Case Study of Academic Achievement Teams in Stellar County

Herbert T. Monroe, III

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James R. Craig, Chair
Carol S. Cash
Jane J. Baskerville
Ted S. Price

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Abstract

A review of the available research indicates that relatively little is known about how districts employ Academic Achievement Teams or similar mechanisms to reduce declines in student achievement and sustain increased student achievement at the elementary school level (Kutash, Nico, Gorin, Rahmatullah, & Tallant, 2010). Turning around chronically low-performing schools is challenging work requiring a systemic rather than school-by-school approach (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). The most successful turnaround efforts have both high-impact leaders and the district capacity to initiate, support, and enhance transformational change through the use of data. Educational leaders on all levels are realizing meaningful information can only be acquired through a proper analysis of data and good decisions are based on this thoughtful process of inquiry and analysis (Creighton, 2007). The intent of this study was to identify practices of Academic Achievement Teams that facilitated student achievement. Interviews were conducted with principals, directors of elementary education, a teacher, and district liaison representing the Virginia Department of Education's Office of School Improvement to gain insight into the operational and organizational structures of the Academic Achievement Teams. A qualitative design was selected to conduct this descriptive cross case study. In addition to the one-on-one interviews, observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings and review of documents from each of the two study schools were examined to gain additional perspective regarding how the Academic Achievement Team operated to increase student achievement. The interviews, observations, and document reviews were analyzed using the Constant Comparative Method to understand the specific practices employed by Academic Achievement Teams that increased student achievement at two elementary schools (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

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"Never say can't, say not yet; but soon with practice!" These are words that I recite to my students each day, and my three and one-half year doctoral journey has often required me to practice what I preach.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Accountability of schools and school officials increased with the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). The purpose of the No Child Left Behind Act is to produce high levels of student performance and require schools to hire highly qualified staff to increase the overall educational performance of our nation's students. Educators are now faced with ensuring that all students regardless of race, gender, limited English proficiency, special education needs, or economic status master high standards and graduate on time (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). The benchmark for achievement continues to increase every year and by the year 2014 all students are expected to be 100 percent proficient in the areas of math and reading. If schools, teachers, and principals do not live up to accountability standards, parents may choose to move their children to different schools in the area. After five consecutive years of inadequate progress, schools are required to restructure by (a) converting to a charter school, (b) replacing staff relevant to the failure, (c) hiring an external contractor to operate the school, (d) inviting the state to take over the school, or (e) initiating other significant reforms that fundamentally change the school (Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2006). Educational reform, teacher accountability, and criticism of schools for declining student achievement are not new phenomena.

In 1981, Secretary of Education Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education as a result of the widespread perception that there was something seriously wrong with the educational system in the United States. The Commission's resulting report, *A Nation at Risk*, concluded that the declines in student performance of American students were due to inadequacies in the way that the educational process itself was conducted (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983). Since the influential *A Nation at Risk* report was published in 1983, there have been a number of educational reforms (Kutash et al., 2010) including:

- Effective Schools Research. In the late 1970's and early 1980s, a team of researchers led by Edmonds (1979), identified seven "correlates" that related to a school's success: clear mission, high expectations, instructional leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, opportunity to learn and student time on task, safe

and orderly environment, and home-school relations. Edmonds' research helped shape current thinking about what makes schools effective and provided an early basis for many of the requirements of the current reform initiative.

- School Choice. The school choice program gained momentum in the 1990s empowering students and parents with options that in turn raised the standard of education (Kutash et al., 2010). School choice introduced a philosophy of competition to the effort and a belief that students should have compelling options for education. These ideas have carried through to the development of the four current turnaround models (i.e., Turnarounds, Restarts, School Closers, and Transformations) and the use of charter, private and public contracts, and district providers to serve as turnaround operators.
- Charter School Movement. Charter schools are free from the staffing, curriculum, and programmatic restrictions imposed on most traditional district schools (Kutash et al., 2010).
- Charter schools are viewed as prime candidates to take over and turnaround failing schools, given the autonomy and flexibility they bring to budget, staffing, curriculum, and schedule (Kutash et al., 2010).
- Small Schools. The Small Schools Movement was predicated upon the belief that a personalized learning environment in small schools can make a significant difference in the academic achievement of high-needs students (Kutash et al., 2010). Operators like Green Dot demonstrated a personalized learning environment by dividing up Locke High School in Los Angeles into smaller units as part of its turnaround plan for the school and had positive results on student achievement (Kutash et al.).
- No Child Left Behind. The federal government's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required all public schools to administer statewide standardized tests annually to students in certain grades and subjects (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). No Child Left Behind represented the most sweeping changes to ESEA since its 1965 enactment. In addition to a focus on stronger accountability, the No Child Left Behind act increased school choice and local control and placed an emphasis on proven teaching methods.

- Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). The federally backed CSR Program began in 1998. The CSR program helps public schools raise student achievement as they implement effective, comprehensive models. The school turnaround initiative builds on the CSR Program's strengths: its philosophy of dramatic and systemic reform and the expectation that districts integrate specific components into their reform plans to qualify for funding. The four turnaround models provide states and districts with more detailed guidance about turnaround approaches, as well as significantly more funding to support reform efforts (Kutash et al., 2010).

Currently, the Obama administration has differentiated itself from previous reform initiatives through its use of large pools of funding in an effort to turn around the nation's 5,000 lowest-performing schools over the next five years (Kutash et al., 2010). Turnaround is a dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that (a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years, (b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performing organization, and (c) takes place in the context of performance improvement for the school system as a whole (Reynolds, 2008). Race to the Top Funds ($4.35 billion), School Improvement Grants ($3.55 billion), and Investing in Innovation Funds ($0.65 billion) (Kutash et al.) are efforts that should have an impact on the school turnaround reform. The competitive process to allocate these educational dollars to states and districts and the prescriptive guidelines involved in dictating the reform strategies increase the accountability for student achievement for states, districts, and individual schools alike (Kutash et al.).

- **Historical perspective.** Accountability of schools can be traced back to the Effective Schools Movement in response to the Coleman et al. (1966) report. Coleman et al. reported that family and peer influences are the important determinates of school performance. Coleman et al. further suggested that student success is directly related to family background and not school conditions, principals, teachers, or resources. Edmonds (1979) disagreed with Coleman et al. and through his research found that urban schools that teach poor children successfully have strong leadership and a climate of high expectations. Weber's (1971) study of four instructionally effective inner-city high poverty schools found that strong leadership, high expectations, and maintaining an orderly environment

with strong skilled-based programs in reading elevated pupil progress. Other researchers such as Brookover and Lezotte (1982) also supported Edmonds' findings and reported unique characteristics and processes that were common to schools in which students were learning regardless of family background. Specifically, Brookover and Lezotte found that effective schools had: (a) a clear school mission, (b) high expectations for student success, instructional leadership, (c) frequent monitoring, (d) opportunity to learn/time on task, (e) a safe and orderly environment, and (f) effective home-school relationships.

The Coleman et al. (1966) study did not detect teacher and/or leadership effects on student achievement, but more sophisticated analysis methods have enabled researchers over the past few decades to include and control a variety of variables to gain a clearer picture of the factors that impact student learning. A good example is the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System created by Sanders to ascertain the effectiveness of school systems, schools, and teachers in producing academic growth in students as part of the Educational Improvement Act signed into law by the Governor of Tennessee in 1992 (Wright, Sanders, & Horn, 1997). Wright et al. examined factors related to student learning using over five million student records to track achievement over at least three years linked to each student's teacher(s), school(s), and school system(s). By following growth over time, Wright et al. asserted that the student served as his or her own control which limited exogenous factors that potentially influenced each child's academic achievement. The findings reported by Wright et al. indicated that background factors such as race, socioeconomic status, and class size were relatively poor predictors of student academic growth. Rather, Wright et al. found that teacher effectiveness defined by a student's academic growth over time was the major factor predicting student academic progress indicating that teacher quality can make a significant difference in student learning.

Instructional leadership provided by the principal has also been identified as a contributing factor to higher student learning and achievement (Lezotte, 1994). Principals are charged with the primary responsibility of setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers which are all factors that influence the teaching/learning process (Flath, 1989). In association with No Child Left Behind and the high level of accountability for schools, the role of the school principal has been defined as being responsible for facilitating effective teaching and learning with the overall

mission of enhancing student achievement (Fawcett, 2008). One way principals can provide instructional leadership is through leading learning communities (Connelly, 2001). Instead of teachers and staff working in isolation or in hierarchies, teachers work in learning communities where they operate as a team using the expertise of the group to drive instruction and student achievement. Individuals in a learning community use data to identify student weaknesses or gaps in instruction and become agents of the solution. In leading learning communities, instructional leaders are making adult learning a priority, setting high expectations for performance, creating a culture of continuous learning for adults, and getting the community's support for school success (Lezotte, 1991). Impediments to principals leading learning communities include the lack of training for the principal's role as an instructional leader, the lack of time to execute instructional activities, increased paper work, and the community's expectation that the principal's role is that of a manager of the school (Flath, 1989; Fullan, 1991).

Principal's role. A shift of emphasis from principals being managers or administrators to instructional or academic leaders emerged in the 1980's. This shift was influenced by research findings that effective schools usually had principals who stressed the importance of instructional leadership (Brookover & Lezotte, 1982). Flath (1989) describes instructional leadership as those actions (i.e., setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers) a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning. Instructional leadership that focuses on teaching and learning is critical, but is seldom practiced as only one-tenth of the principal's time is estimated to be devoted to providing instructional leadership (Stronge, 1988). To meet the demands of No Child Left Behind, the principal's role as the instructional leader of the school has resulted in the principal becoming, more deeply involved in the teaching and learning process. Principals who are instructional leaders are more likely to encourage staff members to meet on a regular basis to discuss their work, work together to problem solve, reflect on their jobs, and take responsibility for what students learn (DuFour, 2002). According to Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), instructional leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.

If principals are going to be effective instructional leaders, they will have to free themselves from managerial tasks and focus their efforts towards improving teaching and learning (Brewer, 2001). Brewer suggests that the role of the instructional leader includes: (a)

focusing on instruction, (b) building a community of learners, (c) sharing decision making, (d) sustaining the basics, (e) leveraging time, (f) supporting ongoing professional development for all staff members, (g) redirecting resources to support a multifaceted school plan, and (h) creating a climate of integrity, inquiry, and continuous improvement.

The broader concept of effective leadership qualities and practices of principals offered by Brewer (2001) recognizes that leadership is always delegated from follower ship in any organization. First identified in the Michigan University leadership studies in the 50's, Katz and Kahn (1952) claimed that effective leaders model leadership as a way to achieve goals as a community. Katz and Kahn posited that leadership emphasizes the leadership role as being one of leading teams rather than one of leading individuals toward a common goal. Effective schools capitalize on expertise being generally distributed among many, not concentrated in a single person (Lezotte, 1991).

Role of school district leaders. Turning around chronically low-performing schools is challenging work requiring fundamental rethinking of the change process, and a systemic rather than school-by-school approach (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). High-impact school leaders are critical to turnaround success. However, Robinson and Buntrock report transformational and sustainable success at scale requires substantial engagement by school district leaders with the capacity and will to initiate, support, and enhance dramatic change. The most successful turnaround efforts have both high-impact leaders and the district capacity to initiate, support, and enhance transformational change.

For example, Robinson and Buntrock (2011) examined parallel tactics in two schools with very similar demographics where both principals turned their respective schools around. After three years, School A experienced a small average drop in its proficiency scores. School B, during the first year of turnaround, doubled the number of students scoring proficient or advanced (from 21 percent to 42 percent) and, based on current formative assessment data, seems poised for another significant increase this year. School B was not alone in its success; in the district where School B was located, more than 80 percent of the turnaround schools made above-average gains in the first year of the initiative.

The approaches taken to turn around these schools appear to be similar. In the case of School B, the major difference was the role the district leaders played in providing it with the

support and operating freedom needed to make transformative changes. The central office partnered with School B to:

(a) make strategic staff replacements where naysayers were hurting the culture,

(b) provide frequent district-designed formative assessments and impart to teachers the importance of following a district-designed data protocol, (c) develop the staff's ability to teach model lessons and use stations to differentiate instruction, (d) monitor constantly the success of turnaround strategies, and (e) encourage new approaches where expected gains were not yet realized. (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011, p. 6)

In contrast, the principal at School A operated on an island. There was no explicit school district plan for consistent collaboration between central administration and the school leadership team, which would help the central office to understand the specific needs of the school. Consequently, the district was not prepared to provide targeted support nor monitor implementation of the turnaround effort. The behaviors and practices of district leadership in enhancing and sustaining student achievement through the use of data on the elementary level is crucial as a road map for the new principal if there were a sudden change in leadership. Ongoing monitoring of student performance data may alert central office staff of the effectiveness of classroom instruction, remediation programs, and where resources need to be allocated to ensure the academic success of all students. The ongoing monitoring of data and strategic engagement by district leadership allows for a systematic approach in providing support and resources for schools that may have a trend of decreasing student performance, and increases the collective capacity of the school system allowing the speed of quality change to be greatly accelerated (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011).

Robinson and Buntrock (2011) report that districts that implement a systematic approach to turning around and sustaining pupil progress at low performing schools saw more than a 40 percent rise in average proficiency. Robinson and Buntrock make the following recommendations for school districts to enhance and sustain turnaround at the building level:

- Develop a comprehensive turnaround plan and implementation strategy.
- Provide clear and visible support for dramatic change from the highest levels.
- Recognize the vital importance of leadership.

- Provide systemic support around instructional strategies including frequently administered formative assessments, prompt distribution of relevant data, and professional development on the effective use of data to drive instruction.
- Provide principals with the freedom to act.
- Recognize that school turnaround must start at the district level.

Successful school turnarounds are not unlike other effective organizational endeavors. Strong, competent site-based leaders must be supported and held accountable by a strong infrastructure. In this context, school districts must create enabling conditions that turnaround schools need based on data (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). Educational leaders on all levels are realizing that meaningful information can only be acquired through a proper analysis of data and that good decisions are based on this thoughtful process of inquiry and analysis (Creighton, 2007).

Creighton (2007) claims that today's educational climate makes it imperative for all schools to collect data and use statistical analysis to help create clear goals and recognize strategies for improvement. The pressure to use data in school improvement and turnaround efforts is emanating from federal, state, and local sources. The federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2002* has driven education at the state and local levels for the past decade. More recently, *Race to the Top Grants* have been awarded by the U.S. Department of Education in order to drive changes in education that will lead to improved student outcomes. One of the expected areas of reform is to create data systems that inform decisions and assess in a systematic way the quality of teaching and learning in schools. School districts across the nation collect many forms of educational data (demographic data, student learning data, perception data, and school process data); unfortunately most schools use the collection of these data to satisfy administrative requirements rather than to assess and evaluate school improvement (Creighton, 2007).

Role of data. Schools may benefit from the utilization of four different types of data (Bernhardt, 2004):

- Demographic data describe the various groups that exist within the school sphere of influence. Commonly, this would include teachers, students, administrators, other school staff, the surrounding community, and various other stakeholder groups.
- Student learning data are what most people think of when they think about data. Standardized tests and other high stakes tests would be included in this category as

would summative and formative assessments that teachers commonly administer to students.

- Perception data are normally gathered through questionnaires, surveys, interviews, and focus groups, and are important in finding out what the "perceived reality" is about an issue or the school itself.
- School process data include information about school programs, assessment strategies, classroom instruction, and other classroom practices. Principal or peer walkthroughs would be a common example of this type of data provided by the administrator, or a colleague spending a brief time "walking through" a teacher's class to observe and record various phenomena. The data from these brief encounters can be used to inform and guide teacher practices, curriculum decisions, and/or assessment practices or needs.

The importance of data-based decision making in enhancing and sustaining the success of an organization is reflected in Collins (2001). The work of Collins sought to explain why some companies make that leap and others don't. Collins identified six fundamental concepts that his research identified as reasons why some companies went from "good to great." Of the six fundamental concepts, *Confronting the Brutal Facts* would be the one, above the remaining five, that reflects the importance of data-based decision making. Collins reported finding no evidence that the good-to-great companies had more or better information than the comparison companies. Both sets of companies had virtually identical access to good data. Collins suggests, "The key, then, lies not in better information or data, but in turning data into information that cannot be ignored" (Collins, 2001, p. 79). There for it is not good enough to have data if it is not going to be analyzed and used to inform instructional decisions. District leaders, principals, and teachers must possess an understanding and working knowledge of data analysis and ways to use this analysis to improve teaching and learning in he classroom (Creighton, 2007).

The information that will be the focus of the proposed study is student learning data. The study will attempt to identify practices of Academic Achievement Teams in enhancing and sustaining student achievement at the elementary school level. Moreover, if there is a blueprint that emerges, it would not only benefit schools in need of turnaround, but all schools and school leaders in the challenging endeavor of enhancing and sustaining student achievement in the pursuit of making Adequate Yearly Progress.

Statement of the Problem

As the achievement benchmark continues to increase under No Child Left Behind mandates, more school systems are failing to meet adequate yearly progress (Pestidge & Slayton, 2010, August 14). Educators on the national, state, and local levels must find ways to demonstrate academic progress measured by state specific annual measurable objectives. The phenomenon of schools failing to meet adequate yearly progress is now requiring a triage approach, "channeling supports and interventions first to districts and schools where performance is weakest" (Redding, 2009, p. 1).

According to the latest U.S. Department of Educational statistics, more than 5 percent of the schools in the United States are chronically failing. These 5,000 schools serve an estimated 2.5 million students. The number of failing schools has doubled over the last two years due in part to the increasing performance standards and without successful interventions could double again over the next five years (Kutash et al., 2010). Pestidge and Slayton (2010, August 14) reported that only 12 of the 132 school districts in Virginia made Adequate Yearly Progress, compared to 60 the year before. Of the 726 schools statewide that failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress, 385 met the benchmark in 2009. These results indicate the tremendous challenge that school leaders have before them and point to providing school leaders the training or opportunity to learn the knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to comply with the increasing accountability mandates of No Child Left Behind (Fawcett, 2008). The federal government and state department of education in Virginia are very clear regarding the annually increasing benchmarks in reading and math that students are expected to achieve, yet few human capital providers such as universities and nonprofit organizations are set up to train the large number of teachers, principals, and support staff needed to improve chronically failing schools (Kutash et al., 2010).

Purpose of the Literature Review

The goal of the literature review that follows is to summarize the evidence related to effective instructional leadership qualities and practices of district leadership that relate to student achievement. The focus of the review is to identify through the literature those specific leadership qualities and practices district level leadership employs through Academic

Achievement Teams to reduce declines in student achievement and sustain increased student achievement for at least two or more consecutive years at the elementary school level.

Significance of the Review

Scholarly significance. School turnaround has experienced a tremendous level of activity over the past few years (Duke, 2006; Fawcett, 2008; Kutash et al., 2010; Redding, 2009). While large numbers of organizations are entering the school turnaround field, the context of school turnaround remains relatively new and fragmented (Kutash et al.). Interventions are being implemented rapidly, but reformers have little knowledge of what is working and how to effectively track progress toward sustained student achievement (Kutash et al.). The federal government recognizes four turnaround models as a means to promote dramatic change rather than incremental progress. The four models are turnarounds, restarts, school closures, and transformations (Kutash et al.). The one unique variable in all four turnaround models involves a change in leadership as the first step of implementation. Therefore, an examination of the existing research regarding leadership practices within the Academic Achievement Team process contributing to early and late school turnaround and sustainability efforts would contribute to our collective understanding of leadership within this one school assistance model.

Practical significance. The literature review identifies specific qualities and practices of leadership and mechanisms used in enhancing and sustaining student achievement on the elementary level. The literature review will provide current and aspiring principals, educational leaders, politicians, and other key stakeholders in the educational field a more accurate understanding of the specific district leadership qualities and mechanisms necessary to improve and sustain student achievement.

Research Question

The available research will be examined for evidence relative to the following research question: What are the specific practices employed through Academic Achievement Teams to reduce declines in student achievement and sustain increased student achievement for at least two or more consecutive years at the elementary school level?

Definition of Terms

Academic Achievement Team. The school based team that directs and monitors a range of accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction to address specific student and school academic needs (Stellar County Public Schools Academic Achievement Teams Process, September 2011-2012)

Achievement Gap. The difference in academic performance among student subgroups (Virginia Department of Education, 2010).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). The minimum level of improvement that schools and school districts must achieve each year as determined by No Child Left Behind (Virginia Department of Education, 2010).

Annual Measurable Objectives. The reading and mathematics achievement benchmarks established by The Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

At-risk Elementary Schools. The elementary schools that have not met the required benchmarks for adequate yearly progress for three consecutive years. The established benchmarks must be met by all subgroups to meet the full intent of the No Child Left Behind legislation (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

Early Turnaround. The period when declining student performance ends or crisis stabilization occurs (Leithwood et al., 2008).

Late Turnaround. The period when achievement is occurring and schools are sustaining or achieving success for at least two consecutive years (Leithwood et al., 2008).

School Operator. The charter, private, and/or other nonprofit school persons and organizations involved in the turnaround process (Kutash et al., 2010).

Standards of Learning. The Commonwealth's expectations for student learning and achievement in grades K-12 in core subject areas (Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

Subgroups. The number of students needed to yield statistically reliable information. Each state decides how many students must be in a particular student subgroup before the performance of that subgroup is included in calculating a school's Adequate Yearly Progress. For example: in Virginia for a school, school districts or the state to have made Adequate Yearly Progress, more than 81 percent of students overall and students in all Adequate Yearly Progress subgroups — white, black, Hispanic, limited English proficiency, students with disabilities, and

economically disadvantaged – must have demonstrated proficiency on Standards of Learning and other assessments in reading, and more than 79 percent must have passed state tests in mathematics (Virginia Department of Education, 2011).

Transformations. Replace the principal, take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, increase learning time, create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support (Kutash et al., 2010, pp.4-5).

Turnaround. The dramatic and comprehensive intervention in a low-performing school that (a) produces significant gains in achievement within two years, (b) readies the school for the longer process of transformation into a high-performing organization, and (c) takes place in the context of performance improvement for the school system as a whole (Reynolds, 2008).

Turnaround School. The turnaround school has a pattern of low achievement, as measured by student performance on standardized tests of literacy and mathematics that have been reversed and an increase in student achievement has been sustained for at least two years at the point where data were collected on the school (Duke, 2006).

Summary

Chapter I began with an introduction explaining the background of the problem and was followed by the historical perspective explaining the accountability of schools dating back to the Effective Schools Movement in response to the Coleman et al. (1966) report. The historical perspective lead to a detailed description of the role of the principal, school district leaders, and data play in increasing and maintaining student achievement. Next, the purpose of the literature review referencing the scholarly and practical significance of the research was explained. The final sections included the research question and a detailed list of the definition of terms.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

The literature review combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies used to identify the effects of instructional leadership behaviors and practices on student achievement. The qualitative literature identified schools that have achieved large and relatively fast gains in student achievement and sustained those gains over time. Case study approaches involving site visits, interviews, focus groups, and document reviews are especially ideal for studying environmental factors and actions that leaders take to sustain student achievement (Rhim et al., 2006). However, qualitative research findings are intended to be informative, but not necessarily transferable to all educational environments as the findings have limited generalizability. Furthermore, qualitative research may be less effective in pinpointing the individual qualities and practices that distinguish successful instructional leaders from others. Gathering quantitative data requires more precise measurement and provides for greater ability to generalize findings. Therefore, quantitative research was also reviewed to examine what has been reported in the research literature regarding school leader competence, knowledge, and skills related to student achievement.

