spends most of his time working in small groups, including with teachers.

A superintendent from a small rural district talked at length about setting high expectations for his staff. He shared that maybe those high expectations were a reason for such a high turnover of staff in his district. The researcher did not encounter this concept in his research, but this gave the superintendent an opportunity to genuinely share this concern.

The information on how schools and school districts are attempting to support their teachers is unique within all districts. It is obvious that school leaders recognize the stress and anxiety that accompanies the teaching profession. The COVID-19 pandemic has exasperated that existing stress and anxiety, so school districts are implementing several ways to support all staff.

Teaching and Learning

Based on the list of 13 competencies mentioned in the literature review, focus group questions focused on the necessary qualities to be successful as a teacher in this day and age.

All three focus groups were asked, "When you're hiring teachers and staff for your building, what qualities are you looking for?" The following were the most common responses from all three focus groups.

The competency mentioned most often was "collaboration." One high school principal referred to this idea as being a "team player," and one elementary principal used the term

"family." The researcher interpreted both to mean the same thing. Successful schools in this age have prioritized time for teachers to collaborate with each other, learning from each other and teaching each other. A rural high school principal said, "Someone who is going to be flexible and willing to try new things." This happens when collaboration occurs, especially when teachers are willing to learn from each other. Another elementary principal said, "I think it is so important for teachers to have relationships with other teachers in a professional way. I currently have a very young staff, and they need to feel comfortable in their relationships in order to grow."

An elementary principal stated:

> "When I came here, they were begging for collaboration and to be heard, included in the decision-making process. I gathered that things were done from the top-down, and it rocks the boat a little bit. They are more likely to take decisions well and understand better if teachers are involved in the conversation before implementation."

These teachers were eager to share thoughts, feelings, and experiences with others. It is evident that this principal's teachers were denied a voice in decisions in the past, and they desire a more prominent role in decision making through collaboration.

Reflection, one of the 13 competencies, was mentioned often. One rural superintendent stated, "I think reflection is about growth, and I just don't think there's such a thing as failure if we reflect upon what our experience was."

A high school principal said:

> "I would agree with what was said about reflection. I think if we go down the road of personal learning, students have to reflect on what they already know and where they want to go. It should be no different for teachers but giving that time to reflect is hard. We finish up units and move so quickly that we often don't reflect on the work. It is still

not engrained in our culture to take time to reflect and really have critical conversations so, I believe, reflection is a key in getting personalized learning to teachers."

There has been a movement in public education to give students a more personalized plan for their learning. This philosophy is also starting to gather support among school leaders regarding how professional development and teacher evaluation happens in schools. When students or teachers are able to reflect on their learning, growth becomes more personal, which can be a powerful tool for students and for teachers.

Finally, another competency shared by participants in each focus group was "unity of purpose." Unity of purpose is best defined as the idea of having a common core of beliefs or values. A superintendent from a mid-sized district said, "Having the ship rowing in the same direction and just how much easier that makes it. To me, that was, that's a piece that I couldn't, that I couldn't stay away from." An elementary principal stated, "I think it's so important for us to have relationships with our teachers in that professional way." Another elementary principal said:

"Everybody coming together, transitioning from 'me' to 'we' is what breaks those doors like you talked about. Chaos can happen if we don't have that and you don't have that shared leadership, you don't have buy in and they're going to do whatever they want to do."

"Instructional leadership" was another common theme in response to this question. A superintendent from a rural school district said:

"For a building leader, I mean, you have to be the leader of the group and know your stuff and be willing to work with all different types of people. I guess that's the one thing

we really do a lot here, a lot of personality, kind of learning about our staff, and the more we do that with them, the more they like it and kind of understand each other."

The most mentioned competencies were collaboration, reflection, unity of purpose, and instructional leadership. This indicates that school staff do not desire to function in isolation. Teachers wish to share best practices, reflect on their own practices, have a voice, and work closely with others in order to build a school climate/culture with common goals.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Collaboration

In keeping with the teaching and learning theme, the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) was part of the focus group discussions with building principals. The question about PLCs aimed to gauge how much collaboration time teachers were allowed with each other. The question also sought to gather information about PLC practices in North Dakota schools and how involved administrators are in staff PLCs.

At the elementary level of education, PLCs are being used very thoroughly according to the elementary principal focus group. A principal from a rural elementary school said:

"Our school meets weekly, 1 hour during the school year. Our school starts at 9:00 a.m., and buses start arriving at 8:30. The students get a half hour of recess. This year our PLCs meet on Friday, and we meet at grade level. We have also done a deeper dive into the questions associated with PLCs because we've added common planning time to do all the other things that sometimes PLCs get asked to do as well. We encourage a lot more data on the table and we're going to double down deeper into that because I think it can tie into our MTSS and how we help all learners succeed and we can do more with that."

Another rural elementary principal said:

> "We meet an hour a week also. I do tell them, like the first, the first week of the month, I do want there to be some data discussions based on our STAR assessments, there is that data piece there. However, I don't ever want it to overpower teachers talking about instructional strategies or if there's any behavior management type things. They're expected to keep notes that I review. I do pop into the meetings, sometimes I'm invited because they need specific guidance, sometimes I just pop in. We also do a new teacher PLC which is separate from our weekly PLC. That's about every other week, sometimes once a month. Once we get an agenda where, okay, we can meet now, I'll just schedule that into the calendar and that's where my veteran teachers come in and teach my new teachers."

An elementary principal in a mid-sized district shared:

> "We have done PLCs for a long time and we used to say we PLC'd but we never really PLC'd. This year we took a big step because we have our essential standards and because we were hybrid in our school for so long, we really wanted to make sure that everybody understood that our kids needed to know these essentials skills and standards to be able at a certain level to be able to move forward and that's what 80% of our time in the classroom needed to be focused around. One of the things we really focused on was building unit plans around those essential standards and then creating common formative assessments and common summative assessments that teachers were working on, focused on reading and math. Our teachers have really worked on those unit plans and getting those ready and having conversations around those, and what we need to do next, and we really have tried to kind of focus around how we build capacity as a team. It is not

uncommon to hear from school leaders that doing PLC's the right way is difficult and hard to sustain. Hearing this school leader share that there was a focus to their PLC's lends credibility to the process of collaboration within this building."

Another elementary principal from a large district in North Dakota said:

> "We have early releases twice a month, on Wednesday afternoons. This is the first year of K-12 alignment, before middle school went with more of a team model and high schools were doing an early or late start. This year we're all doing early dismissals on those Wednesdays. Our PLCs are really more focused and more driven around a particular standard each time they meet, so it will be nice to have a reboot just to make sure we're all on the same page."

A small rural high school principal said, "We're rethinking how that works. I think next year when we will have a lot of people that, they're only singleton teachers, it's really difficult." Elementary school leaders within the focus groups are working to create time daily and weekly for their staff to collaborate on teaching, assessment, and some of the data that they are using in their classroom or school. This is strong evidence of solid practice.

Two high school principals from large districts shared creative modes of collaboration happening in their buildings and districts. One principal stated:

> "We use PLCs in the DuFour sense of the work on Wednesdays. We do a late start for students, early start for teachers. They are in content groups like Algebra I, Geometry, English I, that type of thing. They do use the 4 questions (DuFour), and they use data, so they have common assessments they do look at. But we also have collab time where, especially with the block schedule, they will be able to collab, not with departments, but cross curricular and that's the one thing different at our high school. Our teacher centers

are set up with all grade levels, kind of like middle school, more like teams and academies. The CTE is mixed with the four content areas which is kind of a new concept. They will have an hour every day to collab as well, I guess it's every other day."

The other principal shared:

"We've been having PLC meetings for quite some time but this year we put a new schedule in place in which the three high schools in the district have about 40 minutes every morning. Of that, two days a week are scheduled for intervention time for students to be able to receive assistance with individual teachers. Two days a week, they're working either in their building or with their department across the district. On Fridays, it's building time, sometimes we'll call it 'colleague share,' and sometimes we'll have a faculty meeting, book studies, those sorts of things."

Weekly collaboration across school districts with multiple high schools effectively supports teachers and students.

The question for superintendents regarding PLCs was: "As superintendents, with your administrative teams, would those meetings fall along the same lines as PLCs?"

A superintendent from a mid-sized district stated:

"I don't know that we do enough there, unfortunately. I mean, everybody, I don't care what system you're in, you're going to have some level of meetings or information sharing and we do that to administrative teams, and we've tried to focus on leveled meetings but it's not a PLC. We've done some change with some training we've received for administrators with Michael Mahoney, from Solution Tree, that talks a little bit about that, but I think we are from that. I'm guessing we're like a lot of districts and don't provide that nearly to the degree that we should."

Another superintendent from a mid-sized district reinforced the previous comments:

> "I would say the same, echo what was said. It's organizational management a lot of times instead of leadership. We get caught into making sure things are aligned, make sure systems are working together collectively, addressing issues, rather than being more visionary. Rather than talking about the big picture, connections back in with our goals and so we could be much better making sure we're intentional again relative to things that are happening, what we're doing."

A rural superintendent said, "We have our norms, and we talk about everything under the sun that we need to in as short an amount of time as we can."

In the focus group meeting, the researcher posed the questions:

> "I am curious if your administrative meetings, how you align a common purpose. In districts where you have four or five elementary schools, how do you get those principals together and get them focused on one or two pieces, or do you? Do you give a little more control over each building?"

The superintendent with the first response stated:

> "We try to. When I came to this district, I think there was a pretty significant issue with all our elementary buildings operating like their own K-5 district. They even had their own assessment schedules: one would do NWEA in the winter, and one would do fall/spring. We needed to have a greater common mission and vision, and so we did start doing elementary level and secondary level meetings monthly. They are agenda driven, done by the curriculum director and myself, just to get us all on the same page and at least rolling in the same direction. I think some of that is just natural, you know? Not just the administrative but the relationships that come from those kinds of conversations and

> it's empowering. We're doing a lot more question-asking than we are directing. So, I guess that is sort of PLC'ing, but it's a challenge. Like I said, I don't think we do a great job in schools of doing that with our principals, at least in our bigger settings."

Superintendents are open about the lack of collaboration that exists within their district among school leadership. In large districts, when compared to the amount of teacher collaboration that was shared by building principals, it is noted that the same collaboration is not as organized for the school leaders. This focus group conversation may spur some change in those districts.

RTI/Interim Assessment

This section is dedicated to a discussion on the use of RTI and interim assessments in schools today. With the advent of standardized testing in the early 2000s, intervention resources and progress monitoring with regular assessments has become the norm.

The discussion regarding Response to Intervention (RTI) and interim assessment was with principals, not superintendents. The researcher determined that RTI and interim assessment concerned building principals more than superintendents. The researcher asked the principals:

> "Look at the four essential components to a strong intervention program and talk a little bit about how, you know, are there ones that maybe aren't being done as well as you'd like? Just give me a little comment on the components or add something to what you are doing with your RTI stuff."

Several of the principals felt that the process of intervention has become a bit overwhelming and that resources are so plentiful that it is hard to choose from all the programs. An elementary principal from a rural district said, "Good intervention programs are so expensive. Sometimes it's hard for schools our size to have those resources." An elementary principal from a mid-sized district shared:

> "You can intervention yourself to death, you can have more kids in intervention and then we can go back to assessment, because you can assess til you're blue in the face, and I don't care what assessment you give, you're going to find a student that needs some sort of intervention. You really need to read your research and not just get swayed over to phonics because that's the new kick again."

These two quotes from principals from small districts provide insight into the difficulty that exists when it comes to supporting students adequately and providing resources for schools with small enrollment and small budgets. A principal from a large district stated, "We vary from building to building in our district. All the things I've utilized with Title I funding is not going to non-Title schools."