The literature begins with an examination of a qualitative research dissertation on leadership practices of an effective turnaround principal (Fawcett, 2008) followed by a detailed description on lessons learned reported by Kutash et al. (2010). Next, two qualitative articles (Jacobson et al., 2007; Ylimaki et. al., 2007) are considered to further explore related themes and theories found in the field guide. Finally, two quantitative peer reviewed articles (Waters, 2003; Leithwood, 2008) are evaluated to explore statistical correlations in leadership practices and student achievement.

Search Methods

The quest for literature began with a search for dissertations and peer reviewed articles regarding the effects of leadership practices that closed the achievement gap of students on free and reduced lunch. Using the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University library quick links to search dissertations, Fawcett's study (2008) of the leadership practices of the principals

who have turned around low performing schools was identified. By reviewing her research, key words and phrases emerged that were employed to conduct the literature review using Ebsco Host and Google Scholar: leadership effects, leadership practices and beliefs, leadership on student achievement, turnaround leaders, principal responsibilities and traits that enhance student achievement, and turnaround leadership. The search produced over four thousand articles and studies on the topic. The addition of elementary school to the key word search and the selection of only peer reviewed qualitative and quantitative studies published between 2003 and 2009 yielded fewer than 100 articles. Additional references to instructional leadership practices that enhance student achievement emerged from reading articles and dissertations. Virginia Commonwealth University Library and the Library of Virginia were explored to acquire primary sources cited in studies, books by researchers cited in the article reviews, and original studies conducted on the topic of instructional leadership and student achievement. Articles and dissertations that included the effects of principal practices on exceptional education and those that focused on middle and high schools were excluded while studies that discussed the effects of global principals' practices were included. Additional studies were identified for review from the reference sections of the research articles identified.

Research Studies

The review of literature indicates that the qualities and practices of the principal influence and contribute to enhanced student achievement. However, the most successful turnaround efforts have both high-impact school leaders and the district capacity to initiate, support and enhance transformational change (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011). Previous findings from the effective schools research indicate that the instructional leader possesses a greater influence on education than any other factor (Brookover & Lezotte, 1982; Edmonds, 1979; Egley & Jones, 2005). Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Walhstrom (2004) suggest in their research that successful leadership can play a significant and frequently underestimated role in improving student learning. According to Leithwood et al. the total effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects. In addition, Leithwood et al. found that the greater the challenge, the greater the impact of a leader's actions on learning.

Fawcett (2008)

In related research, Fawcett (2008) developed a conceptual framework adapted from a model used by Hallinger, Murphy, Weil, and Mitman (1983). The specific principal practices identified were setting direction, communication, curriculum and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, family and community connections, and organizational structure. These factors were the variables of interest and were examined in relationship to student achievement.

Participants in the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program were the target population for participation in the study (Fawcett, 2008). The Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program required a three-year commitment to a school in need of improvement and was implemented at the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year. As of June 1, 2007 only five of the original ten principals were still employed at their assigned school. Out of the five remaining schools only three schools maintained Adequate Yearly Progress status over the three years. Two of the locations were in an urban area and the school district in which they were located did not grant permission to conduct Fawcett's study. The third location was in a rural area and the principal that served that school was selected for Fawcett's research.

Fawcett's case study involved recorded one-on-one interviews with the principal, focus group interviews with teachers who taught at the observed school for five or more years, school and classroom observations, and document reviews. The only individuals who had access to the transcripts of the interviews were Fawcett and her advisor. Pseudonyms were used to identify each participant in all transcripts of the interviews. In addition, participants were allowed to decline to answer any and all questions during the interview process. The actual name of the school was not mentioned in reporting the study and participants received no compensation for participating. The data collection procedures were identical when interviewing and recording responses of principals and teachers. Fawcett also assured validity, reliability, and credibility in her instrument and procedures by implementing pilot interviews, member checks, peer examinations, and triangulation of information gained from different data sources.

All interviews were professionally transcribed and the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) was used to code responses, organize themes, and sort data into categories. The analysis protocol required reading and coding each data piece, organizing themes into categories, comparing each new data piece to existing categories to determine if the new data fit into existing categories or fell into new ones, looking for emergent themes within

each category, and repeating the process to identify salient themes. Tables and figures were used to report the findings.

Fawcett acknowledged there were concerns regarding the internal validity of the study. With regard to internal validity, employee truthfulness in responses to interview questions about the individual who directly supervised and evaluated them was a concern. Assuring anonymity of responses and the use of pseudonyms in reporting were methods employed to reduce this threat.

The data analysis revealed the following themes: setting direction, communication, curriculum, and instruction, collaboration and shared leadership, school and family/community connections, and organizational structure were evident at the turnaround school. The findings also revealed that professional development and mentoring were two additional factors associated with the turnaround school studied.

Based on the analysis of the data collected at the school studied, Fawcett concluded that: Research should be conducted at the secondary level and in urban areas to examine the replicability of the findings.

- A comparative study should be done at a school that has not been successful in improving student achievement to determine if there are identifiable administrative/leadership differences between the school achieving improved student achievement and the one that is not successful in improving student achievement.
- A follow-up study should be implemented to assess sustainability of increased student performance under new leadership.
- A replication study should be conducted using quantitative methods to identify which leadership variables are significantly associated with increased student achievement.
- A similar study should be conducted to examine the relationship between the professional development and mentoring on increased student achievement.

Kutash, J., Nico, E., Gorin, E., Rahmatullah, S., and Tallant, K. (2010)

Kutash et al. (2010) posited that more than 5,000 schools in the United States serving an estimated 2.5 million students are chronically failing and without successful interventions, that

number could double over the next five years. To combat this problem, the Obama administration has allocated $5 billion to turn around the nation's 5,000 lowest performing schools (Kutash et al.). The federal government is providing unprecedented levels of funding and strict direction for policy changes to support school turnaround through Race to the Top Funds ($4.35 billion), School Improvement Grants ($3.55 billion), and Investing in Innovation Funds ($0.65 billion) (Kutash et al.). District, state, private, and nonprofit education leaders across the country have given a lot of attention to the funding surrounding school turnaround. However, there are only a handful of proven providers and measuring the effectiveness of implementing any of the four turnaround models is still in the early stages. School turnaround strategies and providers are growing quickly, but remain highly fragmented. Interventions are moving forward rapidly, but reformers have little knowledge of what is working and how to scale what works best in each low performing school (Kutash et al.).

The School Turnaround Field Guide produced by Kutash et al. (2010) was intended to increase awareness of turnaround issues, to prompt those in the field to think about how to do most effectively turnaround work, and to encourage members in the field to work collaboratively. Kutash et al. also provide an overview of the school turnaround issue, identify measures of success, survey the policy and funding environment, compare the major turnaround models, and provide a guide to important stakeholders in the field and a map of their interrelated roles. Early lessons learned, as well as key issues and gaps challenging school turnaround efforts are also explored. Finally, detailed actions are suggested that stakeholders can implement individually and/or collectively to ensure that turnaround succeeds.

Kutash et al. (2010) based *The School Turnaround Field Guide* and the four turnaround models presented in it on more than 100 interviews with turnaround experts, practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and funders. In addition, secondary reports and articles, as well as a synthesis of discussions among 275 turnaround focused stakeholders who attended the "Driving Dramatic School Improvement Conference" on January 11, 2010, were reviewed. Finally, Kutash et al. drew extensively on the guidance and feedback of an advisory group consisting of state and district leaders, philanthropic funders, human capital providers, school operators (i.e. charter, private, and other nonprofit school persons and organizations that are involved in the turnaround process) education entrepreneurs, and researchers. The required four federal government turnaround models:

- Turnarounds. Replace the principal, rehire no more than 50 percent of the staff, and grant the new principal sufficient operational flexibility (including staffing, calendars, schedules, and budgeting) to fully implement a comprehensive instructional program that substantially improves student outcomes.
- Restarts. Transfer control of or close and reopen a school under a school operator that has been selected through a rigorous review process.
- School Closures. Close the school and enroll students in higher-achieving schools within the local educational agency.
- Transformations. Replace the principal, take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, increase learning time, create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support. (Kutash et al., 2010, pp.4-5)

Each model varies in the cost, human capital, provider capacity, efficacy, and the political will necessary for implementation. Kutash et al. report that there is debate over each model and observers believe the model requiring the fewest changes in staff such as the transformation model is the most widely used but the least effective. All models are being implemented at individual schools, but Kutash et al. indicate that little research-based evidence exists to prove which turnaround model works best.

Lessons have been learned in implementing the four turnaround models throughout the country (Kutash et al., 2010). The common variable in all four turnaround models suggested by the federal government involves replacement of the principal or transfer of leadership control, a notion supported by Duke's (2006) findings regarding factors perceived to be the catalyst for school turnaround. According to Leithwood et al. (2008), the first factor in creating school turnaround included removal of inept principals and incompetent personnel. "School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 29). The early lessons learned by school operators, districts, states, and their partners can help define specific behaviors, practices, qualities, and characteristics instructional leaders need to possess that contribute to sustaining school turnaround (Kutash et al.). These lessons include: (a) planning, (b) human capital, and (c) maintaining support and building sustainability both on the school and system level (Kutash et al.).

Planning. According to turnaround principals interviewed by Kutash et al., the first

lesson learned was that one should build in planning time to engage the community, establish the vision, create a new school culture, and identify school leadership. "Successful turnaround principals use this planning time to build community support, hire staff, create a vision for change, and align the staff and leadership team behind that vision, according to the providers and principals interviewed" (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 35). Turnaround principals and central office personnel also pointed out that transforming a school's culture requires not only input, but also concrete actions from all stakeholders in developing a coherent and inspirational vision for success. Frequently cited actions include modeling behavior, setting high expectations, and enforcing discipline codes effectively and positively. The second lesson learned by school leaders was "Removing an incredibly toxic culture, and creating a culture of respect, has to do with professional development … and consistent discipline" (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 35). For discipline to be effective, all stakeholders must "Prepare to meet student needs that are severe and pervasive" (Kutash et al., 2010, p. 36).

Kutash et al. (2010) found that turnaround principals meet students' needs by hiring specialized staff, recruiting and training teachers with specific capabilities, and engaging with effective external providers, as appropriate. The additional wraparound services and resources these stakeholders provide can significantly revamp the educational program to deliver meaningful increases in student achievement. Agencies should not only serve students, but build capacity among all stakeholders, an important strategy to sustain results once funding, resources, and/or services are relinquished.

Human capital. Additional lessons identified by Kutash et al. (2010) suggest that school districts and systems support human capital by:

- Providing training to produce strong classroom and teamwork skills and additional support to teachers and leaders.
- Empowering principals and leadership teams with key autonomies over staffing, program, budget, schedule, and data.
- Ensuring that principals and school leadership teams have the will, skill, and authority to drive change in demanding environments.

Kutash et al. found that turnaround principals, district, and state representatives agreed that the quality of adults in the building, specifically the teachers and the principal, is one of the most significant drivers in turning a school around and sustaining enhanced student achievement. The

turnaround principal must hire turnaround teachers who can meet students' acute academic and behavioral needs through the implementation of effective classroom management, willingly working longer hours, accepting additional responsibilities as part of leadership teams, and demonstrating flexibility to work with students through extended learning programs before and after school. Kutash et al. also recommend that turnaround principals create and sustain professional learning communities for teachers to allow supportive and cross-content dialog to share best practices.

The principals Kutash et al. interviewed suggested that effective turnaround leaders should be ruthlessly consistent, be willing to make difficult decisions around personnel and resource allocation, and be able to maintain urgency, resolve crises, and hire and manage a new staff. The Kutash et al. recommendation is based on the Public Impact for the Chicago Public Education Fund's (2008) definition of the four key competency clusters that turnaround school leaders must exhibit to be successful: (a) driving for results, (b) influencing for results, (c) problem solving, and (d) showing the confidence to lead.

Maintaining support and building sustainability. Kutash et al. (2010) suggest turnaround principals highlight visible improvements early in the turnaround process to rally staff around the effort and overcome resistance to change. Sending the message that things are different at this school is a strategy of successful turnaround principals that maintains support and builds sustainability for change. Quick wins in nonacademic areas signal to students and the community that a dramatic change is under way and include improving the physical condition of the building, reducing disruptive student behavior, establishing a new disciplinary plan, improving student and faculty attendance, and establishing common team processes or planning time among teachers. Kutash et al. report that these quick wins often come before improvements in student achievement and can serve as leading indicators of success. Quick wins are also important in order to build community support for turnaround efforts. Successful turnaround principals and operators highlight nonacademic measures of school culture such as rising student attendance, falling numbers of suspensions or expulsions, and upward movement on student and parent perception surveys as leading indicators that the turnaround is gaining commitment and support from parents and the broader community. In order to build capacity for long-term sustainable results, Kutash et al. encourage principals to systematize and build upon culture, assessments, instructional approaches, and programs that allow schools to dramatically improve

student performance. Kutash et al. provides examples where principals: (a) establish teacher meetings to allow for continued collaboration, (b) build parent group and community groups to sustain ongoing support, and (c) strengthen relationships with the district and state to more effectively access services and develop stronger purchasing power to maintain student support agencies and instructional resources. Maintaining support and building sustainability also require the principal to articulate a powerful vision of turnaround and to have the ability to make tough decisions.

Kutash et al. (2010) state that the principal must communicate the promise of turning a school around along with a strong commitment to student and school success. Principals interviewed by Kutash et al. reported that without a strong and clear vision, district and state leaders will not believe in the reform efforts and will not embrace the political will needed to make difficult changes. The principal must also deliver the vision of turnaround and school success to businesses, philanthropies, government officials, parents, and community organizations. Without communitywide support, school change efforts may be put at risk. By embarking on a public campaign and generating school board support, the principal will be able to buy time and persuade the district to keep the school open, ultimately leading to gains in student achievement needed to track progress and inform decisions (Kutash et al.).

Kutash et al. found that building accountability and data systems to track progress and inform decisions was a school level lesson as well as a system level lesson learned. Kutash et al. found that principal interviewees believed districts, states, and school operators should invest in data systems that provide longitudinal as well as formative real-time data linking student performance with targeted turnaround interventions. Interviewees also indicated that data systems should be used to track school performance across the district, assessing where progress is being made in turnaround schools, guiding earlier intervention in other schools so that they do not need to be turned around, and ensuring that interventions in turnaround schools are not having adverse impacts on other district schools. Lessons learned from the analysis of data can be shared across a school district to adopt a cluster-based approach to facilitate knowledge and share resources. The benefit of clusters organized around identified needs allows school systems to provide specialized support, deliver common services, develop stronger purchasing power among schools, and create opportunities for shared learning and support across schools. Kutash et al. found that principal interviewees reported that providing central-office staff with real-time,

formative data on school and teacher performance allowed for greater accountability, as well as enabled more effective decisions in regards to resource allocation and human capital management.

In addition to the lesson learned on the school and system level during the early stages of turnaround work, Kutash et al. (2010) identified key variables that must be addressed to ensure sustained turnaround success:

- Capacity: There are not enough proven turnaround experts or organizations, and existing organizations are still building capacity and infrastructure. Additionally, there is little capacity to assess the quality of the large number of new entrants to the school turnaround field.
- Funding: There may be a lack of ongoing operational funding to sustain efforts. Additionally, the requirements for the distribution of federal funds are putting pressure on states and school districts to act without adequate planning time.
- Public and Political Will: Key stakeholders find it challenging to make the difficult decisions required for dramatic school turnaround.
- Conditions: Policies and conditions in districts and states are frequently at odds with what is necessary for success in turnaround.
- Research and Knowledge Sharing: There is not enough research or evidence to identify, share, and scale effective turnaround interventions. (Kutash et al., 2010, p.43)

Kutash et al. interviews with turnaround experts (i.e., principals, policy makers, researchers, and funders) indicate that the current perspectives in school turnaround can be summarized as follows:

- Although focus is on school-level interventions, turnarounds must be supported with increased capacity at the district and state levels. If not, conditions that led to chronically underperforming schools will continue to result in repeated failures.
- Determining significant gains are still uncertain due to the lack of longitudinal research in the area of turnaround. There is agreement that the ultimate indicator of turnaround success is student achievement. However, indicators of progress and the end point at which a school can be considered turned around are still being determined.

- The time frame of turnaround is still being discussed. Stakeholders argue that turnaround should occur in the first two years on the elementary or middle school level and three to five years on the high school level. A shorter time frame lies at the heart of differentiating turnaround from other, slower improvement strategies and is a key step in maintaining political will and funding for turnaround efforts.
- A focus on quick results should not overshadow capacity building to sustain improvements. Stakeholders believe that quick results are needed to ensure the long-term sustainability of funding, political will, and community support (Kutash et al., 2010, p.14).

Unlike, Fawcett (2008) and Jacobson et al. (2007) Kutash et al. (2010) focuses on the role of the school district and all stakeholders involved in the school turnaround reform effort. The findings of Kutash et al. support Robinson and Buntrock (2011) claims that transformational and sustainable success at scale requires substantial engagement by school district leaders with the capacity and will to initiate, support, and enhance dramatic change. The most successful turnaround efforts have both high-impact leaders and the district capacity to initiate, support and enhance transformational change. Districts that implement a systematic approach to turning around and sustaining pupil progress at low performing schools saw more than a 40 percent rise in average proficiency (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011).

Jacobson, S. L., Brooks, S., Giles, C., Johnson, L., and Ylimaki, R. (2007)

The intent of the research of Jacobson et al. (2007) was to examine the relationship between principal beliefs and practices and student achievement at three high-poverty urban elementary schools using a two-stage multiple case-study methodology. The specific principal practices investigated were setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization.

The case of Jacobson et al. (2007) involved recorded one-on-one interviews with the principal and focus group interviews with teachers, support staff, parents, and students. The researchers reported that only one school out of the three could be called successful in absolute terms having experienced continual improvement since the beginning of the principal's tenure. Jacobson et al. recognized that the study's purpose was to address successful leadership; however, the cases were selected first on the basis of school success. Jacobson argues that the

second criterion for selection being studied was student achievement gains that were only evident upon the arrival of the new principal. Based on the findings, Jacobson et al. stated that the new principal was the catalyst for the school's success.

The findings of Jacobson et al. (2007) revealed that all three principals responded to the challenges of their high-poverty communities by establishing safe nurturing environments for children and adults, setting high expectations for student performance, and holding everyone (i.e., students, faculty, staff, parents, and themselves) accountable for meeting those expectations. Although different in personal style, all three principals set clear directions for the school and then influenced members of the school community to begin moving towards the school's vision by modeling the behaviors and practices the principal desired. Setting direction, developing people, and redesigning the organization were not the only factors related to improving student achievement. Jacobson et al. acknowledged that other variables such as race and gender of each principal, experience in working in high-poverty schools, instructional strategies, and the relationships principals established with the students, staff, and community may have also contributed to increases in student achievement.

Based on the analysis of data collected from each case, Jacobson et al. (2007) concluded that:

- School systems need to conduct strategic planning in filling leadership vacancies at underperforming schools.
- School districts need incentives that can be used to attract experienced principals who have a proven record of success at turning around schools.
- The state department of education should get more actively involved in principal recruitment to help failing schools attract the right leader.
- Preparation programs need to place potential leaders in high poverty schools that are under achieving to give them exposure and essential skills to lead change.
- A state sponsored mentoring program should be developed to give current principals and potential leaders an opportunity to observe effective administrative practices in their natural environment.

Ylimaki, R., Jacobson, S., and Drysdale, L. (2007).

High levels of poverty can interfere with a school's ability to successfully improve

student achievement (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). Ylimaki, Jacobson, and Drysdale (2007) state that poverty correlates with poor academic achievement primarily due to poor nutrition, inadequate health services, and high rates of illiteracy and criminal behavior. Furthermore, factors related to poverty contribute to high rates of student transience, absence, and high rates of disciplinary issues. Hence, poor student performance in such high-poverty schools is not a surprising outcome, but in the climate of accountability, students and teachers in high poverty schools still have to perform at the same level as schools that do not face these challenges.

The intent of the research of Ylimaki et al. (2007) was to identify the effective practices of a diverse group of instructional leaders from the United States, England, and Australia that positively impact student achievement in high-poverty schools. Ylimaki et al. described four core practices defined by Leithwood and Riehl (2005) that examined the successful leadership practices of those who have navigated the challenges of high-poverty schools across three national contexts. Investigating effective leadership practices globally may strengthen findings from previous research, expand existing themes of effective practice, and discover new correlations between leadership practices and student achievement.

Ylimaki et al. (2007) examined relationships between principal traits and the practices of setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional environment on student achievement in high-poverty elementary schools in the United States, England, and Australia. The researchers hypothesized that if instructional leaders displayed the four practices student achievement would increase in high-poverty schools in the United States, England, and Australia. The operational definitions for the major variables were well defined by the standard measure used to determine their effect. However, there were no criteria to define poverty therefore weakening external validity due to the lack of a clear definition of the sample.

Findings revealed that empathy, passion, persistence, and flexible thinking were traits that principals exhibited in their application of the core practices identified by Leithwood and Riehl (2005). Additional findings reported by Ylimaki et al. (2007) included:

- Setting Direction: All leaders secured the building from unwanted distractions and redefined the school to focus on teaching and learning.
- Developing People: Leaders displayed creative methods to provide professional development to help people grow with limited resources.

- Redesigning the Organization: All leaders developed their schools as effective organizations that supported and sustained performance of teachers and students in the areas of curriculum, discipline, parent involvement, morale, beautification, and decision making.
- Managing the Instructional program: All leaders provided instructional support, monitored classroom activity, buffered staff from distractions, and hired staff whose personal priorities aligned with the school mission.
- School size: While school size was not a focus, principals seem to have a greater impact at schools having fewer than 250 students.
- Ylimaki et al. (2007) made the following recommendations for leadership preparation and practice in high poverty schools:
- Preparation programs should give particular consideration to high-poverty schools, both urban and rural when assigning field experiences.
- Programs preparing principals should require internship placements, whenever possible, in high-poverty schools for at least part of a clinical experience.
- Creating high-quality clinical placements in challenging schools should not be reserved only for aspiring administrators. Mentoring programs should be developed for current principals to observe first hand the practice of exemplary practicing school leaders, such as those in Ylimaki et al.'s study, or by giving exemplary leaders the chance to visit and consult in challenging contexts (this second option might attract recently retired successful school leaders).
- Research into successful leadership in high-poverty schools needs to be expanded into different national contexts and locales varying in size and student demographics.

A criticism of case study research is that it has limitations in establishing reliability and/or generalizability of findings. The benefit of exploring instructional leadership using qualitative methodology is that emerging themes help to bring an understanding of specific behaviors and practices of effective leaders.

Waters, T., Marzano, R., and McNulty, B. (2003)

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) reported a link between leadership and student achievement in their study involving three meta-analyses. The first two meta-analyses provided specific guidance on curricular, instructional, and school practices associated with school effectiveness. The third meta-analysis examined the relationship between leadership practices and increased student achievement. The process began with a systematic meta-analysis (including doctoral dissertations) that examined the effects of leadership on student achievement reported since the early 1970's. Waters et al. selected 5,000 studies that addressed leadership and student achievement. From this sample, 70 studies met the criteria for design, controls, data analysis, and rigor. The meta-analysis included 2, 894 schools, approximately 1.1 million students, and 14,000 teachers. The criteria for the design included: quantitative student achievement data, student performance on standardized norm-referenced tests, teacher perceptions of effective leadership responsibilities as the independent variable, and increased student achievement as the dependent variable. The meta-analysis of Waters et al. identified 21 leadership responsibilities that demonstrate a correlation between leadership and increased student achievement.

Findings. Data collected from practitioners in the field were divided into two areas. The first area was the meta-analysis where the 21 researched-based responsibilities and practices emerged as significantly associated with student achievement. The second was the taxonomy tool used to organize the literature findings and themes into four types of knowledge: experiential, declarative, procedural, and contextual. The value of the taxonomy instrument was in organizing the knowledge in the theoretical research on leadership, change, systems, organizational learning, diffusion, supervision, and institutions so it could be applied to the 21 leadership responsibilities.

Waters et al. (2003) found a correlation between leadership and student achievement to be .25. The correlation can be interpreted to mean that if the principal were able to improve leadership practices by one standard deviation it would translate into a mean student achievement increase of 10 percentile points. Waters et al. reported in some cases a correlation for leadership and achievement to be .50 meaning that one standard deviation difference in demonstrated leadership ability was associated with a 19 percentile point increase in student achievement. A correlation this large had not been reported in prior research creating a need for

further exploration to ensure reliability. In other cases, correlations were as low as -.02, indicating that schools where principals demonstrated higher competence in certain areas had lower levels of student achievement. In situations where principals misidentified the focus of change or miscalculated the order of change, one standard deviation improvement in leadership practices was correlated with one percentile point decrease in student achievement. The analysis gave clear statistical evidence on the positive and negative effects of principal practices and responsibilities on student achievement.

Waters et al. (2003) concludes that there are two primary variables that determine whether or not leadership will have a positive or negative impact on student achievement. The first variable is the focus of change. The second variable is the magnitude or order of change. The focus of change involves the principal properly identifying and focusing on improving the school and classroom practices that are likely to have a positive effect on student achievement. The magnitude or order of change involve the principal understanding the implications that change will have on staff members, students, parents, and other stakeholders. Waters et al. use the terms first order and second order change to make this distinction.

Changes that are consistent with existing values and norms create advantages for individuals or stakeholder groups with similar interest, can be implemented with existing knowledge and resources and where agreement exists on what changes are needed and how the changes should be implemented can be considered first order change. A change becomes second order when it is not obvious how it will make things better for the people with similar interest, it requires individuals or groups of stakeholders to learn new approaches, or it conflicts with prevailing values and norms. (Waters et al., 2003, p. 7)

Views and insights from prior research was done by Waters et al. was a research bias concern because these insights were used to define and describe the effects of the 21 leadership practices and responsibilities that were reported to enhance student achievement. Experience in conducting quantitative research by Waters et al. was also used to select studies for inclusion in the meta-analysis. The choice of practices and the selection of studies could limit or weaken the validity, reliability, and credibility of the findings. However, Waters et al. continued to collect data and do research on the identified 21 responsibilities. The level of continued research and re-analysis of findings strengthen reliability and credibility in spite of the Water's et al. own judgment and prior knowledge as the method used to report the findings. The effects of

researcher bias need to be mentioned, but through the extensive research methodology and criteria used to analyze the data, the use of the Water's et al.'s experiences may have little to no effect on the validity of reported findings and conclusions in the meta-analysis.

Waters et al. demonstrated that leadership had a statistically significant effect on student achievement. Additional findings suggested by Waters et al. include:

- When leaders concentrate on the wrong personal practice or responsibility and/or classroom practices, or miscalculate the magnitude or "order" of the change they are attempting to implement, they can negatively impact student achievement.
- Principal practices account for about 10% of the variance, but teacher practices and responsibilities can account for as much as 20% of the variance.
- Effective leaders understand first order and second order change they are leading and select and skillfully use appropriate leadership practices to enhance student achievement.
- Effective leaders understand how to balance the push for change, while protecting aspects of culture, values, and norms worth preserving.
- Effective leaders know which policies, practices, resources, and incentives to align and how to align them with organizational priorities. Effective leaders are able to gauge the magnitude of change they are calling for and how to tailor leadership strategies accordingly.

Implications and recommendations suggest that data continue to be collected and a factor analysis conducted to tease out underlying factor structures. By doing so, Waters et al. (2003) expect that the results of the factor analysis will produce a smaller number of responsibilities. Further research will allow Waters et al. to report on the strength of relationships between leadership practices and classroom practices in enhancing student achievement. Ongoing research will enhance the current findings in ways that will help leaders, districts, and systems better refine their mentor programs, staff development programs, and current leadership practices (Waters et al.).

The framework for school leadership of Waters et al. (2003) had the most highly developed comprehensive analysis of research on school leadership and student achievement of the six articles reviewed. The article moved beyond suggestions or theory to statistically significant responsibilities, practices, knowledge, strategies, tools, and resources that principals

need to be effective leaders. The leadership framework stated what to do, but also explained when, how, and why to implement specific practices while giving the significance and effect size of each practice. Effective leaders understand and value the people in their organization, know when, how, and why to create learning environments that support people while connecting them with one another, and provide the knowledge, skills, and resources necessary to enhance student achievement (Waters et al.).

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., and Hopkins, D. (2008)

The work of Leithwood et al. (2008) provided seven strong claims about instructional leadership that have continued to emerge in the literature. Leithwood et al. state that, "School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning, and almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices" (p. 29). These are the two claims that have attracted the largest amount of evidence.

The independent variables Leithwood et al. (2008) examined included leadership practices, traits, beliefs, and responsibilities that create early and late turnaround as measured by student achievement. School turnaround as measured by student achievement was the dependent variable and divided into two parts: early and late. Leithwood et al. state seven hypotheses referred to as directional claims. The seven claims are:

- School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning.
- Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices.
- The ways in which leaders apply these basic leadership practices – not the practices themselves – demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work.
- School leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions.
- School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed.
- Some patterns of leadership distribution are more effective than others.
- A small handful of personal traits explain a high proportion of the variation in

leadership effectiveness. (Leithwood et al., 2008, pp.29-30)

The analysis from which these seven claims emerged evolved from an executive summary of key findings from a review of literature on both quantitative and qualitative research. The literature that was the spring board for each of the seven claims provided sources of evidence to define, justify, and explain the relationships and correlations by which each claim emerged. Leithwood et al. (2008) acknowledges external validity and the generalizability of the findings as limitations of qualitative research (Duke, 2006; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Ylimaki et al., 2007). However, the mixed-methods design strengthened the validity and generalizability of the seven claims by using the statistically significant findings from the quantitative research (Hallinger, 1983; Hallinger & Heck, 1996a; Waters et al., 2003) to support the recurring themes, emerging correlations, and relationships reported in the qualitative research. The quantitative studies tended to have much larger samples based on national teacher survey responses on teacher perceptions of effective leadership practices that enhance student achievement. Other claims emerged from the meta-analysis of research from the robust collection of data on the effects of leadership practices on student achievement.

In the qualitative research on the four core principal practices (i.e., setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional environment) (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005), Leithwood et al. (2008) discovered each principal practice included more specific sub-sets of practices: 14 in total. To illustrate the strength of these findings, Leithwood et al. compared each set of practices to leadership behaviors identified in Yukl's (1989) managerial taxonomy and a synthesis of leadership research conducted in non-school contexts. Yukl's taxonomy allowed Leithwood et al. to organize and compare findings in the theoretical research so it could be applied to leadership practices and their effects on student achievement. A path analysis model applied by Leithwood et al. was also used to test the direction and strength of relationships among variables within leadership models, as well as the amount of variation in certain variables that can be explained by other factors.

Yukl's (1889) taxonomy and the path model were very effective in modeling the effects of leadership practices related to improved student achievement made in the seven claims. The path model gave a conceptual framework with values indicating the flow and significant effects of principal practices on student achievement and learning. The path model was easy to interpret and clearly demonstrated that school leadership has a greater influence on schools and pupils

when widely distributed. Data analysis not only revealed what leadership practices enhanced quality instruction and student achievement, but also illustrated how successful leaders integrated functional and personal practice to create early and late turnaround.

Leithwood et al. (2008) presented evidence through the seven claims that leadership had a statically significant effect on student achievement. The seven strong claims were listed as hypotheses, but the null hypothesis would be rejected in all seven cases. The significant results were reported as indirect effects of total leadership on student learning and achievement. The findings indicated there were significant correlations between total leadership and the three dimensions of staff performance. The strongest correlations were teachers' perceived working conditions followed by capacity. The weakest correlations were in relation to teacher motivation and commitment. The relationship between total leadership and teachers' capacity was much stronger than the relationship between the principal's leadership alone and teachers' capacity. Total leadership accounted for a significant 27 % of the variation in student achievement across schools. Total leadership was the combined influence of leadership from all sources: teachers, staff teams, parents, central office staff, students, vice-principals, and principals (Leithwood et al.). Within claim six, the authors shared that schools with the highest levels of student achievement attribute their success to the influence of leadership that flowed from many sources (Leithwood et al.).

Leithwood et al. (2008) suggest researchers continue to investigate the relationship between the 21 leadership responsibilities and student achievement. Studies conducted in non-educational settings may give educators additional insight regarding the effects of leadership on student achievement. For example, Leithwood et al. indicate that private sector studies have revealed that more coordinated patterns of leadership practices are associated with increased organizational outcomes.

Synthesis of the Research

The review of literature identified traits, characteristics, qualities, beliefs, practices, responsibilities, and behaviors of successful leaders in navigating positive turnaround in the area of student achievement in high-poverty elementary schools. The findings suggest that enhancing and sustaining improvements in student achievement depend on comprehensive change, customization, and a core of essential reforms both in the area of school leadership and district

level leadership practices. These findings make it critical to pinpoint principal and central office leadership characteristics and practices that will most affect enhanced and sustained student achievement. In addition to leadership practices, school districts must create enabling conditions that turnaround schools need based on data (Robinson & Buntrock). Educational leaders on all levels are realizing that meaningful information can only be acquired through a proper analysis of data and that good decisions are based on this thoughtful process of inquiry and analysis to drive decisions in order to increase student performance (Creighton, 2007).

Table 1 lists and describes eight domains that emerged from the research in which the qualities and practices of the principal enhanced and sustained student achievement (Duke, 2006; Fawcett, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Ylimaki et al., 2007). Table 2 lists and describes eight domains that emerged from the research (Fullan, 2010; Robinson & Buntrock, 2011; Walberg 2007) as qualities and practices of effective school district leadership that enhance and sustain student achievement. The literature points to the need for further research in the area of turnaround models associated with enhancing and sustaining school turnaround as measured by student achievement. Educational leaders are lacking a strong research base for each of the turnaround models recognized by the federal government. If a clear research-based model for turning around low-performing schools existed, there would not be so many of them (Manwaring, 2011). According to Manwaring, researchers have to examine the implementation process of each case, track each model and determine whether student achievement occurred, and then identify key components of the change process that explain successful sustained turnaround.

An increasingly robust research base, demonstrates the critical role school districts play in school improvement and in schools' efforts to meet and sustain standards. A key element is courageous leadership by a superintendent and a school board willing to recognize challenges, develop a plan of reform, and build capacity for needed change (Walberg, 2007). Districts must take the lead in establishing goals without making excuses while developing initiatives designed to enhance student achievement in all schools. District level leadership has to deliver a clear message that accountability for carrying out school improvement initiatives is in the hands of the principals and teachers. To enhance and sustain the efforts of principals and teachers, districts must create an effective curricular focus, provide intensive development opportunities, monitor all student progress, involve parents and the community in helping children meet standards, and

provide resources to address intervention needs of individual students (Walberg, 2007).

Table 1

Leadership Practices that Enhance and Sustain Student Achievement

Terms	Definitions
Setting Direction	Involves creating a clear vision, mission, goals, positive school culture, the expectation among all stake-holders that all students will learn
Communication	Encompasses effective listening and interpersonal skills in motivating and inspiring others to action
Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	Includes observations, progress monitoring, data collection, professional development
Collaboration and Shared Leadership	Involves collaboration, staff empowerment, professional learning communities
Family and Community Connections	Involves creating an inclusive learning environment, understanding student characteristics, celebrating diversity, and involving multiple agencies in teaching and learning
Organizational Structure	Involves maintaining safety, discipline/behavior, budget, organizational management
Administrative Professional Development	Requires continual, ongoing, relevant, sustained, based on student performance data
Administrative Guidance/Mentoring	Involves attracting and retaining top-notch people in leadership in high-needs schools

Table 2

Qualities and Practices of Effective School District Leadership Practices

Terms	Definitions
Focus	A clear direction and relentless focus on student achievement through instructional improvement in the classroom is the focus of the school board and central office leadership. District leaders strengthen the core message by increasing teacher's skills and knowledge engaging students in learning, and ensuring curriculum challenges students.
Communication	Everyone knows the central focus of teaching and learning priorities and how to achieve them up, down, and across the district.
Data	Timely access and use of data on student learning are used to monitor school improvement efforts. All stakeholders are aware of student needs and targeted instructional responses are provided where needed.
Leadership	Development of teacher, principal, and district level leadership to share effective practices from each other and from the larger research base. Responses are then developed to deliver job embedded in service.
Community	District and schools are linked to parents, community, and related agencies to provide support for students and educators and to intervene early in difficulties experienced by students and/or schools.
Reduce Distracters	There exists a concerted effort to reduce the distracters that undermine teachers' and principals' capacity to carry out this central strategy.
Resources	Resources should be clearly aligned to support the core teaching and learning aligned with the district's goals while not relying on special funding.
Esprit de Corps	A sense identity and community among teachers, principals, and the district that everyone is working for a greater good for all. Allegiances are strong and collaborative competition leverages the schools toward stronger performance.

CHAPTER III
METHOD

Introduction

The study was conducted to identify specific practices employed through Academic Achievement Teams to reduce declines in student achievement and sustain increased student achievement for at least two or more consecutive years at the elementary school level. The following paragraphs describe the qualitative design employed, the school district and schools sampled, the data collection procedures used, and the analysis of data techniques conducted.

Qualitative Design

A qualitative design was selected to conduct a descriptive cross case study of an innovative mechanism called Academic Achievement Teams used by district leadership to increase and maintain student achievement in elementary schools. "A descriptive case study in education is one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study…they are useful in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted. Innovative programs and practices are often the focus of descriptive case studies in education" (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). The qualitative methods employed included one-on-one interviews with select members of Academic Achievement Teams, observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings, and review of Academic Achievement Team documents.

School District and Schools Sampled. A school district in Central Virginia was purposefully selected to study based upon the systematic use of Academic Achievement Teams. Academic Achievement teams were implemented in select schools during the 2006-2007 school year in Stellar County. The Academic Achievement Team consisted of teacher leaders, administrators, and central office staff all working together to ensure student achievement. Academic Achievement Teams have been established at all Stellar County Schools that:

- Receive accreditation with warning because of not meeting current year benchmarks in a specific content area,
- Receive accreditation through three year averaging but not meeting annual benchmark,

- Do not meet Adequate Yearly Progress with specific student groups in specific content areas.
- Rely on a three year calculation or met Adequate Yearly Progress using safe harbor because of continuous growth in a content area but not meeting annual benchmarks.

Two Stellar County elementary schools, Stellar School 101 and Stellar School 102, were identified and purposefully selected for study because they had demonstrated significant improvement in a short period of time using the Academic Achievement Team process. The two study schools achieved state accreditation, Adequate Yearly Progress, and significant increases in student performance in all subject areas on the Standards of Learning assessments in 2010 as evident in Figures 1-6.

Stellar School 101 and Stellar School 102 are located in an economically depressed area approximately ten miles apart within the Stellar County Public School District. Both schools are urban being located just minutes outside of the city. In addition, both schools have a high percentage of students' families in poverty, single parent homes, low literacy, and over 75% of the student population on free and/or reduced lunch.

Figure 1 below contains a graph comparing third grade Standards of Learning scores from 2008-2011 for Stellar School 101 in the areas of reading, history, science, and math (Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The spring 2011 scores for third grade exceeded the state average in all four subject areas whereas scores prior to spring 2011 were below the state average in all four subject areas.

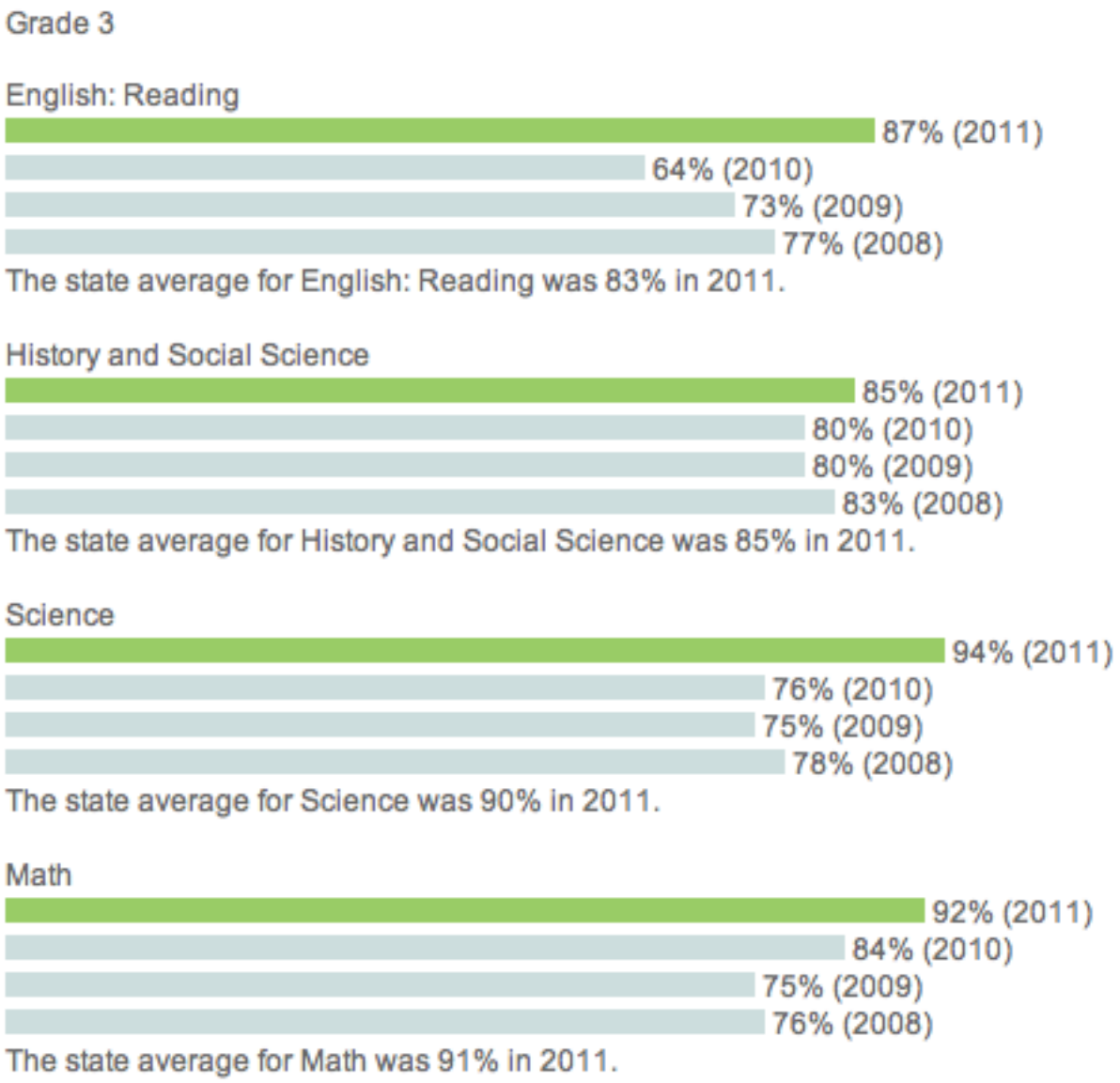

Figure 1. Stellar school 101 grade 3 comparison of standards of learning results from 2008 through 2011.

Figure 2 below contains a graph comparing fourth grade Standards of Learning scores from 2008 through 2011 in the areas of reading and math at Stellar School 101 (Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The spring 2011 Standards of Learning scores exceeded the state average in math and reading while Standards of Learning scores prior to spring 2011 were below the state average in reading and math for Grade 4 students.

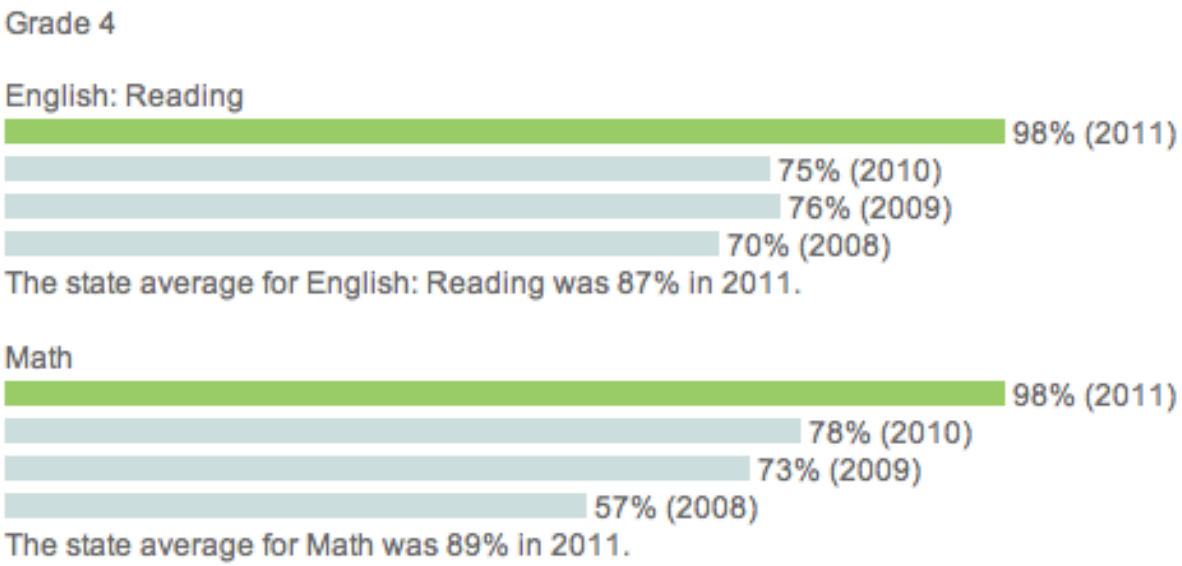

Figure 2. Stellar school 101 grade 4 comparison of standards of learning results 2008 through 2011.

Figure 3 below contains a graph comparing fifth grade Standards of Learning scores from 2008 through 2011 in the areas of reading, science, writing, and math at Stellar School 101 (Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The spring 2011 scores exceeded the state average in all subjects with the exception of writing. Standards of Learning scores reported in Figure 4 prior to spring 2011 were below the state average in all four subject areas.