In terms of the number of resources available, an elementary principal from a mid-sized district said:

> "We have the literacy grants, and so we have more interventions than we know what to do with. There isn't any training and so you listen to one consultant that is very knowledgeable and they tell you have to go down the phonics path. And so it's been a challenge because we have a whole boatload of interventions. The circle grant took us down the intervention trail, and we are now pulling our kids out of our phonics intervention programs and putting them back into LLI [Leveled Literacy Intervention] because they are not moving in their reading level."

This conversation reinforces the issues that exist, even in large districts, when some schools have better access to intervention programs than other schools. Even in large districts, budgets can be radically different, especially when it comes to garnering federal funds that support the purchase of multiple intervention resources.

Next, the researcher inquired about the principals' thoughts on assessments: "Tell me about your STAR or MAP assessment: how often you use it and how much you think there's a benefit from it." One elementary principal from a rural district said:

> "We're using STAR, and we do it quarterly. I'm trying to get a bead on the kids. We use it as one of our checks for our MTSS. One thing we'll be working on this year is going to be working with our data. I'm trying to do some data meetings and use it better."

An elementary principal from a mid-sized district said:

> "We use NWEA still here, and it's something that we've done across our elementary, middle, and high school. We don't use it a ton. One of the things we do for the kids is it's like getting on the scale three times a year to see if you're making the right kind of progress and going in the right direction. We don't use it to drill down because we're focused on our essentials, and if you're doing the right thing on your essentials, growth just happens. We do it three times a year now that we've gone one to one with devices. We're really using more of our common formative and common summative assessments and what we're building there is to drive our instruction, not necessarily those bigger tests."

These responses shed light on how some districts extensively implement their assessment tools compared to other districts. Some school districts have had these assessment tools for as long as 12 years, and they shared that they are still figuring out how to best use the data.

With the high school principal focus group, the researcher implored, "Talk a little bit about what you guys do at the high school to do intervention type work with your kids, your 'at-risk' population." A high school principal from a mid-sized district shared:

"We changed how we use our paras and how we use our special ed staff. Any class that's just a regular level core class, so it's not advanced, it's not AP, it's not dual credit, it's a regular level core class grades 9 through 12, almost everyone will have either a para or a special ed teacher in the room, not team-teaching, but there to assist. They can work with small groups, they can pull kids out and do small group intervention. It doesn't matter if the kid is on an IEP or not, we tell them at the beginning of the year the extra person in the room is there for everyone. The other piece I would say is we have tried to really work now through the PLC process on the guaranteed and viable curriculum. What does that look like, what are you guaranteeing every student so that we know the kids that shouldn't struggle, shouldn't struggle. Everybody's getting what they need. Then, the first question we ask during the MTSS process of a teacher that is starting to recognize maybe there's a kid that they want to submit and have us look into is, 'What have you done?' 'What did you do in your classroom first?' If they haven't done anything, we don't take the name, there has to be an attempt to make an effort. Have they called the parents? Let's start there. 'Have you made a phone call?' So, we're going through that little checklist first, but I think the biggest thing for us is how we support the classroom with paras and the special ed teachers."

A principal from a rural district said:

"We have a Building Level Support Team (BLST) and since we've moved it into teams, which has been super helpful. So, they have a list for their section where they can identify a student and we have a process, all the meeting notes are there so it's available for all the staff on teams. They are able to check on the students and see, 'hey what works, what

didn't.' It's not necessarily a formalized, like MTSS or RTI but, I mean, it's a good process."

Another principal from a rural district stated:

> "We were able to hire an MTSS coordinator here for our district. This has helped so we're working on Pathways the last couple of years. We're really focusing on reading. We're using LLI [Leveled Literacy Intervention]. It's been really effective. I've seen a lot of growth with that, and we want to focus on family engagement as well, but that's been really difficult this year."

A high school principal from a large district stated:

> "We're blessed because we have an EL staff and we have the resources that, for the most part, will be able to assist those kids. It's more of, I think, those students who come from a residential setting and are now coming to us. They haven't had a traditional school setting, and we've got three and a half weeks to go in the school year. How are we going to connect them with any sort of a credit opportunity in that situation? Some of the other things we do, my school, we level classes. I don't know if it's right or wrong, but we try to meet the student where they are at with their reading levels, their ability to have their literacy skills, we call them 'spot classes' and 'level 6.' Primarily it's much of the same curriculum, just presented in different ways, maybe a pace that's a little bit slower, not as deep, trying to meet the kids where they are. We also have an 'Individualized Learning Center' which is really a supervised study hall. Kids don't get credit, but they get the support they need, and it is a semester experience. Through the use of COVID dollars, we also hired an academic interventionist, we call it, a short-term placement for kids that were not doing well, maybe getting Cs and Ds, assign them for two weeks, reevaluate

after that. They earn their way out, and that's really been helpful for kids that didn't have the discipline to be able to get their work done. I mentioned our intervention time back in our discussion on PLCs. We call it BAM time, Bruins Achieving More. It's not only for the students that are intended to be caught up, it is also for that learner that perhaps would need the ability to receive some acceleration, an AP kid that somebody was looking to do a project outside. So those are some of the strategies to be able to help students."

Interestingly, many high school leaders talked about programs that originated primarily for elementary students. Building level teams and MTSS philosophies are rooted in supporting early learners, but high school leaders shared how they are working to support their learners with different strategies and resources. It is evident that K-12 education leaders understand the importance of supporting students throughout their entire academic career.

Summary

Chapter IV shared the stories of school leaders from three focus groups of superintendents, elementary principals, and high school principals. Examples of learning methods, extracurricular activities, college and career themes, and scheduling were all discussed as a means to better engage students in K-12 education. For the purpose of climate and culture, stories of how schools and school districts are working to provide care for the social and emotional health of students and staff members were discussed. Additionally, this chapter presented quotes regarding teaching and learning, collaboration, and the implementation of interventions. Chapter V includes a summary of the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how school leaders in the state of North Dakota define success in their schools and districts without using test scores as a measurement. This study collected information shared by these school and district leaders regarding the practices they use to foster successful schools. This chapter includes a summary of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion. This chapter contains discussion and future research recommendations based on the exploration of the following research question:

1. What are the characteristics of school success as identified by school leaders?

The research for how schools define success revolves around two main themes: student engagement and climate/culture. Within the climate/culture theme, there were five areas of focus that made climate/culture a positive experience: (a) safety, (b) relationships, (c) teaching and learning, (d) Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and (e) RTI/interim assessments. All of these themes or factors can support the idea of a school being successful.