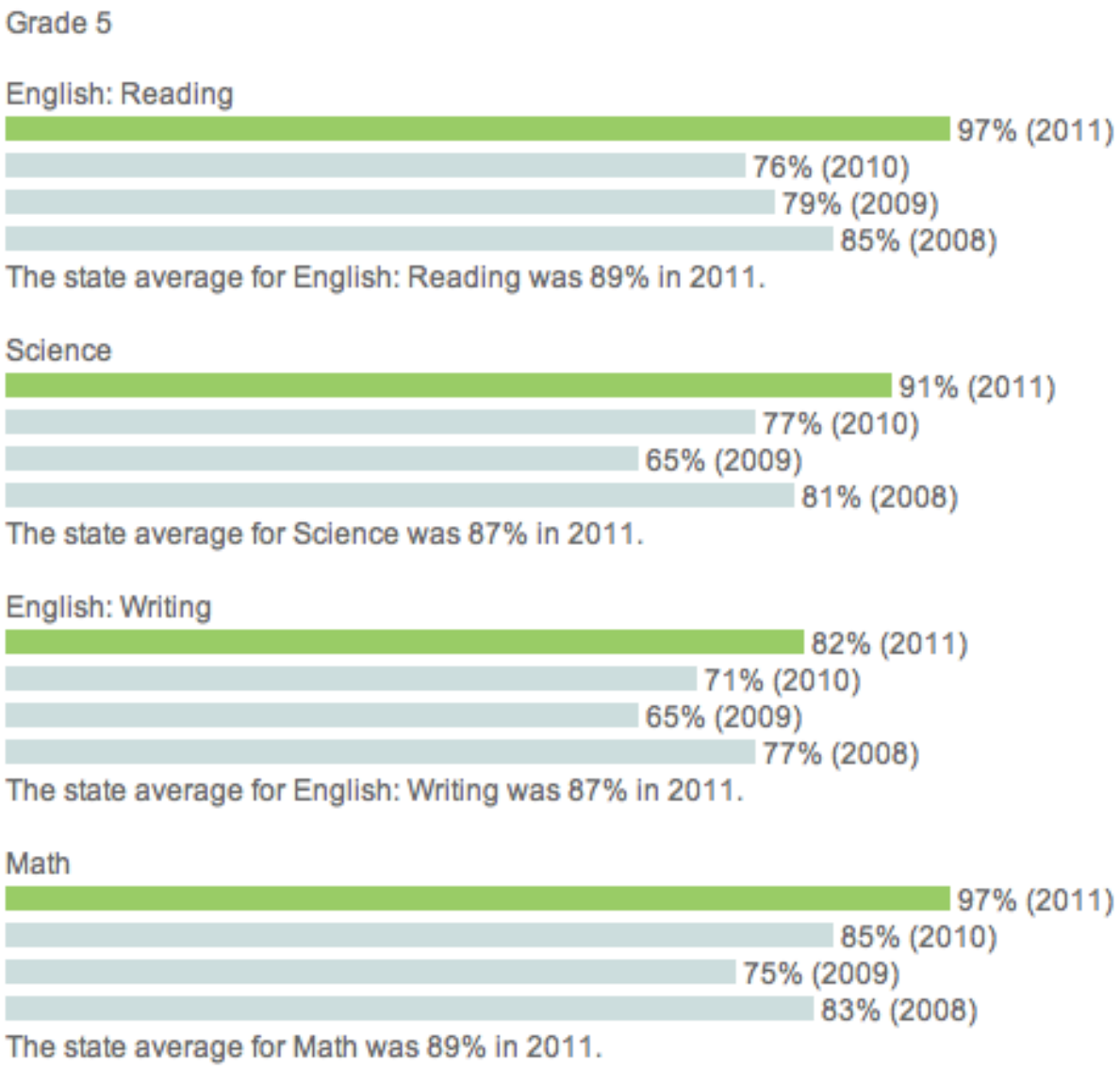

Figure 3. Stellar school 101 grade 5 comparison of standards of learning results 2008 through 2011.

Figure 4 below contains a graph comparing third grade Standards of Learning scores from 2008 through 2011 in the areas of reading, history, science, and math at Stellar School 102 (Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The spring 2011 scores exceeded the state average in all subject areas while Standards of Learning scores prior to spring 2011 were below the state average in reading, history, science, and math.

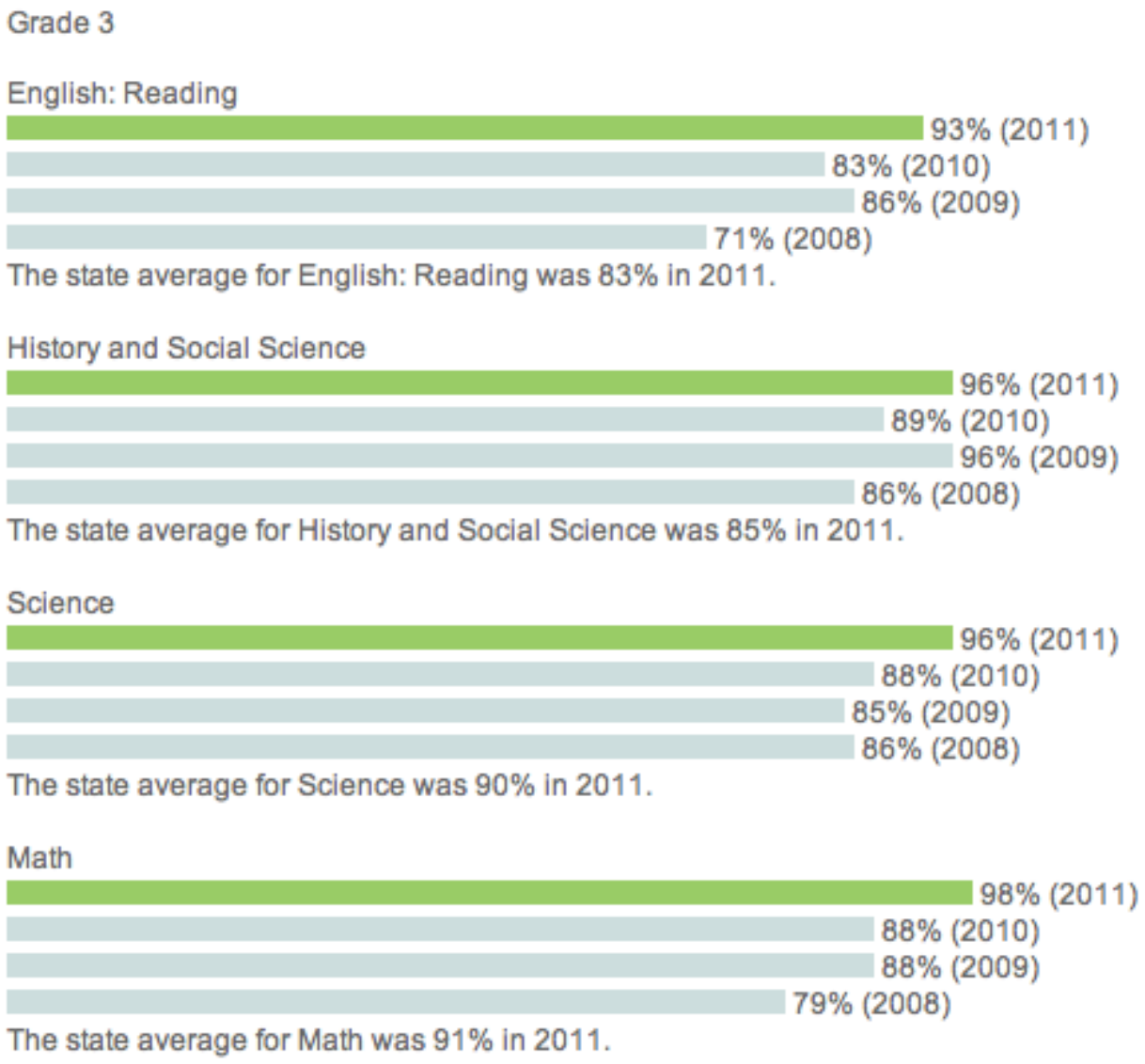

Figure 4. Stellar school 102 grade 3 comparison of standards of learning results 2008 through 2011.

Figure 5 below contains a graph comparing fourth grade Standards of Learning scores from 2008 through 2011 in the areas of reading and math at Stellar School 102 (Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The spring 2011 scores exceeded the state average in both subject areas but were below the state average in reading and math prior to spring 2011.

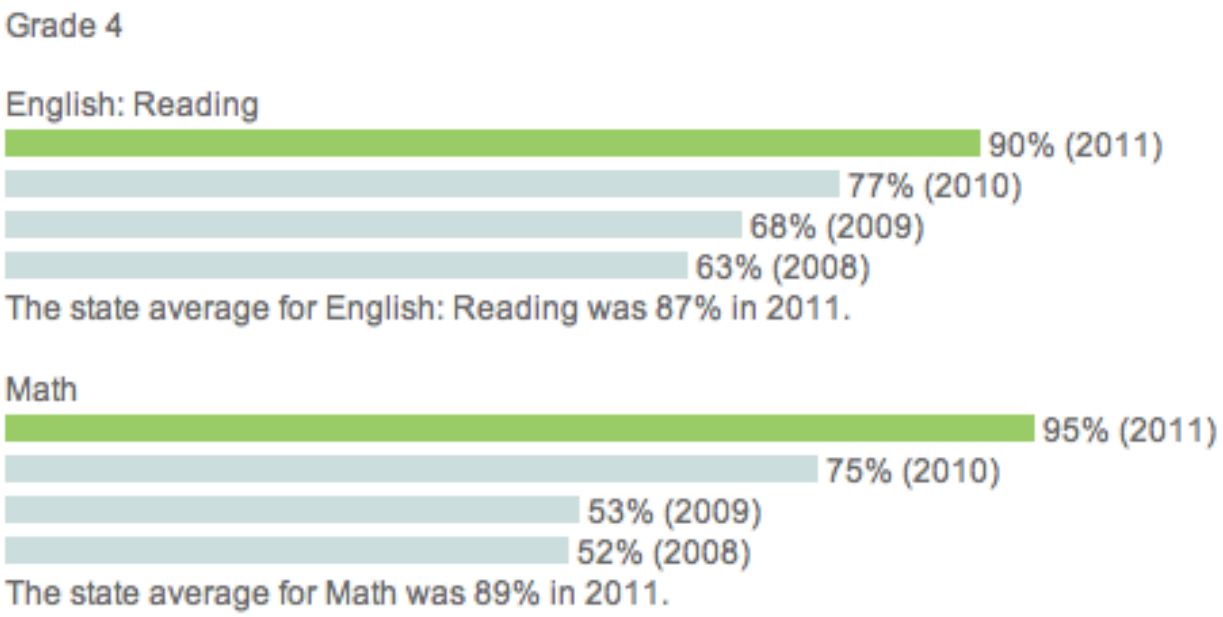

Figure 5. Stellar school 102 grade 4 comparison of standards of learning results 2008 through 2011.

Figure 6 below contains a graph comparing fifth grade Standards of Learning scores from 2008 through 2011 in the areas of reading, science, writing, and math at Stellar School 101 (Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The spring 2011 scores exceeded the state average in all four subjects and were below the state average in reading, science, writing, and math prior to spring 2011.

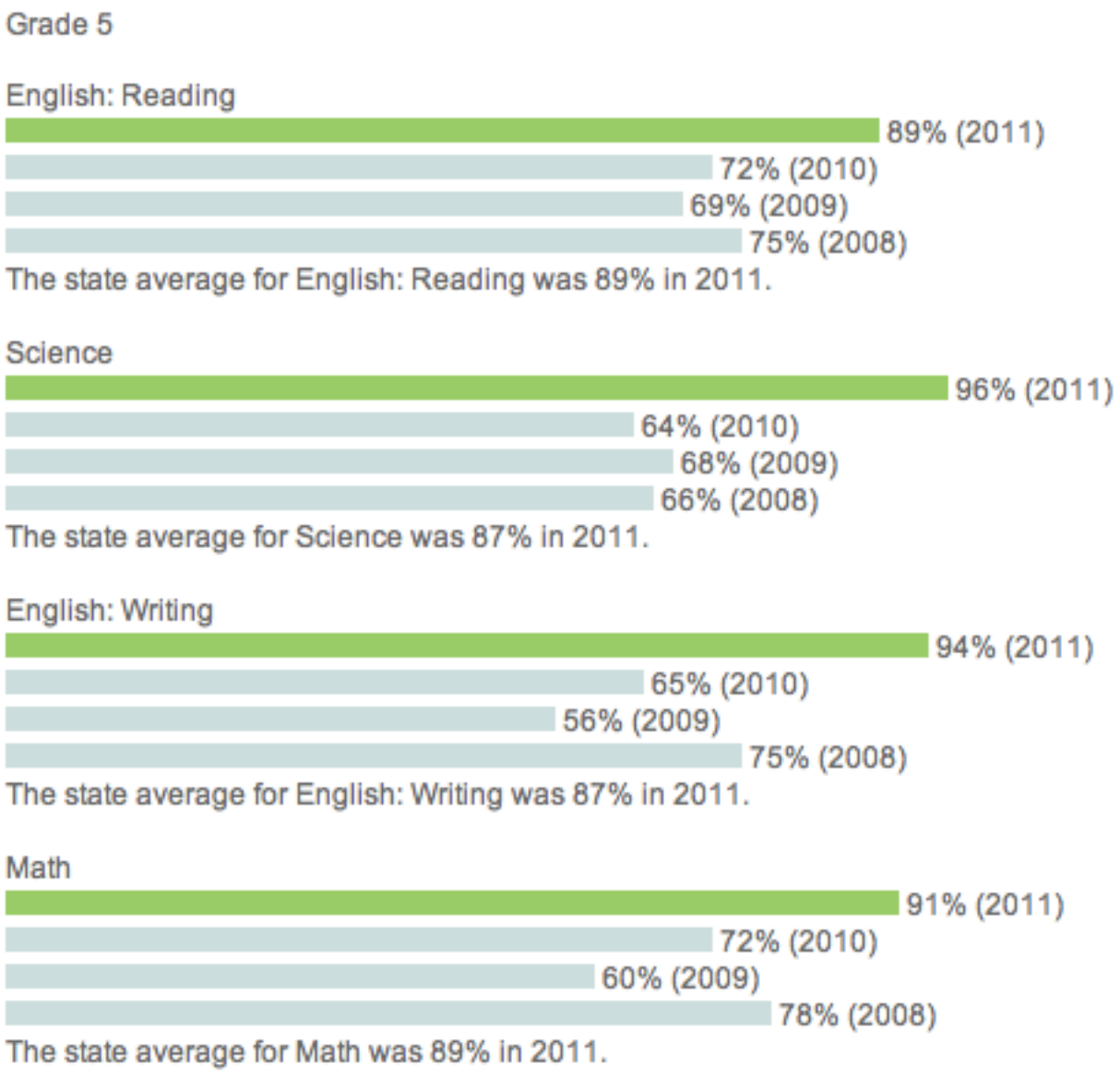

Figure 6. Stellar school 102 grade 5 comparison of standards of learning results 2008 through 2011,

Data Collection

Data collection was accomplished via one-on-one interviews, observations, and document reviews. The data collected were grouped into one of three categories that emerged through the analysis and triangulation of interviews, observations, and document reviews. Member checks were performed following the completion of all transcriptions to ensure accuracy of information. After member checks were completed, transcripts from the one-on-one

interviews were coded by color, sorted, and then grouped. Transcribed data that fit into more than one category were copied and placed in all relevant categories.

Interviews. The format for the teacher, principal, division liaison, and director of elementary education interviews was based on Creswell's (1998) model which includes: the title of the study, time, date, place of the interview, the name of the interviewer and the interviewee, a brief description of the study, the interview questions, and a closing remark thanking the participant(s) for his/her involvement. The specific interview protocols for each participant were derived from the research done by Robinson and Buntrock (2011).

Robinson and Buntrock (2011) listed district leadership practices related to transformational change as making strategic replacements of staff, providing district designed assessments while imparting to principals and teachers the importance of following a district-designed data protocol, developing the staff's ability to differentiate instruction, and monitoring success of turnaround strategies where expected gains were not yet realized through the use of data. The interview protocols found in Appendices B, C, and D were based on Robinson and Buntrock's findings and were designed to identify whether district leadership made strategic replacements in staff, provided district designed assessments, provided data protocols to monitor student performance, developed the staff's ability to provide quality instruction, allowed time to monitor and analyze turnaround strategies, and pinpointed areas in which to allocate additional materials and resources to enhance the educational programs.

The individuals interviewed at Stellar School 101 and 102 included the principal, the director of elementary education for each of the two elementary schools studied, the assigned division liaison, and one classroom teacher that served on the Academic Achievement Team at Stellar School 101. Each person interviewed was briefed on the purpose of the study and the principles of informed consent (i.e., purpose of the research study, participant's role in the study, time required, risks, confidentiality, and voluntariness). Pseudonyms were used for purposes of confidentiality. Interviewees were contacted via telephone and/or email, given a brief description of the purpose of the study, and were told the reason they were selected to be interviewed. All potential interviewees agreed to be interviewed. Upon verbal agreement to participate, the interviewees received a formal letter of selection and a consent form explaining the details of the study, location, and time. The 45-60 minute interviews were conducted at a place of convenience for the interviewee. All interviews were recorded using a program on the MacBook called

Audacity and a hand held recording device was used as a backup. Following each interview, the recording was saved in a MP3 file and professionally transcribed.

Interview data are referenced throughout Chapters 4 and 5 using the following coding system. The letters for each participant's transcript included T=Teacher, D1=District Leadership Elementary Director 1, D2= District Leadership Elementary Director 2, L=Division Liaison, P=Principals, 101=Study School 101, and 102=Study School 102. For example, (P101, p. 3) indicated that the data came from the principal at School 101 on page three of the transcript.

The teacher interviewed at Stellar School 101 was selected based on her participation on the Academic Achievement Team prior to and during the tenure of the newly assigned principal. The teacher served on the Academic Achievement Team for three consecutive years, but was not an Academic Achievement Team member when interviewed.

District leaders that were interviewed included two directors of Elementary Education. Elementary Director 1 served as director of elementary education supervising 15 schools in the Stellar County School District as reported in the one-on-one interview with the director (i.e., D1). Prior to this position, she served as the single director of elementary schools for eight years coordinating the operations of approximately 45 schools and providing guidance to the principals that served at each building. Elementary Director 2 has served in her current position for two years supervising 15 schools in the Stellar County School District. Prior to being an elementary director, she served as an elementary principal for 15 years.

The one-on-one interview with the principal at Stellar School 101 (i.e., P101) indicated that she was in her twenty-ninth year as a principal in the Stellar County School District. The principal also divulged that she had won numerous awards for instructional leadership, that she had served as a middle school principal prior to becoming an elementary principal, and that, in year two of her tenure at Stellar School 101, the school had been recognized for making Adequate Yearly Progress and achieving full accreditation. In addition, the elementary directors interviewed (i.e., D1 and D2) disclosed that she had been recognized as one of the most effective instructional leaders in Stellar County.

The one-on-one interview with the principal at Stellar School 102 (i.e., P102) revealed that she has served as an elementary principal for nine years. She also indicated that her continued success in her new placement at Stellar School 102 had earned her the Instructional Leader of the Year Award for Stellar County in 2010-11 and a plethora of other recognitions for

her work as an effective instructional leader. The one-on-one interviews with the directors of elementary education (i.e., D1 and D2) uncovered the fact that in her first three years as an elementary principal, her school had improved student performance and met Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks. The documents reviewed (i.e., the 2010-2011 Adequate Yearly Progress report and Standards of Learning results) and interviewees (i.e., P102, D1, and D2) indicated that in just the first year after being transferred (2010-2011) to Stellar School 102, the school achieved full accreditation and met all Adequate Yearly Progress benchmarks.

The Stellar County division liaison represented the Office of School Improvement for the Virginia Department of Education. She has served in numerous posts as an educator beginning as a special education teacher and completing a 44-year tenure in education as a School Improvement Officer.

Observations. An observation of an Academic Achievement Team meeting at each elementary school was conducted using the observation checklist developed by the Stellar County Public School System to ensure all mandated action plans, protocols, procedures, and data were reviewed during such meetings. A copy of the checklist is presented in Appendix F.

The principal at Stellar School 101 and 102 granted permission for their perspective Academic Achievement Team meetings to be observed after semester benchmark testing. The observation was purposefully scheduled after the release of the semester benchmark results in order to document practices, protocols, procedures, and behaviors as events naturally unfolded. Field notes were taken and the Stellar County observational checklist was used to record the action plans, practices, behaviors, characteristics of the principal and district leadership, and the data that were discussed during the Academic Achievement Team meetings.

Document review. The documents reviewed included: Standards of Learning results for grades 3-5 from 2008 through 2011, the 2011 Standards of Learning scores for grades 3-5 for Stellar Schools 101 and 102 compared to the division's average in the areas of reading and math, the Adequate Yearly Progress reports for Stellar Schools 101 and 102 for 2011, the 2010-2011 quarterly benchmark assessment results for fall, winter, and spring for grades 3-5 for Stellar Schools 101 and 102 for all Standards of Learning tested subjects (i.e., reading, math, science, social studies, and writing for grade 5 only), and the 2011 February and March minutes from Stellar School 101 and 102's Academic Achievement Team meetings.

Table 3 contains a detailed list of the documents reviewed for Stellar Schools 101 and 102. Student performance data for grades 3, 4, and 5 were reviewed because state accreditation and Adequate Yearly Progress were determined by student performance on the Standards of Learning Tests taken in these grades. Each document listed captured the results for grades 3, 4, and 5 in a single report.

Table 3

Documents Reviewed for Stellar Schools 101 and 102

Date of Document	Title of Document
2007-2008	Grades 3, 4, & 5 Standards of Learning Results
2008-2009	Grades 3, 4, & 5 Standards of Learning Results
2009-2010	Grades 3, 4, & 5 Standards of Learning Results
2010-2011	Grades 3, 4, & 5 Standards of Learning Results
2010-2011	Fall Quarterly Benchmark Data for Grades 3, 4, & 5
2010-2011	Winter Quarterly Benchmark Data for Grades 3, 4, & 5
2010-2011	Spring Quarterly Benchmark Data for Grades 3, 4, & 5
2010-2011	Adequate Yearly Progress Report
2011 February	Academic Achievement Team Minutes
2011 February	Action Plans from Academic Achievement Team Meeting
2010-2011	Continuous School Improvement Plan
2011 February	Bi-Weekly Assessment Results for Grades 3, 4, & 5
2011 February	Classroom Student Performance Charts for Grades 3, 4, & 5

Additional documents reviewed included action plans from the February 2011 Academic Achievement Team meeting from Stellar Schools 101 and 102 and pictures of student performance charts hung in classrooms from Stellar School 101 reporting bi-weekly assessment results in grades 3-5 for the areas of math, reading, science, and social studies. The 2010-2011 continuous school improvement plans for Stellar Schools 101 and 102 were also reviewed to understand better the Academic Achievement Team goals and objectives. The document review checklist can be found in Appendix G.

Analysis of Data

Data obtained from interviews, observations, and document reviews were coded using the Constant Comparative Method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The Constant Comparative Method is a detailed organizational data analysis process which follows a prescribed format: (a) carefully reading to identify key words and/or phrases that may emerge as a theme or combine to form a larger category based on each data piece reviewed, (b) re-examining themes and grouping them into common ideas that are then separated into categories, (c) labeling categories and beginning another series of examining the data to sort themes into relevant categories and to determine whether additional categories need to be created, and (d) repeating the examination of data to determine if themes can be refined, combined, or placed into several categories. Data that fit into more than one category were duplicated and placed in all relevant categories. Interview transcripts, field notes, observation checklists, and documents were reviewed, coded by color and sorted, and then placed into categories that emerged from the review of all data collected. Three categories emerged from the review of data from the one-on-one interviews, the observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar School 101 and 102, and from the documents reviewed (i.e., operational and organizational structure of district leadership in the Academic Achievement Team process, a principal leadership practice, or as ongoing monitoring and analysis of student performance data of the Academic Achievement Team process).

Member checks were performed following the completion of all transcriptions to ensure accuracy of information. After member checks were completed, transcripts from the one-on-one interviews were coded by color, sorted, and then grouped as either an operational or organizational structure of district leadership in the Academic Achievement Team process, a principal leadership practice, or an ongoing process of monitoring and analyzing student performance data of the Academic Achievement Team. Transcribed data that fit into more than one category were copied and placed in all relevant categories.

After all interviews were coded, the observations of key behaviors, practices, and nuances that occurred during the Academic Achievement Team meetings were captured and coded based on the data collected and recorded on the Stellar County observation checklist and field notes. Data collected from the observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings was coded by color, sorted, and grouped as an operational or organizational structure of district

leadership in the Academic Achievement Team process, a principal leadership practice, or an ongoing process of monitoring and analyzing student performance data. Observation data that fit into more than one category were copied and placed in all relevant categories.

After all interview and observation data were coded, documents such as meeting minutes, agendas, action plans, student performance data, student achievement charts, and progress reports were analyzed, coded by color, sorted, and grouped as an operational or organizational structure of the Academic Achievement Team process, a principal leadership practice, or an ongoing process of monitoring and analyzing student performance data. Data contained within certain documents that fit into more than one category were copied and placed in all relevant categories.

As the analyses of data were reviewed and repeated, the data collected were grouped into one of three categories that emerged through the analysis and triangulation of interview data, observations, and document reviews. Large chart paper with the category's title centered at the top of each page was used to organize the analysis. Efforts to achieve validity, reliability, and credibility were accomplished through the implementation of the following procedures:

- Use of member checks. Interviews were professionally transcribed and reviewed by participants to ensure accuracy.
- Use of peer examinations. A peer debriefer who has done relevant research reviewed the findings. The peer debriefer provided feedback on the categories that emerged from the data analysis that were and were not aligned with the literature review findings.
- Use of triangulation. Data from multiple sources were reviewed, sorted, and grouped into categories. Thus, themes emerged through a cross verification of data from multiple sources (i.e., one-on-one interviews, observations, and document reviews).

Summary

Chapter III began with a statement of the purpose of the research and the specific research question used to guide the study. The rationale for selecting a qualitative design to conduct the cross case study analysis was then explained. A brief description of the schools sampled was presented. Next, the criteria for requiring select schools to implement an Academic

Achievement team were presented in a bulleted list. The data collection procedures including the conceptual framework for the interview protocols, observation checklists, and document reviews were given. In the final section, the data analysis processes and procedures were described.

CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

Introduction

The study was conducted to attempt to better understand the specific practices a particular district leadership employs to reduce declines in student achievement and maintain increased student achievement for at least two or more consecutive years at the elementary school level. A narrative format has been used to provide the reader a detailed and thick description of the operational and organizational structure of the district leadership practices of the Academic Achievement Team process, principal leadership practices, and the ongoing analysis and monitoring of student performance data procedures employed. Direct quotations have been used to provide the reader with the thoughts of the participants in context. Figures, graphs, and a model were developed to provide a conceptual framework of the findings.

Interviews

The one-on-one interviews with the directors of elementary education (i.e., D1, and D2) and the district liaison (i.e., L) revealed that the Transformational Reform Model (Kutash et al., 2010) was employed by the district leadership of Stellar County to turnaround the low academic performance at Stellar Schools 101 and 102. The Transformational Reform Model was defined as: replace the principal, take steps to increase teacher and school leader effectiveness, institute comprehensive instructional reforms, increase learning time, create community-oriented schools, and provide operational flexibility and sustained support (Kutash et al., 2010, pp. 4-5). The two directors of elementary education reported that district leadership replaced the acting principals at both Stellar Schools 101 and 102 in July of 2010 implementing the first step of the Transformational Reform Model. The one-on-one principal interviews (i.e., interviews with P101 and P102) revealed that the newly assigned principals at both Stellar School 101 and Stellar School 102 had only served at their respective schools for 20 months at the time the interviews were conducted.

Major Categories

As the analysis of data was reviewed and repeated, the data collected were grouped into one of three categories that emerged through the analysis and triangulation of interviews, observations, and document reviews: (a) operational and organizational structures of the Academic Achievement Team, (b) principal leadership practices, and (c) analysis and monitoring of student performance data. New themes that emerged from the ongoing analysis fit more appropriately within one of the three major categories as an operational and organizational structure, a principal practice, or an analysis/monitoring of ongoing student performance data and did not require the creation of additional categories. Themes that could fit in one or more of the categories were copied and placed in the appropriate category or categories.

Operational and organizational structures of district leadership practices of the Academic Achievement Team. The documents reviewed and the one-on-one interviews (i.e., interviews with P101, P102, D1, D2, L, and T) revealed that the Academic Achievement Team was the mechanism district leadership used to direct and monitor a range of accountability actions to address specific student and school academic needs to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction. The operational and organizational structures of district leadership practices identified were: (a) making student achievement the main purpose, (b) prescribing an Academic Achievement Team process that empowered teachers, principals, district leadership, and other professionals to think outside of the box for solutions to achieve student success, (c) scheduling time with the appropriate team and non-team members to enhance student achievement, (d) establishing district leadership's role as partner versus supervisor, and (e) asking the right questions to facilitate school-wide reflective practice through the use of data.

Making student achievement the main purpose. The principals from the two study schools, (i.e., P101 and P102), the directors of elementary education (i.e., D1 and D2), the district liaison (i.e., L), and the teacher interviewed (i.e., T) all articulated during their one-on-one interviews that Stellar County Public Schools utilized an Academic Achievement Team document that defined the Academic Achievement Team process and established the operational protocol of the team. A copy of the document can be found in Appendix E. The elementary directors (i.e., D1 and D2) made it known that the document was shared via email with all Academic Achievement Team principals across the entire district. The two principals interviewed (i.e., P101 and P102) confirmed that they received the document and evidence of the

document being shared was recorded in the Academic Achievement Team meeting minutes of both Stellar Schools 101 and 102. During the one-on-one interviews with the principals (i.e., P101 and P102) and elementary directors (i.e., D1 and D2), as well as being observed during the observation of the Academic Achievement Team meetings and noted in the documents reviewed, District leadership monitored meeting agendas, minutes, data that were reviewed, action plans, attendance, performance reports, and school improvement plans via School Space to ensure that all protocols and processes were followed. The district liaison (i.e., L) confirmed and further disclosed during her one-on-one interview how representatives from the district leadership team were assigned to each study school to ensure all functions of the Academic Achievement Team were performed with fidelity. When interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) were asked the purpose of the Academic Achievement Team, the common theme articulated was improvement of student performance. In addition, the first sentence of the Stellar County Academic Achievement Team protocol (see Appendix E) was to " . . . direct and monitor a range of accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction to address specific student and school academic needs" (Stellar County Public Schools Academic Achievement Teams Process, September 2011-2012). One elementary director voiced the purpose was: "To review all available data and practices to improve student achievement in schools not making annual benchmarks" (D1, p. 2, April 23, 2012).

Another elementary director reported:

> The AAT will provide the mechanism to improve student performance while achieving full accreditation and full AYP status for the school and school district…central office support and expertise are shared with building level expertise as a partnership to improve student academic performance (D2, p. 2, April 20, 2012).

The Principal at Stellar School 101 stated the purpose of the Academic Achievement team was "To review data and plan for successful Standards of Learning performance… and to assist teachers in implementing best practices and resources to achieve academic success" (P101, p. 2). A teacher who once served on the Academic Achievement Team said the purpose was to facilitate: "Professional educators coming together to effect positive outcomes on student achievement" (T, p. 2, April 20, 2012).

The district liaison commented:

> But I look at it as twofold. It is a good training mechanism to build good leadership within those teams… instructional leadership. The building administrator and the district liaison can model effective instructional leadership skills. That means how to work with a group of people; how to facilitate brainstorming sessions; how to look at data and use that data. Let's say we are third grade teachers. We meet and start talking about our third grade babies. Even from the point of there is one individual student in the third grade that has this, this and this. What are we going to do about that? So we go from a school view to a grade level view, and then hopefully down to the individual student. And then, we encourage the leadership team and the AAT to sort of develop… brainstorm… develop plans to meet all three of those needs: the school wide needs, the grade level needs, and the student needs (L, p. 3, April 9, 2012).

In reviewing the interview transcripts, documents, observation checklist, and field notes taken at the Academic Achievement Team meetings, it was clear that exploring ways to improve student performance through the analysis of student performance data was the goal, purpose, and objective of the Academic Achievement Team process. After the meeting agenda was approved, the principal at each of the study schools asked each grade level chair to share a review of data, instructional programs, remediation updates, and to discuss the effectiveness of resources both human and material impacting student achievement. There was a sense of urgency when any grade level appeared to be underperforming that sparked discussion among all stakeholders to investigate factors that could be contributing to a lack of student progress. Team members were observed discussing and addressing factors such as: student attendance, tardiness, grade level schedules, conflicts in remediation schedules, lack of parent support, test taking strategies, and the reading level of students. Academic Achievement Team members worked collaboratively to develop action plans and to assign roles to individuals or instructional teams that would address the possible deterrents to increasing student achievement. An example of shared responsibility and teamwork was observed at Stellar School 101 when a Kindergarten teacher expressed that she would be willing to review and teach test taking strategies to her former students who would be taking the Standards of Learning tests.

In summary, the primary purpose of the Academic Achievement Team, as evidenced by interview responses, observations, and document reviews, was to involve key stakeholders in a structured process to enhance and sustain student achievement. Utilizing teamwork and

collaboration to solve problems, allocating resources, and using data to drive decisions pertaining to pupil progress were activities consistent with the purpose of making student achievement the primary focus of the Academic Achievement Team.

Prescribing an Academic Achievement Team structure that empowered teachers, principals, district leadership, and other professionals to think outside of the box for solutions to achieve student success. During the one-on-one interviews with district leadership, both D1 and D2 referred to the 2011-2012 Stellar County Academic Achievement team process document listing the criteria for the implementation of an Academic Achievement Team as well as specific meeting requirements. Both D1 and D2 revealed that Academic Achievement Teams existed at all Stellar County Public Schools that:

- Received accreditation with warning because of not meeting current year benchmarks in a specific content area
- Received accreditation through three year averaging but not meeting annual benchmark
- Did not meet AYP with specific student groups in specific content areas
- Relied on a three year calculation or met AYP using safe harbor because of continuous growth in a content area but did not meet annual benchmarks

As outlined in the Academic Achievement Team process document found in Appendix E, select schools in Stellar County were assigned to one of three Academic Achievement Team tiers by district leadership. As reported by D1 and D2, three Academic Achievement Team tiers were created based on school performance criteria and are listed in the 2011-2012 Academic Achievement Team process document.

Tier I schools were classified as not being fully accredited, accredited with a three year average, or being a Title I school that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress for two consecutive years in the same content area. Title I schools that offered school choice or provided supplemental educational services to students who did not meet the benchmarks on the Standards of Learning Tests were also classified as Tier I schools.

Tier II and Tier III schools were classified as meeting full accreditation. However, Tier II schools were defined as being involved in school improvement or as an elementary school fully accredited for two consecutive years in the same subject. Any Title I elementary school on the watch list was also labeled as a Tier II school. Tier III schools were simply defined as schools

that made full accreditation, but did not make Adequate Yearly Progress. The criteria defining each tier for establishment of Academic Achievement Teams on the elementary school level is listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Criteria for Academic Achievement Team Schools on the Elementary Level

Level of Tier	Elementary Criteria for Academic Achievement Team Tiers
Tier I	Schools not fully accredited, schools accredited with a three-year average (or just making the target), and Title I schools that did not make AYP for two consecutive years in the same content area and in choice or supplemental educational services.
Tier II	Schools fully accredited that made AYP but are still involved in school improvement, or elementary schools fully accredited for consecutive years in the same content area or on the Title I watch list.
Tier III	Schools that made full accreditation and did not make AYP.

Stellar Schools 101 and 102 were Title I elementary schools in choice. Schools in choice were Title I elementary schools that did not make Adequate Yearly Progress in the same content area for two consecutive years. The observation of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both Stellar Schools 101 and 102 and interviews with the principals (i.e., P101 and P102) confirmed that Stellar Schools 101 and 102 were both Tier I schools. Being a Tier I school meant that Stellar Schools 101 and 102 had to meet no less than two times a month for two hours at each meeting. According to the 2011-2012 Academic Achievement Team protocol document, "Academic Achievement Team meetings last no more than two hours twice per month for Tier I schools. If agenda items cannot be completed, a follow up meeting is scheduled within five business days to complete the agenda and begin implementation of the strategies identified" (Stellar County Academic Achievement Team Process, 2011-2012, p. 3). The review of meeting agendas and minutes from Stellar Schools 101 and 102 confirmed that both Stellar School 101 and 102 met no less than twice a month for two hours from September to May during the 2010-2011 school year.

The operational structure of the Academic Achievement Team was detailed through interviews with D1 and D2, observed during the Academic Achievement Team meetings at

Stellar Schools 101 and 102, and specified as listed in the Stellar County Academic Achievement Team process document (2011-2012). A review of these data revealed the following five key functions of the Academic Achievement Team's operational structure:

- Review and report on implementation of action plans from past meetings
- Report on data collected to determine the success of the action plans
- Brainstorm new initiatives to solve identified areas of low pupil performance found in the data
- Report on the progress of remediation programs
- Review the action plans to be implemented over the next week

The interviewees were asked the following questions in reference to the operational structure of the Academic Achievement Team meetings and members.

Interview question: How does the Academic Achievement Team work?

Teacher reported:

> Well, we come together and discuss… look at student data, and then we decide which action items need to be set in motion. This is coming from grade levels talking about things that are working or concerns that they may have- successes and things that we need to work on. Stakeholders such as curriculum specialists are there to provide helpful assistance in a number of ways-whether they are going to provide a framework for lesson planning or whether they are going to be offering specialty assistance like coming in and doing lessons where they feel like they may need to, helping the teachers to understand the data a little better and how to look at it and where to go from there… Then we will set those action items up to be reported on at the next AAT- to see if they were effective or if things are moving forward the way that they need to be. Then, of course, at the round table, everyone has a chance to reflect and share and help each other out (T, p. 2, April 20, 2012).

One principal explained, "There is an agenda sent out in advance, minutes are taken during the meeting and sent out following the meeting. Everyone participates and adds to the meeting" (P101, p. 2).

Another principal shared:

> Because we were a school in its second year of not making AYP last year, we had a district representative from Research and Planning in addition to the Elementary Director. What we would do is sit down and go over our bi-weekly data and address any academic concerns that were going on within the school. The teachers… It was mostly teacher focused. We would talk about different areas where students were having difficulty. It also gave our teachers the opportunity to see what was going on in other classrooms that were more successful, giving them the opportunity to take some of those resources or strategies and utilize them within their classroom (P102, p. 2).

One director stated, "Teams meet bi-weekly or monthly depending on their status, using a set agenda. The decisions made at Academic Achievement Team meetings are shared by the group and are binding to the school. Minutes are kept and reviewed" (D1, p. 2, April 23, 2012).

Another director stated:

> Tier I schools will meet no less than twice a month. AAT meetings should last no more than two hours. Schools in Tier II and III will meet no less than once a month, and more often as needed to analyze data and provide instructional support in a timely manner (D2, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

In summary, one-on-one interviews with D1, D2, P1, P2, and T revealed the Academic Achievement Team operational structure required teachers, administrators, district level persons, and content specialist to collaborate in analyzing and disaggregating student performance data to develop action plans to enhance quality instruction and student achievement. It was observed during the Academic Achievement team meeting that once data were analyzed, problem areas were identified, action plans were formed to address poor student performance, and resources were allocated to support intervention efforts. A review of the Academic Achievement Team minutes indicated that the academic Achievement Team would reconvene every two weeks to assess the effectiveness of the action plans implemented and to evaluate student achievement improvement efforts. Observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings confirmed that if action plans were effective in one grade level or classroom, those plans were implemented in other areas within the school, if not; they were revised or terminated and new action plans were developed.

Interview question: How does the Academic Achievement Team provide a formal structure in which the central office support and that of the district liaison coach are shared with the building principal and teachers?

The teacher interviewed explained:

The formal structure would be in the way that we have the same agenda, pretty much every time. We usually have the same Central Office support personnel so that they are familiar with where we are coming from. As far as the formal structure, the meetings take the same shape and everyone involved knows what to expect so that it is most effective. Things come down the pike from the Central Office so that the principal will know what to expect and then disseminate that down to the teachers so that everyone is ready and prepared to come to the meetings (T, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

The district liaison further noted:

It is required that every division support team must assign a member from that team to a school that is in school improvement. And luckily for Stellar County, that person is the district liaison, and comes back to that team and reports the strengths, the needs, and what can we do to help (L, p. 4, April 9, 2012).

One director stated:

Central office staff is assigned to each school and these individuals attend all meetings. There is a set agenda for all teams, the Stellar County Research and Planning Department provides established data structures in conjunction with site specific data. During meetings, there is open dialogue to share ideas and plan for resources needed (D2, p. 2, April 20, 2012).

Another director read verbatim from the Academic Achievement team process document and shared:

The AAT will agree upon the decision making process (consider consensus of the majority of the members attending the meeting). At the beginning of each meeting, the AAT will approve meeting agendas developed by the principal. The principal will consider agenda items from the primary central office representative member of the committee with input from any committee members, teachers, and the director. AAT

> members will have an opportunity to ask questions regarding minutes from the prior meeting. Each meeting will include a review of data, instructional program and remediation updates, and a discussion of the effectiveness of resources. Discussion should include data and updates for courses, classes/sections, and students. Data to be reviewed at each meeting. The primary central office representative will be responsible for ensuring appropriate data are being analyzed, ensuring resource/support needs are identified and articulated to appropriate individuals in central office, ensuring that the work of the committee is communicated to instructional directors and the division improvement team, ensuring that the work of the committee is completed as described by the committee and according to the school improvement plan (D2, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

When asked if the items listed above really occurred at the meetings, the director's response was, "At the meetings I attend" (D2, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

The organizational structure of the Academic Achievement Team was established by the district leadership of Stellar County and outlined in the 2011-2012 Stellar County Academic Achievement team process document. The document lists a prescribed protocol and sample of the expected agenda format, minute format, meeting requirements, and data that should be reviewed monthly at each meeting. It was observed during the Academic Achievement Team meeting that a central office representative was assigned to each Academic Achievement Team to ensure the work of the team was completed as described by the mandates of district leadership and in accordance with the school improvement plan submitted to the State Department of Education. A copy of the Academic Achievement team process document can be found in Appendix E.

Meeting organization tasks within the Academic Achievement Team structure. Interview data from P101, P102, D1, and D2 revealed that District leadership designed a process on how agendas and minutes were to be reported, established meeting norms for principals to follow, and mandated an agreed upon decision making process that required team consensus. The agenda template required the school name and meeting date to be recorded for each meeting. The purpose of the agenda reported by D1 and D2 was to give an itemized description of key duties, data, and reports that either needed to be reviewed, evaluated, and/or discussed at the upcoming Academic Achievement team meeting. The team minute template required several different items to be captured.

For example, the team minute template required the Academic Achievement team members and guests to be listed along with the school name and meeting date. D1 and D2 explained that an itemized description of action plans related to the ongoing monitoring of student data was the main purpose of the Academic Achievement team minutes. Monitoring of student data listed on the minute template included: data review, plans/initiatives review, revision to or new plans needed, indicators to be monitored to determine plan effectiveness, and student intervention and remediation effectiveness. The meeting minutes also required individuals responsible for assigned tasks and individuals responsible for reporting at the next meeting to be listed. Table 5 includes a sample Academic Achievement Team Agenda and Table 6 includes a sample Academic Achievement Team minute template.

Table 5

Example of Academic Achievement Team Academic Achievement Team Agenda 2011-2012

School Name:	Meeting Date:

Agenda:

Item	Description
I.	Review/approval of minutes from previous meeting.
II.	Review progress of action plans from previous meeting.
III.	Review new student data to determine if plans and initiatives are working; discuss new plans and initiatives that must be undertaken or adjustments to current plans based on data review. Review student intervention and remediation efforts and their effectiveness on student performance based upon data.
IV.	Review and assign action items from this meeting to the individual responsible to report at the next meeting.
V.	Review additional items captured today that may impact instruction.
VI.	Other agenda items.

Specific data reports to be reviewed:

Table 6

Example of Academic Achievement Team Minutes 2011-2012

School Name:	Meeting Date:

Academic Achievement Team Members and Guests Present:

Minutes:

Item	Description
I.	Describe the progress of action plans from previous meetings.
II.	Student data: Data reviewed: Plans/initiatives reviewed: Revisions to or new plans needed: Student intervention/remediation effectiveness:
III.	Action items from this meeting assigned to the individual responsible to report at the next meeting.
IV.	Review additional items captured today that may impact instruction.
V.	Other items addressed.

When interviewees (i.e., L, D1, and T) were asked, "Does the Academic Achievement Team provide an organizational structure in which the central office support and that of the district liaison are shared with the building principal and teachers?"

The district liaison commented:

> It is required that every division support team must assign a member from that team to a school that is in school improvement. And luckily for Stellar County, that person is the district liaison, and comes back to that team and reports the strengths, the needs, and what can we do to help (L, p. 4, April 9, 2012).

One elementary director explained:

> Central office staff is assigned to each school and these individuals attend all meetings. There is a set agenda for all teams, Research & Planning provides established data structures in conjunction with site specific data. During meetings, there is open dialogue to share ideas and plan for resources needed (D1, p. 2, April 20, 2012).

The teacher interviewed added:

> I think… the formal structure would be in the way that we have the same agenda, pretty much every time. We usually have the same Central Office support personnel so that they are familiar with where we are coming from. As far as the formal structure, the meetings take the same shape and everyone involved knows what to expect so that it is most effective. Things come down the pike from the Central Office so that the principal will know what to expect and then disseminate that down to the teachers so that everyone is ready and prepared to come to the meetings (T, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

However, using the mandated Academic Achievement Team agenda with fidelity may not have a direct effect on the effectiveness of the Academic Achievement Team meeting in enhancing student achievement. It was observed during the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 and through the one-on-one interviews with T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2 that both principals (i.e., P101 and P102) followed a proposed agenda. The observations and review of the meeting minutes confirmed that Stellar School 101 used the agenda template with fidelity and while Stellar School 102 did not. The review of Stellar School 102's agenda items included: reviewing Adequate Yearly Progress cut scores, reviewing semester pass rates in third, fourth, and fifth grade, discussing results of recommendations from the reading and math specialists, and evaluating additional strategies, interventions, and remediation ideas. The agenda items mandated by district leadership in the Stellar County Academic Achievement Team process document that were not observed in Stellar School 102's agenda included: a review/approval of minutes from previous meetings, a review of progress of action plans from previous meetings, a review of assigned action items from the current meeting, and a review of additional items captured from the current meeting. However, both schools' data revealed ongoing improvement in student performance reported by teacher leaders at both Stellar School 101 and 102 during the observed February Academic Achievement Team meetings. The district liaison (i.e., L) expressed in the one-on-one interview that both Stellar School 101 and

102 achieved enhanced student achievement from the first quarter to the end of the second quarter based on the progress recorded on the student performance charts displayed in each classroom in grades 3, 4, and 5.