Summary of Findings

For the school leaders that participated in the research, student engagement appears in many forms. The conversations from the focus groups were broken down into four categories:

(a) real-life learning experiences, (b) college ready/career exploration, (c) extracurricular activities, and (d) scheduling.

For the purposes of this research, the following definition was used to define student engagement:

> "Student engagement is the investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution." (Trowler, 2010)

Real-Life Learning Experiences

All of the participants from each focus group gave many examples of how schools are striving to make education relevant to their students' future. The following are some examples: (a) early elementary school teachers asking students "Why is this important to know?", (b) elementary schools using web resources like Newsela as a tool to teach students about current events, and (c) schools using community members to teach farm and equipment safety.

Activities like Genius Hour are being incorporated into classrooms at a young age to give students opportunities to create their own projects and creatively think for themselves. STEAM challenges and the use of Legos and coding to share engineering practices with the youngest learners are examples that support the real-life learning philosophy that Dewey promoted (Williams, 2017).

High school principals and superintendents shared how work experience and internships have started to take a place in K-12 education. The following are additional real-life experience examples: (a) students leaving the building during school time to participate in real work settings

in the community, (b) exposure to careers like dental hygienics and diesel mechanics, and (c) experience with drone technology including drone pilot certification.

In North Dakota, the role of Career and Technical Education (CTE) is growing and exploring more opportunities to create work and life experiences for students. The following are some examples: (a) Intro to Education course offerings, (b) early coursework for students interested in becoming registered nurses, and (c) CNA certification.

College Ready/Career Exploration

Dual credit coursework has grown extensively in the state and is designed to allow students a head start on a college degree. Qualified teachers in rural North Dakota are teaching Comp I and II, College Algebra, and more to students as they become juniors and seniors in high school. One superintendent mentioned her school's relationship with a university in their area that helped make this possible for their students. Some of the activities mentioned in the focus groups, especially for the high school students, are clearly designed to help students prepare for the next steps in their lives after K-12 education. It should also be noted that elementary schools, with the use of Genius Hour and coding activities, are giving some of the youngest learners insight into potential careers.

Extracurricular Activities

The research shows that students who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to have higher levels of engagement (Lawson & Lawson, 2020). The participants in the focus groups confirmed this by sharing that they want to keep students involved in extracurricular activities. Some schools have even added activities in order to increase student participation.

A superintendent mentioned the importance of having activities within the district like chess club, speech, debate, and fine arts in order to reach as many students as possible. Having a variety of options allows students a chance to engage, gain a sense of belonging, and strengthen relationships with other students and adults in the school and district. A high school principal from western North Dakota shared that her school offers a cybersecurity exercise as an extracurricular activity, which could lead to interest in a potential career.

While there was not significant evidence of extracurricular activities from the elementary school leaders, high school leaders and superintendents spoke about the importance of student participation in extracurricular activities that foster students' specific skill sets.

Scheduling

Though unexpected by the researcher, the topic of scheduling was discussed regarding student engagement. High school principals shared that a form of block scheduling is a positive tool for student engagement. Block scheduling, which consists of students attending four longer class periods two to three days a week instead of the typical seven-hour day, has become a popular trend. Block scheduling allows students more time in those classes and finish assignments prior to leaving the room and moving on to another class. The focus group discussions revealed that this sort of scheduling assists students with experiencing less stress. One high school principal shared that the surveys filled out by their students supported the idea of block scheduling in their district. Diverse scheduling is happening in small and large school districts. There is also evidence that student voice is driving some of this change in scheduling.

School Climate/Culture

Regarding climate and culture, the focus groups discussed safety for students and teachers, relationships, teaching and learning, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and RTI/interim assessment.

Safety of Students

The focus of the safety questions in each focus group was from a mental health perspective. There was ample evidence of how schools have made efforts to address this with their students and staff. Social Emotional Learning (SEL) was addressed by the elementary principals and a little bit by high school principals. Resources like Zones of Regulation, 2nd Step, and Best Friends Mentoring were all resources that were mentioned as being used in elementary school.

High school principals shared that they focus more on mentoring programs between staff and students as a tool for supporting students, as well as building student/adult relationships. "Minute Meetings," "Advisory Time," and attempting to give students ownership of their school were practices put in place in order to help students feel safe and valued in the school building. Resources like The 7 Mindsets and Ramp-Up to Readiness were mentioned as being used in high school buildings.

Safety of Staff

This was an important component of concern for the focus group participants. In Cohen and Freiberg's (2013) research, staff safety was discussed as an essential piece of overall school safety (p. 3).

A couple of examples of staff safety practices include: (a) hiring counselors from professional agencies to work with students and staff and (b) creating independence for staff

members like classroom painting or working through evaluations after a tough lesson. The most popular theme from this discussion was professional development. The participants shared that they aim to give their staff a voice in the mission and vision of the school building, especially when it comes to teaching and learning. As personalized learning for students has become more popular, this same idea is being applied to staff and their growth as professionals.

Superintendents referenced team building activities, such as committees, that allow staff to have a voice in decision making. Team building opportunities can build a positive and synergetic culture for staff.

Teaching and Learning

The teaching and learning question stemmed from Ross and Cozzens's (2016) research regarding the 13 core competencies for school administrators and their effect on academic achievement. All 13 competencies were mentioned; some fit better for principals than for superintendents.

The focus group questions regarding teaching and learning focused on the qualities that principals seek when hiring teachers. The same list of competencies was voiced by superintendents when it came to hiring administrators. With the building principals, "collaboration" was mentioned most often. Principals desire staff capable of working together, while sharing what methods work best for them and simultaneously accepting ideas from others to improve strategies within classrooms.