The district liaison (i.e., L) explained that Stellar School 101 was required by the Virginia Department of Education to select practices, referred to as indicators, to enhance and sustain improvement in student performance and quality instruction. The review of meeting agendas and minutes revealed that Item III in the proposed agenda for Stellar School 101 listed the following indicators to be incorporated into the school's improvement plan:

- VA08 Staff members plan ways to involve students in assessing their own progress.
- VB02 Staff members check students' understanding through purposeful questioning (such as formulating higher order questions).
- VC05 Staff members plan ways to increase and support the student's role in their learning-metacognition, self-regulation, peer feedback, students as instructional resources for one another.

In summary, both Stellar Schools 101 and 102 had a set agenda for Academic Achievement Team meetings as seen in the document review and observed during the observation of the Academic Achievement Team meetings. In spite of Stellar School 102 not following the agenda protocol with fidelity, observations revealed both schools reviewed student performance data, evaluated ongoing instructional programs to address quality instruction and student achievement, and shared action plans from all stakeholders on the team. In addition, it was observed and confirmed by P101 and P102 that at the beginning of each Academic Achievement Team meeting, the principal would consider agenda items from the primary central office representative member of the team with input from any team members, teachers, and/or the elementary director. Approval of the minutes was observed during the observations of the Academic Achievement Team meeting at Stellar School 101, but not at Stellar School 102. Both meetings began with an introduction of the members present. Interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) at both schools expressed the importance of having the appropriate members at the meetings.

Scheduling time with the appropriate team and non-team members. The interviews (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2), observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings, and the document reviews disclosed that the principals at both Stellar Schools 101 and 102

selected team members and established meeting times as required in the 2011-2012 Stellar County Academic Achievement Team process document. School teams generally consisted of the principal, assistant principal, resource teacher, test coordinator, all departmental/grade chairs (including special education), content coaches/remediation coordinators, Title I staff (where applicable), central office representative(s), and, if mandated, a district liaison appointed by the State Department of Education. The composition of the teams was listed in the meeting minutes at both schools.

The district liaison reported that the Academic Achievement Team members were selected as follows in Stellar County Public Schools:

> What was done with them was… and in most cases, they look at personalities. There is no need in sending someone along that has the knowledge but will turn off that staff- because they will not accept any of their suggestions and nothing will be accomplished. That is the first thing. Second of all, their knowledge level… and understanding of that school and school demographics. That is, I wish…in all cases, but it doesn't always work that way. In some divisions, district leadership just select persons who are willing to go or are selected by random to be honest with you. I've told you basically what an AAT should be composed of- representatives of each grade level, representative subject area, subject areas depending where the need for school improvement me be coming from. I think a smart administrator would have both there, to be a preventative to keep the other subject area from getting into school improvement- whichever it might be (L, p. 3, April 9, 2012).

The teacher interviewed commented:

> Our AAT has Grade level representatives- the grade level chairs for each grade level. All curriculum specialists, Title I teachers, guidance counselor, the entire admin team. We have Central Office representatives and we have the curriculum specialists that have our school (T, p. 2, April 20, 2012).

In sum, the Academic Achievement Team process document outlined who was to serve on the Academic Achievement Team. However the building principal had the duty of assigning members and ensuring that the proper participants were at the table twice per month to provide the input needed. P101 and P102 made known during their interviews that the Academic

Achievement Team members had a duty to report all essential information and action plans to the appropriate stakeholders to ensure that the entire school team worked collaboratively to produce positive change in pupil progress. Observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both schools revealed that scheduling time with non-team members to share ideas, reflections, next steps, and action plans that emerged during team meetings was a key expectation of district leadership. P101 and P102 reported that it was their responsibility to ensure members and non-members communicated during grade level meetings, team meetings, via email, lunch conversations, and/or at faculty meetings. Finding time for team members to discuss key agenda items and action step accountability with non-team members was explored through the following questions.

Interview question. Does the district leadership set aside time or have a way for non-Academic Achievement Team members to review, analyze, and discuss data with Academic Achievement Team members in order to make decisions involving quality instruction and student learning?

The district liaison explained:

> Yes. The state has a recommended (or at least I had, and hope that divisions liaisons have) a suggested agenda…What happens is we have a suggested agenda template. It should force the representatives from the school level, when they go back and have an instructional team member meeting… that is what they should be discussing. It is still left up to the administrator, but that is what we recommend that the administrator collects the minutes from the instructional team meetings/grade level meetings, and we also recommend that they attend those to facilitate- especially if the team leader is new, to ensure that they talk about the data and they share the data and conversation from the AAT meeting. Yes, everyone (even to the janitor if necessary) should know everything about school achievement. That is why we suggest putting charts up to inform people from the community and visitors to the building to see progress. Everyone can see the progress of the third graders…What are the kindergartners doing? At the first benchmark, they were at the 50%. At the second, they were at the 60%, so they are making so gains. So it sort of says “look what we’ve done” or “we’ve needed to work on this because we have dropped.” The students can walk by and see what they have

> accomplished. And also it says to the community and students and staff what is important in this building. Student achievement is important in this building (L, p. 10, April 9, 2012).

> The teacher interviewed commented:
> Yes…we do as a team sit down and look at the data….our Title I reading and math teachers- we have time to sit down and work through the data and talk with them, especially about individual children. They go out of their way to look at the data and brainstorm and strategize with us. The implementation is also monitored as far as things that we are doing, like the class performance chart (CPC). It is a chart that we keep. People will come by and take a look at- it is in every classroom. We also share it quite openly with the students, because they are excited to see if they got a green dot on last week's bi-weekly assessment. That is one way it is measured. We also occasionally turn in a Student Learning Report, which we send bi-weekly home. It is not only a student progress report, but also a notation of the SOLs that were taught and how your student did on mastering them. So, the level of parent communication is just that much higher- not having to wait for progress reports or report cards. We also are responsible for turning in parent count of contacts. All of these things are monitored, with the grade level chair speaking about them at the AAT (T, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

The teacher also added, "We usually meet twice a month formally, but we basically meet every day…we eat lunch together… we all look out for each other, communicating by email in between…we are always communicating" (T, p. 3, April 20, 2012). Based on the teacher's interview responses (i.e., T), teachers appeared to be in constant communication formally and informally whenever time allowed. The teacher and both principals (T, P101, and P102) interviewed disclosed that the principal at Stellar School 101 and 102 attended grade level meetings monthly. P101 reported, "Non- Academic Achievement Team members review, analyze, and discuss data with Academic Achievement Team members in grade level meetings, and other team meetings, administrative team, resource team, etc." (P101, p. 5, April 21, 2012). D1 added, "There are scheduled specialist and coach meetings to discuss data and plans for improvement, updates and expectations are outlined and follow up times established with grade level teams as needed or requested" (D1, p. 5, April 23, 2012). Another director commented that

time for non- Academic Achievement Team members to review, analyze, and discuss data with Academic Achievement Team members in order to make decisions involving quality instruction and student learning was facilitated by the principal (D2, p. 5, April 20, 2012).

The principal at Stellar School 101 divulged, "All information from the Academic Achievement Team meetings are shared during grade level meetings" (P101, p. 5, April 21, 2012). The teacher shared, "The grade level chairs disseminated information to the team during our team meetings" (T, p. 7, April 20, 2012). The teacher was asked two additional questions to gather a more detailed response to the quality of the information shared from the Academic Achievement Team meeting.

Interview question. Do you think the information you receive from your grade level chair is detailed and effective enough that you feel like you know what was discussed at the meeting?

The teacher interviewed commented:

> I think that I am just a little hungrier for details than some. I don't know a lot of what happens at AAT this year. Things are pretty good, so you don't hear as much when there aren't as many issues. I am just basically getting from AAT what I need to provide. Being on the team previously, I feel like I know what is going on in there. I feel like it is easier to understand and know what needs to be done because I have been in there (T, p. 8, April 20, 2012).

Interview question. So then, once these central office folks come in to check progress, what happens at the next Academic Achievement Team meeting? Do they speak to the group? What happens next?

The teacher interviewed reported:

> If there are some areas where they (the CO staff) felt like things need to be stepped up a little bit, they would probably have that conversation with the principal before the AAT meeting. We hear a lot of positives at the meeting, like I was in this room and I saw these great things happening… stuff like that. There is not as much "I didn't see this or that." I have heard expectations of what we need to buy into based on what would you do differently conversation. There is honest conversation going on but not "checking up on people (T, p. 8, April 20, 2012).

The building principals (i.e., P101 and P102) were directed by the district liaison (i.e., L) to use the Department of Education's template for grade level meetings. The district liaison (i.e., L) claimed that the use of the grade level meeting template would force teachers to analyze student performance data by Standards of Learning strand while requiring teachers to create a plan of action to increase student performance. The teacher interviewed confirmed that the principal facilitated the use of the template at grade level meetings. The teacher further explained that it was common for the principal, Title I math and reading teacher, content specialists, and curriculum specialists to attend select grade level meetings to assist in providing instructional resources, staff development, and/or to model best practice for teachers where needed. The teacher noted that student progress reports were discussed by content, notes on student progress were recorded, and grows/glows were noted to share at the next Academic Achievement Team meeting. The directors interviewed (i.e., D1 and D2) expressed that the quality and effectiveness of the grade level meetings depended on the expectations set by the building principal. D1 and D2 both stated that it was the principal's job to facilitate the monthly review, analysis, and discussion related to quality instruction and student achievement data. The principals (P101 and P102) commented that the content coaches and curriculum specialist join grade level meetings to discuss student data to assist the team in suggestions that may enhance student achievement. P101 and P102 further added that the specialists are frequently amazed at the rate of student growth through the targeted instruction of the teachers at Stellar Schools 101 and 102.

Interview question. How does district leadership and/or designees from central office or other stakeholders check to see if implementation and next steps from the Academic Achievement Team meeting are happening in the classroom and in all areas of the building?

D1 explained that implementation of action plans decided upon during the Academic Achievement Team meetings are check through frequent walkthroughs done by district representatives and principals. The D1 and D2 divulged that stake-holder survey data and student performance data are reviewed by content specialist and coaches during site visits. Content specialist and coaches perform their own walkthroughs and provide feedback to the building principal on progress related to implementation and next steps that were to be

implemented from the previous Academic Achievement Team meeting. (D1, p. 5, April 23, 2012). D2 explained that meetings are held with the principal following site visits to check for implementation of action steps from the Academic Achievement Team meeting (D2, p. 5, April 20, 2012). P1 shared, "I do walkthroughs constantly formal and informal" (P101, 5, April 21, 2012). P2 commented, "I do walkthroughs and make sure I attend all grade level meetings" (P102, p. 2, April 2, 2012). The teacher added, "Everyone is always reviewing our data, visiting our classrooms, and talking to us" (T, p. 8, April 20, 2012).

The teacher interviewed further detailed:

> I think that last year there was a time set because it was a big shift after our first year of school improvement. We did have Central Office representatives in and out all of the time. We did have people coming in to see if our CPC charts were up to date. We had a lot more "checking up." This year, it is not at the same level. Everyone got so used to keeping those things up to date and doing what we need to do that now there is more peer pressure- more of an expectation that those things get done. The AAT member comes to the team ready to speak to those things happening at our grade level at length, and to everyone's satisfaction (T, p. 9, April 20, 2012).

It was observed during the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 that district leadership expected Academic Achievement Team members to review, analyze, and discuss data and action plans with non-Academic Achievement Team members in order to make decisions involving quality instruction and student learning. The principals (i.e., P101 and 102) ensured sharing between Academic and Non-Academic Achievement Team members by attending selected grade level team meetings to assist in reviewing, analyzing, and discussing data and action plans.

According to D1, "Having the right person assigned to the right Academic Achievement Team is extremely important for efficiency and effectiveness, also to enhance trust and communication" (D1, p. 1, April 23, 2012). The interactions between directors and principals prior to and following the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 were observed. Observations revealed that the director assigned to the principal acted as an advisor prior to and following the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both Stellar Schools 101 and 102. Directors were observed pointed out team members that appeared to be disengaged during the meeting to the principal. Directors would advise the principal on what

teacher leaders to follow up with, whether or not the appropriate information was shared, when to evaluated the progress of actions steps, and what grade levels or individual teachers needed assistance based on the data that was shared during the meeting. D1 and D2 disclosed during the one-on-one interviews that district leadership serving in an evaluative role held the building principal responsible for adhering to the Academic Achievement Team process.

Establishing district leadership's role as partner versus supervisor. The 2011-2012 Academic Achievement Team process protocol document (see appendix E) listed specific duties for district leaders on the elementary level. The primary duties included:

- Ensuring appropriate data are being analyzed
- Ensuring resource/support needs are identified and articulated to appropriate individuals in central office
- Ensuring that the work of the committee is communicated to instructional directors and the division improvement team
- Ensuring that the work of the committee is completed as described by the committee and according to the school improvement plan (state or local).

In addition, both D1 and D2 shared that the Academic Achievement Team's organizational structure allowed each director the opportunity to provide coaching, mentoring, constructive criticism, and encouragement to the principals.

Ensuring appropriate data are being analyzed. D1 and D2 articulated during the interviews that specific data needed to be analyzed throughout the instructional year. To ensure the appropriate data were analyzed, instructional leaders in Stellar County created a guideline of data topics to be discussed at the bi-monthly monthly at the Academic Achievement Team meetings. The document identified the data topics recommended for discussion for each month from September to May as mandated in the Stellar County Academic Achievement Team process document (2011-2012). The data listed for review in September included student performance data results from the spring of the previous year as well as the continuous school improvement plan from the previous school year (See Table 5 for specific data reports). According to the interviewees (i.e., L, T, D1, D2, P101 and P102), the purpose of recommending specific data to be reviewed starting in September was to evaluate the success of the continuous school improvement plan based on student performance, to analyze student performance data in order to set develop staff develop for teacher to enhance instruction, to begin identifying students

in need of remediation/enrichment, and to develop the individual school's mission and vision to meet the needs of all stakeholders for the current year. Data topics required for review during the months of October, November, and December mainly encompassed all analyses of student results from mandated assessments taken in the fall. As indicated by interviewees (i.e., D1, D2, P101, P102, and T), the fall data allowed school teams to assess where students were at that moment during the school year compared to their end of the year results. Observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both schools captured teacher teams using the fall data to develop intervention and enrichment schedules and groups to meet the specific needs of each student. Data topics for discussion during the months of January, February, and March mainly focused on reviewing benchmark assessment results, attendance data, and student discipline data. These analyses gave both schools quantifiable information to evaluate remediation/enrichment programs, school-wide discipline programs, and truancy procedures. The benefits of the mid-year assessments and data reports relayed by interviewees (i.e., T, L, D1, D2, P101, P102) was that they provided Academic Achievement Team members the data needed to formulate, revise, enhance, or discontinue action plans implemented to improve student achievement. Data topics for discussion in April and May were strictly used to prepared students for the end of year Standards of Learning tests according to D1 and D2. The Academic Achievement Teams at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 were observed analyzing assessment results of each student by the Standard of Learning objective to provide as much strategic intervention as possible to aid all students in passing the mandatory Standards of Learning tests. Table 7 is an example of the document outlining data topics mandated by district leadership for principals to discuss at the bi-monthly Academic Achievement Team meetings.

Table 7

Example of Data to be Reviewed at Academic Achievement Team Meetings

Month	Data Topics for Discussion
September Status:	Spring Standards of Learning and Stellar Achievement Test Reports (i.e., bank account, Adequate Yearly Progress Summary, 34 reports) Spring Cogat Results (Elementary) Spring Measures of Academic Performance Results by Fall Location Continuous School Improvement Plan (Due October 3)
October Status:	Fall Measures of Academic Performance Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening Results (Elementary) 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
November Status:	Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) Students At-Risk List
December	4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
January Status:	Measures of Academic Performance Results Attendance Data Student Discipline Data
February *Observed/Not Observed Comments*	Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) PALS Results (Elementary) Continuous School Improvement Plan Update (Due February 17)
March *Observed/Not Observed Comments*	Access for ELL Results Student Discipline Data 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
April	Stellar Achievement Tests and Standards of Learning Writing Prompt Results Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) Students At-Risk List (High)
May	Measures of Academic Performance Results Student Discipline Data Standards of Learning simulation and/or 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)

* Stellar Achievement Test Reports (This is a pseudonym.)

The document review and interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) revealed that each month required a slightly different Academic Achievement Team focus based on data available on the current cohort of students at different points within the school year. For example, the district liaison expressed during the one-on-one interview that the role of the district leader changed as the school year unfolded based on what data were available to be analyzed to drive decisions related to quality instruction and student achievement.

The district liaison reported:

> First nine weeks, the administrator, at the beginning, needs to be determining his best teachers to be on the team. That is someone who can be confidential, have the confidentiality, and who shows potential for being a good leader. That is a person who is pretty good at instruction. Sometimes it behooves a principal to put an adversary there, because I am less to complain about something if I am part of the making of it. After that, our roles should be explained to us about our responsibilities. Number one, let it be known perfectly that decisions will be made by "US," not be me and then bring it to you. There are some decisions you will not have anything to do with. These are mine, not yours- make that perfectly clear. I may come talk to you about them after they have been made, but overall you are going to help me run the school. You are going to help me implement, monitor and evaluate the whole process that is going on in the school. That means you will go back to your cohort, your co-workers, and discuss what the problems are and what we are going to about them. I will have to come back to this level and find out what you need and what you have requested, and get it to you. That could be professional development, additional person, additional materials, staff training for one or all of you- depending on what the needs are. The other thing is to pick a person that the staff will feel comfortable working with. That is all a part of the leadership team (L, p. 13, April 9, 2012).

The teacher reported that she has learned from her principal and district leadership to use the spring data from the prior school year to, "Quickly identify potential struggles and identify students who may need support right away, where it would be such a loss of time to wait for the first benchmark or PALS testing" (T, p. 10, April 20, 2012). D1 reported that the first nine weeks involved, "Establishing the team, determining meeting dates, completing needs assessments and

school improvement plan, reviewing baseline screening data, developing intervention plans, and communicating a strong focus on writing" (D1, p. 7, April 23, 2012).

The D2 commented:

Summary of analysis of test data (SOL, HAT, PALS, NWEA) and survey results (a copy of 10 highest/lowest if I have not seen them), CSIP focus, (these will be reviewed in detail at a later time), master schedule, the PGEP/observation schedule for the school and any staff focus (a copy of summary for me) retention lists, intervention plans, financial audit info, math plan, and writing plans" (D2, 8, April 20, 2012).

The district liaison commented:

Second Semester time, you should be looking at your benchmarks, be it PALS, HATS, and your 3, 4, and 5 benchmarks…data. And the good thing about that with the AAT is, because there is a representative from each grade level, they can say, "here is something else we have figured out. Not only are the fifth graders not doing well in reading, but we figured out for Suzy (one of our fifth grade teachers), she doesn't get to teach reading until after lunch. It takes her about 15 minutes to call them down before she can teach, so she is losing instructional time. What are we going to do about that?" That is when the instructional team with the administrator there try to brain storm about how to deal with it- whether it be giving her more time at the end, assisting Suzy by moving reading to another time of day, or assisting Suzy and making sure that some disciplinary action can be taken to make clear to the students that they are not meeting expectations for transitioning from lunch back into the classroom. It is ridiculous. So it could be useful for a guidance counselor or administrator to step in and have a conversation with the grade level. Then from then on, the same kind of thing each semester needs to go on. The closer you get to the third and fourth quarters, now it is time for you to really key in and start focusing on what kind of intervention groups you have. Hopefully though, intervention groups were starting to be developed from day one, after you got the data in determining who is going where. Who is going to Title I or ELL or SPED? Are they going to SES. Also during this whole process, SES isn't doing as well as Title I… we better move Tommy out of there and move him into Title I. We will probably have to talk to his Mom because he selected this SES. She may want to look at another SES, you know, because we find that Tommy doesn't like that teacher and feels that teacher is very

negative to him and things just aren't working. Or, that entire SES group… lets say it is the Joyner group… and that group is not doing well. We need to give Gail a call and say, you know what? All the kids in this group are not doing well. What can we do about it? Can we call the parents? She may say, no you can't do that. But at least she is aware, so next year… the Joyner group may be taken out. So there is a lot, it is not just within the classroom that you are looking at. You are looking at SPED, and within SPED they should be looking at the IEPs. You know, here in the fifth grade, a couple of those kids that are causing problems are ours. Here is what we are doing about them. One of the things I found happens at the school is. Initially, they were just getting reports from the grade level teachers. I looked at her and I said, "the Title I folks are here, but they are just talking in general. Don't they have students? Why aren't they giving reports and saying I serve 20 students at third grade. Ten are in intensive and ten are in above. Why? What are you going to do about it?" Because they are responsible too. And so what came about that, one of the Title I teachers that I know personally came up to me and said, "well they are just from broken homes and blah blah blah." And I said, WHOA! That sounds good and you are absolutely right, but there are so many schools now that research has proven that it doesn't matter. The state is not interested in that excuse, nor is the nation. So lets go back and figure specifically what is going on with the test results. So they look back and say, "oh, yes it is vocabulary." Vocabulary is kind of broad. What in vocabulary? How many of your ten students didn't make it in vocabulary? "Oh, all of them." What part of vocabulary did they need? I know, the next time they came, I had ten… you see what I am saying? And here is what we are going to do about it. We are going to offer this, this and this. Also, who came in for reading and/or math? We had a ladies club, that met with guidance, and a counselor worked with them on reading and math and their parents as it relates to this need. There goes the whole team effect- and it makes a big difference (L, pp.14-15, April 9, 2012).

Teacher described:

The second nine weeks look to see which students have been added on to the active lists for Title I services. Looking at what implementations will be put into place for remediation since you have a pretty good idea of who your target students are. Then

> making sure that everybody is headed in the right direction- looking at the first set of benchmark tests (T, p. 11, April 20, 2012).

D1 explained how, "The second nine weeks the Academic Achievement Team reviewed progress of intervention and all benchmarking results to establish student and staff growth targets, review attendance, discipline, and grade comparisons plus a final push for writing focus" (D1, p. 7, April 23, 2012).

Teacher reported:

> By the third nine weeks you are relieved that the writing tests are over, and looking to strategize and see how your 45 day plan will be implemented. Making sure that everyone is still staying strong and carrying out the action items planned for the year (T, p.13, April 20, 2012).

D1 elaborated, "The third nine weeks involves a review progress of intervention and benchmark results for additional targeted intervention and resources, attendance and discipline data, and motivational plans" (D1, p. 7, April 23, 2012).