"Reflection" also came up several times. This connects with personal growth opportunity, which is becoming more prevalent in K-12 schools. As a type of definition, a high school principal mentioned that reflection is a way to self-assess. Professional development for teachers is becoming more independent yearly. The idea of voice and choice is popular among student

learning conversations, and it is growing to include our teachers as well. For growth to happen with either group, students or teachers, they have to reflect and assess what they are learning and what they still need to learn. That is the power of reflection.

Finally, “unity of purpose” was a popular competency in each focus group as well. One superintendent referred to this idea as “having everyone in the boat rowing in the same direction.” As mentioned by an elementary principal, it is the process of transitioning from “me” to “we.” From all of the shared insights, it is evident that these principals and superintendents support a culture that fosters care and collaboration, even in their hiring practices.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

As portrayed in the literature review, a strong professional community possesses a collective sense of contributing to the learning opportunities that exist for the students, not just in the current year, but also in the years that follow (Lee & Louis, 2019, p. 86).

The principals who participated in this study shared a considerable amount of information regarding their PLCs practices. The following are some examples: (a) weekly meetings within buildings, (b) weekly meetings within departments, (c) weekly meetings with departments from other schools in larger districts, and (d) early dismissals in districts multiple times a month. The research shows that PLCs are a prominent component of schools, big and small, throughout North Dakota.

The superintendents agreed that the implementation of PLCs in school buildings is much different than meetings among administrators. They shared that their meetings did not necessarily follow the procedures of true PLCs.

RTI/Interim Assessment

Finally, only the principal focus groups discussed RTI/interim assessment. The information gathered from those two focus groups showed that appropriate support for learning has become a priority in K-12 education. The focus in the conversation with elementary principals revolved around the cost of intervention programs and trying to find a common ground for how much intervention is too much intervention. The high school principals shared examples of how they are working to support their "at-risk" students, such as placing paraprofessionals in all required courses like English I-IV, Algebra I, and Geometry. In this case, the paraprofessional is not only responsible for students with disabilities but also any student in the classroom who may need additional support to be successful. Other examples include: (a) creating intervention time multiple times a week where a student can find a teacher and get the extra time necessary to be successful and (b) hiring MTSS/RTI coordinators that lead the intervention work for teachers. There was an abundance of evidence showing that intervention is happening at a variety of grade levels across the state of North Dakota.

Only the elementary teachers were asked about their interim assessment work. There was an even split on those using NWEA versus STAR. Both assessments seem to be valued in the elementary setting, as teachers can use the data to progress monitor students. There was discussion about using the STAR assessment as a tool within the MTSS program at one elementary school.

The conversation led to the perceived lack of value in interim assessment in 2021. Many districts have adopted common assessments, formative and summative. So those tests, written at grade level by teachers, seemed to hold more weight than STAR or NWEA assessments.

Implications for Practice

In the literature review, research showed how successful schools are defined. Student engagement and climate/culture are crucial to the overall success of a school or district. Five specific themes were generated within school climate/culture: (a) safety, (b) relationships, (c) teaching and learning, (d) Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and (e) RTI/interim assessment. How teachers and administrators can apply what was learned from this study is discussed here.

In the K-12 school settings represented in this study, the variety of ideas for student engagement is excellent. The youngest learners are exposed to real-life learning experiences. Genius Hour and coding are just two examples of STEM or STEAM activities that are taught in elementary settings. Even in the core content areas, stories were shared about how math lessons or assessments can be written to engage students with real-life answers. The high school administrators shared content that not only becomes a real-life learning experience, but it also gets students in the workforce for part of their school day. Internships have become part of the day for many high school students, and they are exploring career opportunities much earlier in their academic careers. The value of strong Career and Technical Education (CTE) curriculum has become a great resource for students who may be able to complete two years of college instead of four. North Dakota superintendents stated that dual credit courses are offered to give students a head start on their academic path in higher education. Some of those dual credit courses shorten the time required in higher education. This allows students an early start in careers like nursing, where there is a shortage of workers nationwide. Dual credit courses are not new to North Dakota, but having teachers physically in high school buildings, especially in rural schools, has become an option for more students. When college courses are taught by known

teachers, students are more likely engaged. Finally, at least one district in North Dakota provides the opportunity for students to obtain a drone pilot license before high school graduation. All of these examples are solid evidence of student engagement in North Dakota schools.

Extracurricular activities are shown to keep students engaged in school, including their academics. While competitive sports are available in all schools in North Dakota, the findings from this study showed that schools need to create and develop activities for as many of their students as possible. Speech, debate, theater arts, and chess club are all examples of activities that allow students to find a niche within their school and build relationships with adults in the building. For small schools, there can be challenges that exist for some of these activities, but for the purposes of engagement, school districts need to work to develop as many opportunities as possible for their students.

Finally, the research from the focus groups showed strong support from students regarding block scheduling. For the schools that have implemented block scheduling in some form, the feedback from students has been positive. Students want more time with fewer teachers each day and the ability to finish school work before they leave the building at the end of the day. Block scheduling appears to enhance student engagement in high school settings.

The examination of climate and culture started with school safety with a focus on mental health. SEL curricula are available at all grade levels, and there was ample evidence of those resources being used in elementary and secondary schools in North Dakota. Beyond SEL curricula, school leaders also shared about the mentoring programs they implement. Some programs involved older students, others involved younger students, and some involved teacher mentors being assigned to a number of students. In the end, the idea of building relationships for all students with a mentor appeared to be an effective culture building tool for large and small

school districts. “Advisory meetings” and “minute meetings,” where all students have an adult check in with them every week or two, are successful practices in larger districts where staff are outnumbered on a large scale.

The research from the focus groups showed that school leaders are making staff safety a high priority in their buildings. The staff book study on “compassion fatigue” was one example of administration understanding that mental health and stress are very real and impactful for staff and students in a K-12 education setting. The research showed that another district utilizes an outside agency to bring professional help to the building multiple times a week to support adults and students.

Evidence of giving teachers a voice was also shared in the research. These ideas range from choosing classroom paint color to the methods of teacher evaluation and assessment to the freedom of voice and choice for teachers’ own learning. These are all excellent steps being taken by schools and districts to lessen teacher stress.

There is evidence of schools having created “safety committees,” although the participants in the focus groups did not explicitly state that these committees have addressed mental health.

The research on teaching and learning, in the area of hiring teachers or administrators, showed that the participants emphasized that a person’s willingness to “collaborate” was shown to be the most important quality. Today, teachers meet in teams more than ever before. This gives the educators an opportunity to share best practices with others, while being open to trying or adopting other ideas and strategies in order to improve teaching practices. This, in turn, positively affects school climate/culture.

Another concept discussed in this research was “reflection.” A study participant stated that “reflection is about growth,” and growth is emphasized more and more in the profession of education. The idea of teaching being less about completing every chapter in the math book and more about slowing down to make sure learning is happening correctly requires reflection. When the emphasis is placed on learning instead of pace, school culture can potentially change.

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are a prime example of why reflection and collaboration are so important to school leaders. PLCs have become a normal practice in schools today. Almost every participant shared information about their schools’ PLCs. Some PLCs meet once a week, and some meet several times a week. PLCs are formed based on several factors: one grade level, several grade levels, and content areas. Some PLCs even exist across entire districts. There is strong evidence that PLCs are a critical element in schools. The study participants shared that it is important for teachers to establish a “unity of purpose” with fellow teachers and administrators. In Chapter IV, unity of purpose was defined as having a common core of beliefs and values. School leaders expressed the significance of creating a successful culture regarding teaching and learning, which is enhanced by PLCs.

Response to Intervention (RTI) and interim assessment are embedded in schools today. The research showed a variety of ways that these practices are applied. In the elementary school setting, participants shared that MTSS is used regularly as a tool for intervention. Interventions are more scripted and documented in elementary school, but there was also conversation about the cost of good intervention resources, which makes it difficult for schools on smaller budgets. The participants also stated that the process of intervention has become overwhelming because resources are so plentiful, making it difficult to choose from all the programs.

At the high school level, there were several examples of intervention. The following are a few examples: (a) time inserted into the school day for students to seek help from teachers two days a week, (b) structured study halls built into schedules for students to get caught up or show improvement in their grades before opting out, and (c) redefinition of the role of paraprofessionals in the school building. The evidence from this research shows that elementary and high schools in North Dakota are tirelessly implementing appropriate support for their students so they can be successful learners.

The type of interim assessment used in North Dakota schools is equally split between STAR and NWEA assessments. Elementary schools are using them three to four times a year to progress monitor their students' learning and look for growth in reading and math. The focus group participants discussed how the assessments were used to remove students from MTSS/RTI programs. The elementary principal focus group discussed how these assessments are becoming less necessary as teachers write their own formative and summative assessments.

Recommendations for Further Research

While this qualitative research was conducted with the best intentions of presenting the most accurate information in the best way possible, it would be beneficial to pursue quantitative research regarding this study.

For schools that use standardized testing as a tool to measure their success, a quantitative study that compares the scores of students who receive regular math interventions with those students who do not use standardized testing results in math would be recommended.

As shared by the high school focus group, block scheduling is a positive tool for students in their buildings. Using a large-scale survey of high schools that utilize block scheduling could lead to a possible research study that supports the information found in this study.

The safety of students, specifically emotional safety, was addressed in this study. The research showed that there were many positive steps being taken by K-12 schools to support mental health. The evidence to support staff safety was not as detailed as it possibly could have been, so a quantitative study of perceived support for emotional well-being among school staff is recommended.

Conclusion

Standardized testing has been a barometer of school success or failure for the last 20 years. That is more than an entire generation of public school students with a math or reading score being an identifier of their success in school. For teachers and administrators, the emphasis on test scores has forced school improvement to revolve around increasing test scores rather than many other areas of concern. This research aimed to encourage education constituents to look beyond just standardized test scores as a measure of school success. Rather, this study sought to reveal all the non-testing practices North Dakota schools are regularly implementing in order to foster a successful environment centered around positive student engagement and climate/culture. The qualitative research through focus group discussions revealed that student engagement and climate/culture were key factors in school success for North Dakota schools.

The results of this study revealed that elementary and high schools have many practices in place to increase positive student engagement and climate/culture. A variety of these practices involve the participation of all three key entities: administration, teachers, and students. While state data shows a decline in student engagement from the 2018-19 school year to the 2020-21 school year across all three measures of student engagement (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional) (Insights.nd.gov, 2021), this study's research from the school leaders invited to participate shows that there are many strategies being implemented in order to create more

student engagement in their schools. It is the hope that this research will encourage more schools to pursue different activities, scheduling, and real-life experiences with their students.

School climate/culture is about students and staff. When a positive climate is established in a school, all parties feel valued and experience the space as welcoming, safe, and a great place to learn. School is not just about learning for students; it is also about teachers and administrators having opportunities to learn as well. Using subgroups like safety, relationships, teaching and learning, PLCs, and RTI/interim assessment, school leaders from different sized schools from various parts of the state of North Dakota shared how they attempt to create an environment that fosters positive student engagement and climate/culture within their schools.

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Focus Group Questions for Building Principals

Student Engagement

For the questions in this focus group meeting, we'll use the following definition of student engagement; "Student engagement is the investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution." (Trowler, 2010)

1) What strategies have you utilized or shared with your staff to enhance student engagement?

John Dewey spoke of engagement in schools being enhanced when classrooms took on real-life situations so that students could participate in learning activities interchangeably and flexibly in a variety of social settings. (Morgan, 2017)

1) Please share some examples from within your school that would promote the philosophy of Dewey.