Teacher commented:

> The fourth nine weeks you are making decisions about the following year, and what you want to change. Setting up plans to start the year with- some things as simple as grade levels picking a month to do a PTA program or parent workshop, just setting those things up early to make them more successful the following year (T, p. 11, April 20, 2012).

In summary, the one-on-one interviews with interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2), observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both schools, and review of documents indicated that the format and protocol for the Academic Achievement Team from August to June used various assessment indictors, including but not limited to, student performance, remediation, and benchmark data to develop school, grade level, and specific classroom plans to improve individual student performance. The interviews with T and L revealed that the instructional needs of individual students were identified as early as September and were based on the Standards of Learning data from the prior school year by content and skill level in order to develop individualized remediation plans. As indicated in the document review and shared during the one-on-one interviews with T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2, classroom

teachers were responsible for monitoring progress and the effectiveness of remediation programs for each student. The review of minutes and observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings indicated that data analysis at both schools was ongoing so that programmatic and individual instructional adjustments could be made as needed.

Ensuring resource/support needs are identified and articulated to appropriate individuals in central office. District leadership monitored school-level student learning data constantly as evident in meeting minutes and observed during the Academic Achievement Team observations. P101 and P102 reported having to send their benchmark data to central office every nine weeks and interviews (with T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) indicated that was just one way district leadership monitored student data to evaluate school performance. The district liaison (i.e., L) shared during the on-on-one interview that if anyone on the district leadership team had any questions a phone call or visit would be made to the principal. The principals at both schools shared during their interviews that a common concern was that once their schools began to show significant growth in student performance, monetary, material, and human resources were redistributed to other schools or taken away. The principal at Stellar School 102 expressed the importance of maintaining the same level of resources in order to have continued growth in sustained student progress. She continued to explain that, "teacher leaders acquired the capacity to provide quality instruction through a detailed knowledge of how to analyze data, but having to do more with less support and resources tended to burn staff out." (P102, p. 6, April 22, 2012).

The principal also said:

> In coming into a situation where the school was not making Adequate Yearly Progress, and having a lot of the resources, the monetary resources needed, and then you have all of those resources and you meet the goals that the Central Office wanted you to meet… In order to sustain that same level of expectation… I understand the "yes, you made it," and the data reflects that you made it. But the same resources are needed to continue to make it and maintain it. I feel those resources shouldn't be taken away. Especially monetary resources when it comes to tutorial programs (P102, pp.6-7, April 22, 2012).

In sum, it was observed during the Academic Achievement Team meeting, shared in the one-on-one interviews, and found in the document review that as school teams built capacity in effective instruction through differentiation, strategic intervention programs, and improved

student progress, both human and monetary resources were shifted away. P101 and P102 reported that their budgets at both schools were cut after each school showed significant growth in pupil progress.

Ensuring that the work of the committee is communicated to instructional directors and the division improvement team. An important practice shared by D1 and D2 during their one-on-one interviews was communicating to instructional directors and the division improvement team student progress as a result of action plans implemented and resources allocated at Stellar Schools 101 and 102. The following questions were asked during the one-on-one interviews to understand how information from the Academic Achievement Team was shared with division leadership and state department officials.

Interview question. Does the district leadership have checks in place to ensure those who attend the Academic Achievement Team meeting share the information with division leaders who do not attend the Academic Achievement Team meeting? Please explain.

The district liaison reported:

> Yes. Prime example: the district liaison that is assigned to an Academic Achievement Team- it is their responsibility to come back and report to the division support team and share with them what took place at that meeting- both good and bad (L, p. 10, April 19, 2012).

The district liaison explained that her role is to report to the division leaders, to the state department of education, and to the principals when needed.

When asked if she ever addressed the teachers, the district liaison commented:

> Basically, I talk one-on-one with the administrator unless it gets to a point where I can see that they are not giving the full support that they can give as an administrator. Sometimes I step in and hopefully boost up the urgency of the situation that they are in (L, p. 10, April 19, 2012).

D1 reported, “Minutes are available for review and there are division-level update meetings to highlight information” (D1, p. 5, April 23, 2012). D2 articulated, “Minutes are kept and dropped on School Space” (D2, p. 5, April 20, 2012).

Interview question. Does the presence of the district liaison or district leadership hinder or foster courageous conversations at the Academic Achievement Team meetings?

The district liaison commented:

It depends on the person's personality as far as matching and making a group feel comfortable in sharing and talking? That is critical. If they don't get that comfort level there, they are defeated. You want the people to be very candid about what their needs are and where they are. That is the first thing I try to do with an AAT. First of all, with the administrator… Most of them now, even though I am old as dirt, I go in and say my name is Tommy. Number two, I am here for you- not the state. I am here representing the state, but you in Stellar County have an advantage because they have offered me to come and go over and beyond the state. Right now, I am not a state employee. I am your employee. My job is to assist you. Anything you say stays between you and I. What happens now with me, and I tell them… I make a suggestion one, two, three times and you do not try… What in fact I do is, you tick me off and you will see another Tommy. And I become more, not an evaluator, but more precise and direct. I go from assistance to "I want it by such and such a date." If not, then I will go further and present the problem to your district level. I hate going to that level, and to be honest, I get angry at them for forcing me into another role that I don't like playing. I prefer being their buddy and sister, and extra set of eyes saying, "did you see this, did you think about this?" And the same with the district, they should have a person in that role. That does not mean ignore what is out there, but approach it with that person… "Did you think about this? This is something I noticed you did not address. Were you aware of that? Do you need me to help you with it?" Big difference from "you didn't do this and I am going to write you up!" Big difference! (L, p. 15, April 9, 2012).

The teacher responded:

I think it can do both. There are a few Central Office personnel that I think are so wonderful, and I wish they could be with me every day. They are uplifting, wonderful and honest, and set up very honest exchanges. And, of course, there are one or two others that I have come in contact with that seem to have some preconceived notions

> about our school and perhaps do not seem open to even being part of it, more there as a separatist. I see this as not helpful, and as a possible hindrance. (T, 11, April 20, 2012).

One director shared:

> Does the presence of district leadership hinder or foster courageous conversations at the AAT meetings? There may be times when it hinders, but there are always times it encourages courageous conversations. Building trust is an important part, but it takes time. As schools are heard and additional resources provided, the relationship is enhanced (D1, p. 7, April 23, 2012).

In summary, one-on-one interviews with the T, D1, D2 and L explained that it was the job of the district liaison to report the progress of Stellar School 101 and 102 to the division leadership team, to give monthly reports to the Department of Education on Stellar County's use of the Academic Achievement Team to enhance student achievement at both schools, and to give the principals at both schools feedback. Observations of the Academic Achievement team meetings at both schools and the interviews with L, T, P101, P102, D1, and D2 revealed that District leadership required all Academic Achievement Team minutes to be placed in the Academic Achievement Team folder on School Space. School Space allowed district leaders, instructional coaches, content specialists, and other stakeholders to access action plans, student data, material/human resources being used, and intervention/enrichment programs in existence at both schools. However, the district liaison and teacher voiced in their one-on-one interviews that honest and courageous communication could be fostered or hindered based on the personality of the central office representative(s) that attended the Academic Achievement team meetings at both schools. The teacher interviewed expressed the view that certain central office representatives are uplifting and non-judgmental during Academic Achievement Team meetings which fosters an honest exchange when addressing positive or negative reports on student progress and quality instruction. The teacher further explained during her interview that certain representatives from central office have a preconceived notion about the principal, students, teachers, or Stellar School 101 in general that may limit the amount of authentic reporting shared by teachers in fear of being judged negatively. Both T and L articulated during the one-on-one interview that a trusting relationship needed to be formed between the school team and central office team for open communication to occur throughout the Academic Achievement Team

process. D1 also emphasized in her one-on-one interview that creating an atmosphere of trust and honesty where all stakeholders feel comfortable enough to speak freely takes time. For this reason, D1 and D2 made known that district leadership in Stellar County made every effort to keep the same central office representative at their assigned school once a positive and trusting relationship was formed.

Ensuring that the work of the committee is completed as described by the committee and according to the school improvement plan (state or local). The document review and interview with the district liaison demonstrated that Stellar Schools 101 and 102 created a school improvement plan based on student performance data. One-on-one interviews with L, P101, P102, D1, and D2 revealed that both schools were required by the State Department of Education to select practices, referred to as indicators, to enhance and sustain improvement in student performance and quality instruction. The documents reviewed and observations during the Academic Achievement team meetings brought to life that the selection and implementation of indicators mandated by the State Department of Education were reviewed by the district liaison and elementary directors (i.e., L, D1, and D2) to ensure the indicators matched the areas of growth based on student performance data for both schools.

The district liaison reported the following when asked about her role in evaluating the quality of the school improvement plan:

> That is one of my big jobs as it relates to the state. I have to review the INDISTAR plan. What I start off initially is comparing that to their state report card. And I show first of all that the strand that they selected actually addresses the needs that their initial data shows as a need. Prime example: if I look at a report card for a school and it says that they had 20% mastery in third grade in math, then I look. If I don't see math even mentioned… If I don't see third grade mentioned… then I go uh uh. You haven't addressed what you actually need. Go back and figure out some strategies that will show that you are looking at third grade math, and coming up with some strategies in math to address those needs (L, p. 5, April 9, 2012).

The district liaison (i.e., L) went on to say in her one-on-one interview that feedback was shared with both principals but not with the entire Academic Achievement Team. The district liaison further indicated that it was the responsibility of the principal to share feedback with their leadership team or Academic Achievement Team members.

Interview question. Does the district leadership monitor implementation of the school improvement plan in the specific content areas of concern in reference to student performance? Explain…

Teacher shared:

Our school improvement plan includes the few items that we came together as a school and decided were most important as well as the state indicators. Before each AAT, each grade level has team planning once a month under the school improvement plan where they work on their indicators. When we come back to AAT, each grade level chair is able to share how well the school improvement plan is working and whether or not it is being followed through with and different ways to tweak it if need be (T, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

One director reported:

> Each plan is reviewed at the division level and feedback given based analysis of available data. Feedback is shared with the principal. The contents of the school improvement plan are an integral part of the discussion at AAT. For schools in school improvement, the plan is tied to the agenda in a more structured way. There is quarterly review of the plan and benchmark data, in addition to a review of AAT minutes. Directors also meet with the division leadership following benchmark tests to give updates on progress and school needs. Student data is used to highlights areas for growth. Once the plan is established, measures and timelines are determined for periodic review. The measures identify if progress is being made or adjustments are needed. This is not a one-time review but a cycle to ensure schools/students are moving in the right direction at an appropriate pace to meet established targets (D1, pp. 2-3, April 23, 2012).

One principal explained:

> We set yearly learning goals for ourselves within the school through our continuous school improvement plan. When we are putting together, as a team, our CSIP, we look at where we were last year and determine what percentage of growth we would like to make for the current year. The administrative team within the school and the leadership team-which consists of teachers do this as part of the AAT. We use the strand data reports that we get from the county and 34 reports we receive from the county. We use individual

item analysis. The entire process is facilitated by the principal (P102, p. 4, April 22, 2012).

In closing, while observing the Academic Achievement Team Meeting at both schools, the district leadership representative ensured appropriate data were analyzed by reviewing the agenda prior to the start of the meeting, checking off agenda items as they were being discussed among all stakeholders, asking probing questions to get a better understanding of what the data meant in reference to instruction and student achievement, and reviewing action steps with the building principal and team. During the observations of both schools' Academic Achievement team meetings, both principals asked questions and probed for a robust understanding of student progress from the analysis of data. District leadership representative and the district liaison mostly observed the process unless explanations for sub-par performances were not disclosed or addressed. Observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both schools revealed that when teacher representatives reported their data in a strategic format identifying strengths and areas of growth the district liaison acted as a facilitator. The liaison would encourage all stakeholders to engage in meaningful discussions in the formulation of action plans to increase pupil progress. Teachers were able to give a detailed analysis of data. Teachers further listed qualitative rationales to explain classroom and individual student performance by citing teacher pacing, classroom management, student attendance, student achievement history, and test taking strategies. Teachers were observed at both schools taking ownership of their student's data and not blaming the students or parents for poor performance. Teachers at both schools responded to student needs by providing remediation and enrichment opportunities to raise the achievement of the highest and lowest performing students.

Asking the right questions to facilitate school-wide reflective practice through the use of data. At the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102, an additional critical practice of was observed. In each instance, district leadership asked good questions to assist in the identification of problems first and solutions second. Based on observing the Academic Achievement Team meetings, reviewing the 2011-2012 Academic Achievement Team process protocol, and examining the minutes from the Academic Achievement Team meeting at both schools, it was determined that the questions asked generally fell into four categories:

1. Student Learning:

- How are students learning?
- What is the measure used for performance?
- Is the measure valid?
- Which students are learning and which are not?
- What are the learning objectives that will require the greatest focus for all students?

2. Problem Solving:
    - Why are students not learning?
    - What is it about the specific learning objective(s) that is creating a roadblock to learning?
    - How are we currently teaching this learning? (Ask about resources, time, and types of activities, qualifications and skills of the people teaching the learning and how the learning is being assessed.)
    - Are there foundational learning issues that need to be addressed?
    - How do we give extra support to students for this learning objective?
3. Action Planning:
    - What is the exact plan to impact teaching and learning?
    - How will the plan be implemented?
    - Who will be responsible for doing what?
    - How will we measure if the plan is working?
    - Are we sure this plan will get the desired impact in a reasonable amount of time?
4. Implementation:
    - Is the action plan being implemented?
    - How do we know it is being implemented?
    - Are there implementation data that can be shared?
    - Is the action plan impacting student learning?
    - How do we know?
    - Are there outcome data that can be shared?

Observations and minutes from the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both schools revealed that asking appropriate questions was critical in examining the effectiveness of remediation programs and resource allocation. Academic Achievement Team members knew how individual and groups of students were performing by monitoring pass rates on the Standards of Learning based benchmark assessments each quarter. Observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both schools proved that once student results were identified resources were allocated to those students that needed them the most.

Benefits of the Academic Achievement Team

When the interview participants (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) were asked about the most beneficial and the least beneficial functions of the Academic Achievement Team, one director said, "The open dialog about student performance has impacted achievement" (D2, p. 6, April 23, 2012). A principal felt, "I think that all schools should have such a team" (P101, p. 4, April 21, 2012).

Another director added:

> It provides a consistent, structured way for schools to analyze data and monitor changes and progress. Schools that have maintained an AAT, even when not required, have maintained progress. Those that stopped AAT once achieving benchmarks, showed a decline in progress. We surveyed the teachers as to whether we moving in the right direction. Were they able to see the growth, to see the continuum of what the expectations were. This type of open dialog built leadership capacity, teacher buy in and trust, and gave all stakeholders a voice. By doing AAT we sustained student progress and the results were strong over time. Healthy data-driven discussions…Structured review of data, solutions, progress monitoring, shared leadership, resource allocation based on data and outcomes are the most beneficial functions (D1, p. 7, April 23, 2012).

A teacher commented:

> I think first of all it is a team of action. So not only are you talking about ideas and things that will help- but also that things get done. It is also a place where teachers can ask for something. It may not happen exactly like they want, but at least it becomes something that everyone is aware of. In first grade last year, it was not an area that everyone was focusing on since we were in our first year of school improvement and what needs to

happen in May. But that is where these kids learn to read, so I felt like I needed to speak up and ask for some things… and we got them. I see it as a place of action to be added to the uplifting piece (T, p. 10, April 20, 2012).

The teacher further added:

The least beneficial tasks required of the AAT…This is probably going to sound terrible, but there is a lot to put into a 2-hour meeting. I sometimes feel like there are certain things that are reported on that do not have a lot of bearing on student achievement. I am trying to think of an example, but I cannot even think of one. The least beneficial is probably not being respectful of time, but for the most part that is not a huge problem. I mean data is obviously necessary and very beneficial (T, p. 10, April 20, 2012).

The district liaison stated:

I think, if they stick to the protocol and assure that instruction is the main focus of those meetings, AAT is beneficial and very effective. I think the original protocol for an AAT meeting has to be upheld. In some cases, sometimes, I have seen it fall back and I have had to remind some administrators… "Hey look, I did not see anything about data. I did not see you put any responsibility on the teachers to report, here is where we were weakest in, and here is what we are going to do about it." That is crucial (L, p. 12, April 9, 2012).

The district liaison added:

The least beneficial tasks required of the AAT…You know, I have tried to think of that. when you get a team that is really together with it, the "least" part for me would be having them put every word in their minutes. That is after four or five good years of them together, knowing that they will carry it to the next level and they have a broad agenda of what was discussed. But that comes with time and experience (L, p. 13, April 9, 2012).

Summary of the Benefits of the Academic Achievement Team Process

In conclusion, biggest benefit of the school-based Academic Achievement Team echoed by the interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) was that the Academic Achievement Team process empowered teachers to work with district leadership and other professionals to

think outside of the box for solutions to achieve student success. The interview evidence indicated that teachers on the team, as well as those receiving input from the team, felt supported in the work that was done each day by the administration and the district representatives. There was a sense of true collaboration and support for teachers observed at the Academic Achievement Team meeting at both schools. In addition, observation of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at both schools revealed that, once a trusting relationship was formed between the school team and the district representative, teachers openly shared their challenges, struggles, and frustrations without being judged and/or criticized. It was communicated in the teacher and principals interviews that the level of trust that existed between staff in the building and district representatives created a culture where teachers were more receptive to suggestions made by district leadership in meeting student needs. Evidence from the interviews, observations, and document reviews revealed that district level representatives were seen as partners in the process of achieving successful student performance rather than just supervisors of student and teacher performance. The Academic Achievement team fostered a "we" as opposed to an "us vs. them" mentality often seen in schools.

Principal Leadership Qualities and Practices

The review of relevant student performance data for the schools studied revealed that increased student performance did not occur until the new principal was assigned to each study school. Observations of P101 and P102, information obtained through the one-on-one interviews with T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2, and the review of documents revealed that leadership practices of the building principal within the Academic Achievement Team structure was the second category possibly related to improving achievement at Stellar Schools 101 and 102. The observed principal practices of P101 and P102: setting direction, communicating clear directives, reviewing curriculum and instruction, sharing leadership responsibilities, connecting with families/community, and providing operational and organizational structures.

Setting Direction

The vision expressed during the one-on-one interviews with district leadership and the principals (i.e., D1, D2, P101, and P102) at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 was for every teacher to provide quality instruction, creative instruction, and meaningful instruction. District leadership (I.e., D1 and D2) believed that this could be done through the Academic Achievement Team

process. When a teacher was asked, "Do you think the Academic Achievement Team is an effective systematic approach used by the district for accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction to address specific student and school academic needs?"

A teacher responded:

> I do. I feel like it… first of all sheds light for all of the team players or stakeholders. It allows the teachers to see the school's vision and mission coming together… to see why teachers are asked to do certain tasks. You know, we all think we are so busy and we need to do this and we need to do that. Why do we have to do this? It is a meaningful experience to know why we have to do some of the tasks we are asked to do. And I think it really builds a feeling of "we are in this together." We are supporting each other. It really lifts up the school if it is done well and everyone buys into it, and if people are coming from a good, sincere place. And I mean that for the Central Office people who may come in with certain ideas about what is happening at a school. I think they are just as responsible for being a positive part of the process (T, p. 10, April 20, 2012).

One director summarized the essential role of the principal as:

> Well I will say this, when I was a classroom teacher I thought the classroom teacher was the whole thing and I still believe that it is the classroom teacher that is critical to student learning. But what I know is that that building level leadership…nothing takes the place of that. And that getting, developing that administrative leadership, I've seen it when it works and I've seen it when it doesn't work and it is the most important role in the building because they hire and then they cultivate and they motivate and they integrate and if you don't have the right kind of leadership and beliefs system which will come from that administrator. That administrator sets the stage for that entire school culture and so while I still think that the teacher is really where the action is, I know that one teacher in his or her room won't cut it. You've got to have that building level leadership. And I just think that, I just can't say enough about it. I think it's absolutely critical and beginning a solution oriented person who doesn't, who looks at the road block as trying to figure out how to get around it rather than seeing the road block as a stopping point and what I said earlier is that best leaders are academic; they're really forensic scientists, they're finding the thread, the fiber that gets the child to learn or finds the problem with

> the program and content, gets the teacher motivated. It's taking those itty bitty little things that seem insignificant and making meaning for the whole (D1, p. 8, April 23, 2012).

Communicating Clear Directives

The documents reviewed indicated that the principals at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 used newsletters, progress reports, monthly calendars, parent phone calls, home visits, and the parent teacher association to share the school's vision, mission, and goals throughout the entire community. The document review also revealed that parents and community members were invited to all school events and were encouraged to participate in the daily activities of the school. It was reported in the one-on-one interviews with T, L, D1 and D2 that both principals possessed the interpersonal skills to greet parents at their cars in the morning, venture out into the community to communicate their school's vision to community agencies, churches, and civic organizations, and opened the lines of communication from the office to the parents to by having principal coffee's and other events to keep parents informed of the vision, mission, and academic goals of the school. As observed during the observation of the Academic Achievement Team meeting at Stellar School 101, one teacher shared that student performance data were communicated daily through child performance charts that were on display in each classroom. Similar student performance charts were also observed on display at Stellar School 102.

The teacher interviewed stated:

> That is something that people will come by and take a look at. People will come by and take a look at- it is in every classroom. We also share it quite openly with the students, because they are excited to see if they got a green dot on last week's bi-weekly assessment. That is one way it is measured. We also occasionally turn in an SLR report, which we send bi-weekly home. It is not only a student progress report, but also a notation of the SOLs that were taught and how your student did on mastering them. So, the level of parent communication is just that much higher- not having to wait for progress reports or report cards. We also are responsible for turning in parent count of contacts. All of these things are monitored, with the grade level chair speaking about them at the AAT (T, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

Teachers at Study School 101 had to turn in parent contact logs every two weeks that documented all forms of parent contact including visits at the school, phone calls, emails, and signed notes home. The teacher interviewed averaged about twenty-three parent contacts every two weeks (T, p. 3, April 20, 2012).

Reviewing Curriculum and Instruction

The document reviews and observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings demonstrated that the primary method both principals used to ensure that teachers were teaching the curriculum and students were learning was the analysis of data from quarterly benchmark tests and other local, state, and national assessments. According the principals' interview comments, the key was teaching teachers how to differentiate the curriculum to meet the various levels and learning styles of each student. Both principals reported that quality teaching and learning occurred as a result of daily walkthroughs, weekly observations, ongoing progress monitoring of student performance data, and continuous monitoring of the full implementation of actions plans developed at the Academic Achievement Team meetings. The principals reported that district leadership monitored school-level student learning at both schools weekly by conducting walkthroughs, by reviewing student performance data, and by examining action plans recorded during the Academic Achievement Team meetings.

One principal reported:

> This year, my director called me and she wanted me to look at two particular classrooms in third grade because there was a discrepancy between the ability and achievement tests. The ability tests they had taken in second grade and the achievement tests that were taken at the beginning of third grade. There was a discrepancy between ability and achievement; therefore, she wanted me to take a look at the teacher and the students within the classroom to see if they were on target (P102, p. 5, April 22, 2012).