Since the 2017-18 school year, North Dakota has given an engagement survey to our students in grades 3-12. The survey measures cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement and defines students in one of three areas. *Committed*, defined as a student who volunteers resources under his/her control, i.e. time, effort, and attention. *Compliant* is defined as a student who only gives as much time and effort energy, and resources to get the reward offered or designed. Finally, a student can be defined as *disengaged* if the survey shows that the student does nothing until direct supervision is required and then the student will either be compliant or rebel. (https://insights.nd.gov/Education/State/EngagementSurvey#)

1) What has the engagement survey told you about the students in your building over the last 3 years?

2) Have you made any changes to the learning environment within your building or specific to your building with the idea of student engagement improving?

School Climate/Culture

In 2012, the National School Climate Center (NSCC) published their school climate research survey and identified 5 essential areas of focus regarding school climate. Those 5 areas are safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environments, and school improvement. (p. 3)

Cohen and Freiberg (2013) talk about 3 essentials of day-to-day practice that support effective bully prevention efforts and school climate reform. (p. 3)

1) What are some school wide strategies designed to promote a safe, supportive prosocial-informed climate of social responsibility where students and adults think about, "what is the right thing to do."

-What is goal of your intervention program?

2) What is done to promote a prosocial theme in your school using character education themes, social emotional learning, and promoting mental health efforts with students and with staff.

3) What, as a building leader, do you do to a) support educators understanding about how to respond to a perpetrator or target situation in a moment's notice. b) support more effective mental health partnerships between teachers and parents.
4) Programs that emphasize academic and social emotional learning with students can enhance a student's sense of belonging and engagement in the hope of improving student learning. (Rutledge, 2017) Please mark which of the following tools are used to help students feel valued by the adults in the building and we'll discuss them within our focus group when we meet:
Rapid check-ins, defined as teachers formally checking in with their identified students every 2 weeks. (Rutledge, p. 636)
Goal-setting activities, defined as teaching students how to write goals and then decide how they would accomplish the goals. (Rutledge, p. 632)
Systematic use of data, done by teachers, administrators, and counselors to identify students with Ds and Fs and students with poor attendance. These teams meet regularly to discuss those students and develop strategies to support them. (Rutledge, p. 632)
-Is there a mentoring program or Connection program within your building for all students?
Gleason (2019) states that, "Students who feel like their teacher knows them and encourages them as a student or a learner value the relationship they with their teacher."
1) What emphasis is there in your building to make learning more personal with students?

The NSCC emphasizes 2 relationship priorities within schools: Principal-Teacher relationships and Teacher-Student relationships.
1) Pick the 5 elements you believe are most important in building relationships with your staff. Be prepared to discuss why you feel they are most important.

Assessment	Collaboration	curriculum/instruction
Diversity	inquiry	instructional leadership
Learning community	organizational mgmt.	professional development
professionalism	reflection	unity of purpose
Visionary leadership		

Are there any pieces not seen on this list that you personally use to build relationships with your staff?

<u>Teaching and Learning</u>

1) Please identify the qualities you look for when hiring teachers and staff within your building. (Ohlson et al., 2016)

2) What are the goals or what is the focus of your PLCs within your building?

-What role does your staff play in aligning the goals of your PLCs?

<u>RTI and Interim Assessment</u>

What do you believe are essential components of a strong intervention program?
According to rtinetwork.org there are four essential components to a strong intervention program:
1) High quality research-based instruction, 2) Ongoing student assessment and progress monitoring, 3) Tiered instruction, differentiated for all students, and 4) Parent involvement, letting parents know where their child is with his/her learning. (www.rtinetwork.org)

1) Which interim assessment does your district use with your students?

2) How often are your teachers using Interim Assessments in their classroom?

Please share some examples of success stories within your building specific to your intervention program.
Sampson (2018) used STAR assessment to determine if there was a correlation between the STAR assessment scores and the standardized test scores in the state of Tennessee for grades 3, 4, and 5. Finnerty (2018) used MAP assessments with the same agenda except with middle school students.
3) Have you seen your interim assessment scores in the past show accuracy with the students who are proficient or not proficient on state assessment?

Kane (2016) did research on intervention success for students in 5th grade who scored below the 10th percentile on the easyCBM assessment for math. Each student was given 90 minutes of classroom instruction and then 20 minutes a day of small group instruction. While the results weren't great, there was data that showed an increase in math skills after 6 weeks of intervention. (p. 48)

4) How often do you give your interim assessments to your students?

5) Do you have a percentile that puts students in the intervention protocol?

6) How long would a student receive interventions before testing out and no longer require interventions?

Appendix B
Focus Group Questions for Superintendents

These questions are written to create a discussion based on your perspective with respect to student engagement and school climate/culture and how those contribute to student success.

Student Engagement

For the first couple of questions in this focus group meeting, we'll use the following definition of student engagement; "*Student engagement is the investment of time, effort and other relevant resources by both students and their institutions intended to optimize the student experience and enhance the learning outcomes and development of students, and the performance and reputation of the institution.*" (Trowler, 2010)

Does this definition fit the definition you would use for student engagement? What would you see differently?

1) Using the definition above for student engagement, what programs have been developed and/or put in place within with your school district to make or to enhance engagement within school and with the students?

Leonard (2008) did research that linked student engagement to math and reading scores with middle school students.

What are a few of the aspects of student engagement that could possibly lead to better scores on assessments?

1) Have you done any comparison work with the student engagement survey done by DPI/Cognia and your state assessment scores for your district?
2) If yes, have you found similar correlation within your district as Leonard did with his research?
3) How much of administrative professional development is given to discussing student engagement and looking for tools that may enhance student engagement in your district?

Francis (2017) has research that shows an increase in student motivation and learning when technology is part of the student experience in school.

Are your experiences with technology positive and engaging? What are some factors with technology that would make learning more engaging to the students?

1) What are the goals of your school district regarding technology?
    - How could student engagement be part of your technology philosophy regarding growing technology in your district?

Lawson & Lawson (2020) studied with some detail student engagement in ways that aligned with the student engagement survey given by DPI/Cognia in North Dakota. Lawson & Lawson (2020) studied participation in extracurricular activities, behavioral engagement in leisure activities within school and outside school, and looked at student conduct, attendance, and suspensions. (p. 9)

-The ND engagement survey defines "cognitive engagement" as, *"A student's perceptions and beliefs associated with school and learning. Students identify with academics, show extrinsic/intrinsic motivation, and students believe they can execute the behaviors necessary to be successful."* (www.insight.gov/Education/State/EngagementSurvey)

1) When looking at past data from your district, what do you see with results specific to cognitive engagement?
2) What are some ideas you have that we can share among this group that could enhance this part of the survey from the state?
(In the 2019-2020 survey, 50% of our students were "committed", 40% were "compliant", and 10% were "disengaged".) (https://insights.nd.gov/Education/State/EngagementSurvey)
-The ND engagement survey defines "behavioral engagement" as, "*A student's observable actions or participation while at school that is investigated through a student's positive conduct, effort and participation."* (www.insight.gov/Education/State/EngagementSurvey) Some examples of this part of the survey would include participation in extracurricular activities, attendance and work habits. Lawson & Lawson (2020, p. 6) noted that participation in extracurricular activities all but eliminated the probability of school dis-identification of students.

1) Have you seen any correlation between attendance and academic success within your student body and a link to those who participate in extracurricular activities within your district?

2) Has your district worked to add extracurricular programs to your district outside of athletic programs?

(In the 2019-2020 survey, 54% of our students were "committed", 30% were "compliant", and 10% were "disengaged".) (https://insights.nd.gov/Education/State/EngagementSurvey)
-The ND engagement survey defines "emotional engagement" as, "*a student's feelings towards his/her school, learning, teachers, and peers.*" Students with low scores in this part of the survey would be dissatisfied with the people in authority, teachers/administrators, coaches, and no longer support those people. Lawson & Lawson (2020, p. 23) noted in their research that students with behavioral difficulties are all but eliminated from being academically engaged or identifying with school.
1) Can you share some specific goals or programs that are used by your district to support students with discipline, attendance, and academic issues?
2) What are some ideas you can share with the group that may be a means to heightening the emotional engagement of our students.
(In the 2019-2020 survey, 52% of our students were "committed", 24% were "compliant", and 24% were "disengaged".) (https://insights.nd.gov/Education/State/EngagementSurvey)

<u>School Culture/Climate</u>
In 2012, the National School Climate Center (NSCC) published their school climate research survey and identified 5 essential areas of focus regarding school climate. Those 5 areas are safety, relationships, teaching and learning, institutional environments, and school improvement. (p. 3)

<u>Safety</u>
A safe environment is essential to student learning and to social emotional development. (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013, p. 2)
1) Does your district use a commercial bullying curriculum, and can you share what it is and why you chose the curriculum? (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013)
2) Does your district have a team that addresses school safety and who is that team made up of regarding students, staff, administration, and parents (Cohen & Freiberg, 2013, p. 3)

Relationships

Students learn more and are happier in school when they believe that their teacher care about them and where they think that they are in a class where their peers support their learning. (Louis & Murphy, n.d., p. 1) There are 2 parts, Principal-Teacher Relationship and Teacher-Student Relationship.

Principal-Teacher Relationship:

1) Which of the following competencies, if any, do you use when evaluating your building leaders? (Ross & Cozzens, 2016)

Assessment	Collaboration	curriculum/instruction
Diversity	inquiry	instructional leadership
Learning community	organizational mgmt.	professional development
professionalism	reflection	unity of purpose
Visionary leadership		

2) Which elements listed above would you consider a priority for your building leaders?

3) Are PLCs a part of your district regarding administration or is it limited to your teachers only?

Teaching and Learning

High employee job satisfaction and work performance is important for an organization to function and achieve its goals. (Duan et al., 2018)

1) What are some tools or resources you use to assess these pieces regularly with your building leaders?

Institutional Environments

The NSCC defines institutional environments in two parts: 1) school connectedness/engagement, and 2) physical layout and surroundings of school. (Thapa et al., 2012) The focus of these questions will be specific to the physical layout and surrounding of your school(s).

Scott-Webber et al. (2018) using surveys of teachers and students found that space matters (p. 66)

1) In any new construction that you've done within your district, where has the emphasis with regard to space been focused.
2) Has exterior space taken priority over interior space or have both been an emphasis?

School Improvement

Lee and Louis (2019) state that, "A strong professional community will have a collective sense of contributing to the learning opportunities that exist for the students, not just in the current year but also in following years."

1) What commitment has your district made to PLCs regarding time dedicated to collaboration for administration and teachers?
2) What are the current goals your district is working on with respect to your PLCs?

Appendix C
IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA

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Office of Research Compliance & Ethics
Tech Accelerator, Suite 2050
4201 James Ray Drive Stop 7134
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April 23, 2021

Principal Investigator:	Dave Wheeler
Project Title:	How do North Dakota School Leaders Define Success in their Districts/Buildings?
IRB Project Number:	IRB-202104-119
Project Review Level:	Expedited 6, 7
Date of IRB Approval:	04/23/2021
Expiration Date of This Approval:	04/22/2022
Consent Form Approval Date:	04/23/2021

The application form and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Attached is your original consent form that has been stamped with the UND IRB approval and expiration dates. Please maintain this original on file. ***You must use this original, stamped consent form to make copies for participant enrollment. No other consent form should be used.*** It must be signed by each participant prior to initiation of any research procedures. In addition, each participant must be given a copy of the consent form.

Prior to implementation, submit any changes to or departures from the protocol or consent form to the IRB for approval. No changes to approved research may take place without prior IRB approval.

You have approval for this project through the above-listed expiration date. When this research is completed, please submit a termination form to the IRB. If the research will last longer than one year, an annual review and progress report must be submitted to the IRB prior to the submission deadline to ensure adequate time for IRB review.

The forms to assist you in filing your project termination, annual review and progress report, adverse event/unanticipated problem, protocol change, etc. may be accessed on the IRB website: http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP
RC&E Manager

Enclosure

Cc: Sherryl Houdek, Ed.D.

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