When asked if instructional teams used student learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and instructional strategies, one principal commented:

> Yes. When we are looking at um… the student data, especially when we are looking at the individual analysis and the strand data, we look at particular questions that the students may be having difficulty in. Looking at the stems within those questions to see if it is something that the student may not just understand- that particular type of

> question. If so, and we have a lot of students that are having difficulty with it, then we might need to teach that particular concept in isolation. Or, if it is based on a particular strand and students are having difficulty with computation and estimation… okay, then what can we do as a school? Usually, an issue like that is school wide. We notice it is school wide for us, so we know that we need to be doing more to teach computation and estimation school wide. That is one of the reasons why we are really concentrating in the lower grades with basic facts. Because as the students go from one grade level to the next without having their basic facts down, then it will impact when we start testing SOL-scores will go down because the students did not have their computation and estimation skills, that they did not develop the prerequisites for (P102, p. 5, April 22, 2012).

The same principal also commented that instructional teams used student-learning data to plan instruction and further explained:

> In science last year, we were struggling. The teachers were not doing a lot of hands on activities, especially in the area of scientific investigations. So, getting the science specialist in here, making sure… helping me make sure that the teachers were incorporating science experiments into the curriculum, making sure that they were teaching the different processes of scientific investigation. Umm, in that they fully grasp what they are supposed to be doing P102, p. 5, April 22, 2012).

Sharing Leadership Responsibilities

One principal reported:

> I would maybe share a thought or solicit ideas about certain things, as a team we would make those decisions, other than situations where I felt the decision was not the best for the kids and so those were times where I might have to make the final decision that might not be in the same interest as everyone else but it was my job to look at it globally (P102, p. 7, April 22, 2012).

One director shared:

> We surveyed the teachers as to whether we were moving in the right direction. Were they able to see the growth, to see the continuum of what the expectations were. This type of open dialog built leadership capacity, teacher buy in and trust, and gave all

stakeholders a voice. By doing these things we sustained student progress and the results were strong over time (D1, p. 6, April 23, 2012).

The teacher interviewed commented:

I think its a really fluid process of giving things enough time to be effective, but knowing when changes need to be made. I think the evaluation process is also open to the teachers to say we've been trying this and it isn't working or doesn't feel right… or we need more support. I think that it can also come from a district representative saying, "I see that you are doing it this way, but I don't think it is good enough or I don't think it is effective as it could be. Let's try this…" And then when you come back and you see the results... Were scores raised? Did we get those bubble kids up a little bit? Did we encompass a larger group of kids who are succeeding? If not, it is an informal evaluation that we are all doing together, around the table (T, p. 4, April 20, 20120).

Connecting with Family and Community

The vignettes below explained how Principal 101 and 102 built family and community relations in order to improve student achievement within the structure of the Academic Achievement Team.

One principal explained:

Actually I went door-to-door with our business communities, where we built relationships with our local hotel, who partnered with us for big family events, father-son breakfasts, mother-daughter events, those types of things. I also spoke a lot directly with my parents. Car rider area was one of the best PR moves I ever made and that gave me the opportunity not to just open the door for their child, but to greet them, get to know them because that rapport building made a difference, so when there were things that I needed to get done in the school or have a belief system about discipline or about instruction, parents bought in because the principal said so and what I wanted for their child. No other reason. We employed an honor roll system where we awarded parents for their involvement. They would attend events and they would receive points. They would sign agenda books and receive points, so things that they did and so the goal was, each parent wants the best for their child and ideally each parent would like to see their child on the honor roll so we then turned that around to say, you know your child wants

your involvement, your child wants you to make the honor roll and so parents really enjoyed coming to make sure they received their points and when we recognize our students at the end of the nine weeks for whatever their achievements would be. Parents were also invited to the awards assembly and we recognized those parents who were on the honor roll, were the most outstanding events I think that we, and decisions as a team we made. Getting parents involved, getting students involved and making it a non-threatening place to be, so we made sure that what we did to get the parents in, they would leave still having a sense of pride, whether they knew all the information for the SOL night or not. We would make sure they would have an answer key, so that as they competed and had fun along with their children they didn't feel like they would be put in an uncomfortable situation. So just some various things that the team came up with and that was a collaborative decision-making as well with staff members (P1, p. 7, April 22, 2012).

The other principal commented:

Most of my parents didn't always have a good experience at school and so, my thing, I was going to try and do the back rail work. We instituted things like programs, family nights. We also, we did this several years, where parents came in and talked about what kind of work they did, whether it was a stay at home mom. We had some that were more appropriate than others, but we met with them to help them couch what kind of work they did how they contributed it and how it connected to student learning whether it was kindergarten or fifth grade and it could be their parent, their uncle, their grandparent, because not every child has the same family structure and I think you need to be sensitive to that. We did normal kinds of things like grandparents day. We always had a big community event at our school, whether it was, like we had a beach music festival as a celebrating the end of our year themes, where we had picnic, and music and danced. We always had a community event at the end of each year and fall festivals. You know I'm a big, speak, greet, call, dress up, act crazy, get people involved and so some of that I think is just, I enjoy people and I think that I really do believe that we want to have community involvement and we did all that kind of PTA things and programs and every kind of thing like that. Business partnerships were in our community but we really did try to have an academic focus and not just an incentive or food or whatever. I mean anytime parents had

> something we try to find a way to connect it with the school the veterans, you know all those kinds of things you do but the academic piece and drawing in on the strengths of the kinds of career and things that our parents had and trying to connect those with our school theme was an important part of family involvement and just talking, you know all the stuff (P 101, p. 6, April 22, 2012).

Providing Organizational and Operational Structure

The principals interviewed considered themselves instructional leaders rather than managers. Both P101 and P102 had a collaborative approach in the management of safety, discipline, student behavior, and the overall organization and operation of the building as observed and as reported during their one-on-one interviews. The two principals led by example and considered themselves master teachers who knew the curriculum and best practices in instructional techniques.

One principal reported:

> I lead and manage the way that I would want to be treated and so I try to have systematic ways to monitor and manage the various tasks that are before me, but utilizing leaders around me so that we can split responsibilities and make sure we have as tight a rein as we can on what's going on and just keep people informed (P101, p. 7, April 22, 2012).

Another principal related:

> I think you really need to cultivate the leaders around you and that every person in the building plays a critical role… working with people to collaborate on what their strengths are and then assigning tasks that way and just monitoring progress (P 102, p. 8, April 22, 2012).

Both instructional leaders indicated during their interviews that management required a great deal of problem solving, being able to embrace change, and ongoing sharpening of the brain through taking classes, attending trainings, participating in study groups and/or book studies, and ongoing conversations with colleagues who were participating in the Academic Achievement Team process.

Summary of Principal Leadership Qualities and Practices

Stellar County principals (i.e., P101 and 102) representing Stellar Schools 101 and 102 set direction, communicated clear directives, reviewed curriculum and instruction, shared leadership responsibilities, connected with families and the community, and provided operational and organizational structures in providing instructional leadership for their school. These leadership qualities and practices were observed during the Academic Achievement Team meetings and expressed during the one-on-one interviews. Additional evidence of the leadership qualities and practices listed were also revealed in the field notes and review of documents from Stellar Schools 101 and 102. The teacher interviewed voiced, "leadership of the principal through the Academic Achievement Team process allows the teachers to see the school's vision and mission coming together… to see why teachers are asked to do certain tasks" (T, p. 10, April 20, 2012). The observations and one-on-one interviews with the principals at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 uncovered that both principals (i.e., P101 and P102) displayed extensive knowledge of how to analyze data even though staff development and training in the area of data analysis was not a priority of district leadership.

Observations during the Academic Achievement Team meeting, a review of documents, and the one-on-one interviews confirmed that the principals (i.e., P101 and P102) within the Academic Achievement Team structure were responsible for establishing meeting times, ensuring that all Academic Achievement Team protocols and procedures outlined by district leadership were followed, and establishing family and community relationships. Principal 101 and 102 created an inclusive learning environment, understood student characteristics and needs, celebrated diversity, and involved multiple agencies in the teaching and learning process in order to establish effective family/community involvement as reported in vignettes taken from the one-on-one interviews with the principals (i.e., P101 and P102) from Stellar Schools 101 and 102.

The district liaison stated, "When an effective principal leaves, the accountability leaves regardless of the capacity that was created among all stakeholders" (L, p. 18, April 9, 2012). The principal was the gatekeeper, receiver, and disseminator of all data that was available through the district's research and planning department's central database website as observed during the Academic Achievement team meeting and recorded in the documents reviewed. It was observed during the Academic Achievement Team meeting and reported by interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) that the principal used guiding questions to analyze school data with the

Academic Achievement Team to develop strategies to address areas of need, as defined in the school improvement plan. Observations during the Academic Achievement Team meetings, the documents reviewed, and interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1 and D2) revealed that the principals (i.e., P101 and P102) shared student learning data expectations mandated by district leadership and monitored the school team to insure implementation took place to the agreed upon action plan. The Academic Achievement Team principals (i.e., P101 and P102) supervised teacher teams in:

- Using student performance, remediation, and benchmark data to develop school, grade level and specific classroom plans to improve individual student performance.
- Identifying the instructional needs of individual students by content and skill level and developing an individual remediation plan for each student.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of remediation programs for each student by classroom teachers.
- Conducting ongoing programmatic data analysis and making individual instructional adjustments as needed.

The documents reviewed and the observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings revealed that the role of the principal touched upon every aspect of the Academic Achievement Team process. However, one principal (i.e., P102) shared:

> The Academic Achievement Process required collaboration and shared leadership. We encouraged cross grade level social events because the overall bonding among staff makes a difference in the overall culture in the school and we have a positive culture in the school, then you typically have positive students and when you have positive students who are happy then you also have positive and happy parents and so that whole collaboration and decision-making was key (P102, p. 7, April 22, 2012).

It was expressed in the one-on-one interviews with D1 and D2 that district leadership felt the need for school systems to continue to improve in the area of providing relevant and sustained staff development for teachers and principals in the use of data, especially in meeting the demands of schools in need of being turned around. The comments from interviewees (i.e., L, T, P101, and P102) shared during the one-on-one interviews supported the reflection made by district leadership (i.e., D1 and D2) that on going staff development was lacking for both

teachers and building principals especially due to principals having to request training rather than it being mandated, scheduled, and evaluated by district leadership and other central office representatives at Stellar Schools 101 and 102.

Ongoing Monitoring and Analysis of Student Performance Data

The third category that may have contributed to the improved student achievement noted at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 was the ongoing monitoring and analysis of student performance data. The observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 captured Academic Achievement Team members demonstrating awareness of student needs through the analysis of ongoing assessment data. Following benchmark assessments, detailed descriptions about why certain students performed well and why others did not, was observed during the Academic Achievement team meeting observations at Stellar Schools 101 and 102. Targeted instructional responses were provided where needed as a result of strategic data analysis and discussion that occurred at the bi-monthly Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 that was recorded in the Academic Achievement Team meeting minutes and reported by the interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2).

Academic achievement team assessment and data. Table 5 listed data topics for Stellar Schools 101 and 102 to review at each Academic Achievement Team meeting over the course of an instructional year. Assessing student learning frequently with standards-based assessments was required by district leadership and the State Department of Education for Stellar Schools 101 and 102 as reported in the documents reviewed and the one-on-one interview with the district liaison (i.e., L). The district liaison divulged that the State Department of Education assigned her the duty of monitoring each school's adherence in using INDISTAR to report plans of improvement for Stellar Schools 101 and 102.

The district liaison explained INDISTAR as:

> Every school that is in school improvement has to have a school improvement plan; however, it is done on INDISTAR. The INDISTAR plan, and that is on the internet and is composed of the effective strategies that research has proven to be the best strategies. The indicators and strategies… the best strategies that… benefit schools and make them highly successful. But all of this is based on Redding (2009). As a matter of fact, he started the INDISTAR plan, and the state department went there to observe, and that is

> where they met Redding. His belief is in order to have an effective change… a positive effective change in schools, you must impact everyone who is involved with that student's learning (L, p. 4, AprL9, 2012).

The observations and the review of meeting minutes from the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 confirmed that district leadership in the Stellar County School District used Redding's (2009) INDISTAR system to establish student-learning goals. The elementary directors interviewed (i.e., D1 and D2) reported that Walberg's (2007) success indicators were also implemented as district leadership practices to ensure required assessments given identified what a student knew or could do, patterns of strengths and weaknesses, and areas requiring re-teaching. The eleven indicators also served as a means to set learning goals based on student performance data found in the Academic Achievement Team minutes for Stellar Schools 101 and 102. The eleven indicators developed by Walberg (2007) were posed as interview questions below to solicit responses from interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2). The questions were asked to explore practices Stellar Schools 101 and 102 employed that may have contributed to the student progress achieved at each school.

Question 1: Does Stellar School 101 and 102 test every student annually with the same standardized test in basic subject areas so that each student's year-to-year progress can be tracked? All participants stated yes to the first indicator. One director said, "Yes, Research and Planning Website houses archival data results from standardized tests" (D2, 5, April 20, 2012). Another director reported, "Yes, trend data is reported by Research & Planning department" (D1, p. 5, April 23, 2012).

One principal commented:

> Yes. We have… this is our second year using the Measures of Academic Progress (MAPS) testing, looking at a student's Rasch Unit (RIT) scores in a particular area or strand area to know deficits ahead of time if students are having difficulty in computation, estimation, measurement or geometry. We can offer some staff development during the summertime to assist teachers with difficulties in teaching those particular areas or come up with some resources to help our students having difficulty in those particular areas (P102, p. 3, April 22, 2012).

A teacher reported:

I haven't seen from first to fifth, but definitely student performance third through fifth using SOLS, and HAT scores spring to spring. I haven't really seen anything else. Our school, being under the teacher incentive fund… Central Office did provide our teachers with as much data as possible going back as far as they had to help us make informed decisions as we develop student-learning targets. This year, in particular, we got quite a bit of data on each child (T, p. 9, April 20, 2012).

Another principal shared:
Bi-weekly assessments, benchmark testing… if it is around the time for HATs, PALS… I think those are the main tests. Obviously, when you come back in the fall you are talking about SOLs for the past year. We also compare year-to-year performance, and yes, definitely, we are looking at year-to-year performance (P101, p. 4, April 21, 2012).

Question 2: Does Stellar School 101 and 102 test each student at least 3 times each year to determine progress toward standards-based objectives? One principal responded, "Yes. We use the MAPS testing at the beginning of the year and again in December and April" (P102, p. 3, April 22, 2012).
One principal explained:
We look at each child's progress and instructional needs to discuss with the rising teacher. Students are carefully selected for classrooms. Students are identified from day one of the school year to track. Our instructional coach follows the progress of all remedial recovery students after each assessment. Title I teachers, ESL and exceptional ed. teachers track students from year to year (P101, p. 4, April 21, 2012).

The district liaison reported:
The SOLs, the PALS, the benchmarks. Umm… and if the school comes up with their own kind of grade level or unit testing, then they can use that as well. The key is to make sure that they are all aligned with the state Standards of Learning and the pacing. If in fact they are, (and certain divisions do have their own that are not aligned, so their efforts are really good but it is a waste of time, because it is still not going to help the school district relative to passing the SOLs (L, p. 6, April 19, 2012).

The one-on-one interviews (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) revealed the Stellar

Schools 101 and 102 tested every student annually with the same standardized test core content areas so that each student's year-to-year progress could be tracked. Student performance data was acquired and analyzed from the following assessments and reports: Standards of Learning Tests (SOL's), Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS), Measure of Academic Performance Screening (MAPS), Stellar Achievement Tests (SATS), quarterly benchmark tests, bi-weekly assessments, and quarterly attendance and discipline reports as indicated in the documents reviewed. The review of documents also indicated that Stellar Schools 101 and 102 did bi-weekly tests in reading and math. Both Stellar Schools 101 and 102 were required to administer quarterly benchmark assessments in addition to the fall, winter, and spring PALS and MAPS tests as reported by each elementary directors (D1 and D2). All participants interviewed (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) shared that these assessment results were recorded on student progress charts, discussed at Academic Achievement Team meetings, and created the information needed for plans of corrective action.

Question 3: Do teachers receive timely reports of results from standardized and objectives-based tests? One principal responded, "Yes. With the MAPS test, we get the kids' overall scores by strands within the same day. In addition to the Standards of Learning test, it is broken down in individual strands and we also get the 34 reports that look at particular strands for students" (P102, p. 3, April 22, 2012).

A teacher reported the following:

Data is made available to us throughout the entire year from the principal. We just have to ask or tell her what we need. Like at the mid-year, the benchmark data was made available to us. The principal handed it to each grade level chair and it was handed out to team member teachers from there.

Some of the data is teacher generated- most of it, I would say. We do have the county spreadsheets and it is wonderful that it is there for us. We plug it in. Either the grade level chair is holding it, but we also send it to the admin team and Title I teachers as well.

Bi-weeklies are generated as far as us scoring them, and then turning in my pass rate, pre-requisite, strategic and, you know, those numbers. Teacher generated as far as plugging in the item analysis for the benchmarks or PALS, and then PALS data being ready to share at AAT.

For the mid-year benchmarks, the county scored it. The students took the tests and we turned them in. I think the turnaround time was a couple of weeks. I personally felt like it was a little bit long. Just because… especially from where I sat as a second grade teacher- that is the first benchmark to indicate that my students are reading on their own. Knowing that we had a few concerns and that there were a few mistakes on the test. Knowing that we were going to be responsible for speaking to them, it would have been nice to have the results a little sooner.

I personally would prefer to score my tests myself and plug in the item analysis. I love the excel spreadsheet, and the calculations and pretty little pie chart analysis at the bottom. I trust myself to be really thorough, so I like to grade it. Plus it really allows me to experience what the kids were doing, what they were thinking, what they were writing down. As a teacher, it is really helpful to me to see what the students are doing… to lose the test when you want to look at it and see where specifically the child was having trouble. This is hard when you are talking to the Title I teacher, and you don't have the test to look at. I do feel like a few of my teammates felt that way (T, pp. 4-5, April 20, 2012).

The district liaison explained the following to be best practice:
My understanding is that it is left up to the administrator to provide data to the teachers. My druthers, the epitome of perfection would be that the administrator and their leadership team did reviewing of the data first and then disseminate it (with administrators being present at the meeting) at each grade level meeting so that they can be talked about. Then take it a step further. If I am an individual teacher that has strengths and weaknesses that have popped out in review of the data, it would behoove the administrator to have an individual conference with me and find out about how I feel about the assessment, was I aware of the areas of strengths/weaknesses, and what do I plan to do about it. That is my famous question, and everybody who works with me knows, "so what are you going to do about it?" I would leave it there. I will sometimes leave a meeting if they bring up a problem. What are you going to do about it? I will give you all time to discuss and brain storm for a while and then follow up with you about it (L, p. 9, April 1, 2012).

The teacher reported that results from standardized tests were shared with teachers and appropriate staff in a very timely manner except for when benchmark tests were scored by central office. The teacher explained that when scoring of tests were done at school, teachers were able to score, complete the item analysis, identify strands that were mastered, identify areas of concern, and establish remediation groups within two days. When district leadership scored semester benchmark tests, it took over two weeks for teachers to get the results back as reported by the teacher during the one-on-one interview. The teacher interviewed also expressed that instructors felt unprepared in providing timely whole group lessons, re-teaching specific strands to students in need, and establishing remediation and enrichment groups to increase performance among all students in a timely manner.

According to the teacher and principals interviewed (i.e., T, P101, and P102), teachers at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 would prefer to do their own scoring and item analysis rather than central office. Teacher leaders on the Academic Achievement Team appreciated the central office database, but preferred to do all of the work in house when it came to bi-weekly, interim, quarterly, and 18-week data analysis as observed during the observation of the Academic Achievement team meeting and expressed during the one-on-one interview with the teacher. T1 also expressed in the one-on-one interview that content specialists do an effective job creating aligned assessments, but teachers want to hold on to those benchmark tests with the item analysis in hand to provide timely remediation, collection of resources and teaching materials, and to begin setting up cluster groups to give each student the enrichment and/or intervention needed to enhance student performance.

Question 4: Does Stellar School 101 and 102 maintain a central database that includes each student's test scores, placement information, demographic information, attendance, behavior indicators, and other variables useful to teachers? The principals at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 both have a central database within the school that is linked to the county's research and planning department's data warehouse as shared during the one-on-one interviews with the principals (i.e., P101 and P102). P101 and 102 reported in the one-on-one interview that they used Mac School, Web reporting, and Data Quest to track attendance, behavior, and demographic information that was critical in analyzing the performance of students that make up Adequate Yearly Progress groups.

One principal commented:

> In addition to databases we have in house, we break down demographics in bi-weekly and benchmark testing within the building based upon adequate yearly progress categories. We can go back last year and track a child's benchmark testing (reading and math) and compare to a current year. This is helpful when tracking kids that start off a little bit slow to see if it consistently increases as they go through the year, checking for validity in that (P102, p. 4, April 22, 2012).

The principals interviewed (i.e., P101 and P102) shared that Stellar County School District maintains a central database that includes each student's test scores, placement information, demographic information, attendance, behavior indicators, and other variables useful to teachers to drive decisions that enhance quality instruction and student achievement. The Principals shared during the one-on-one interview (i.e., P101 and P102) that they had access to all data listed by simply logging into the data warehouse for their school. Observations at the Academic Achievement Team meetings confirmed that teachers received these timely reports from the principal along with standardized and objectives-based tests results during the Academic Achievement Team meetings or at other opportune times.

Question 5: Do teams and teachers receive timely reports from the central database to assist in making decisions about each student's placement and instruction? Both principals (i.e., P101 and P102) reported during the one-on-one interviews that the Research and Planning Department for Stellar County was effective at updating the central database with disaggregated reports to share with teachers to drive decisions at the Academic Achievement Team meetings throughout the school year.

One principal responded:

> "Yes. During the summer, Research and Planning puts the testing data on its data website. We pull the data off and I meet with each individual grade level. We make informed decisions for the upcoming school year. Last year I met with each grade level once a week. However, this year, I go to each grade level about twice a month. I hit two to three grade levels a week, or if they ask me to come for a special circumstance during an off week, I will go to them (P102, p. 4, April 22, 2012).

The district liaison described:

> Data is made available, again, based upon the capabilities of the division. Stellar County School District, is very fortunate to have a department that provides data to the schools, including the benchmarks, the SOLs, all of that. In certain divisions, the administrators of the schools have to collect that themselves and put it in some format that they can use to determine students' needs. That is why the state attempted to come up with datacation, which they are finding out is not that successful. Not because… and they were doing this to try to save the administrators a lot of time in collecting the data to put into old report forms, the quarterly report forms. However, the datacation is finding, in some situations, not to be as successful for implementation. It is not as compatible.
>
> From my perspective, Stellar County School District's central database is one of the better ones that are accessible to the division. The reason why I say that is that there is always waiting on the state to get theirs, but as far as the benchmarks… it seems as though you all (Stellar County) get those on a regular basis with a short turnaround time after the tests are administered. I can't say that for all the divisions, but again the capacity for different divisions, just like for schools, is very different. Either because of lack of funding, large division versus small division. Just like one division that I work with… excluding the superintendent, there are four people that I work with in Central Office. That is it. The assistant superintendent is the reading specialist, the math specialist, the Federal programs person, the k-12 person, and all of that. That one poor person! (L, pp. 6-7, April 19, 2012).

P101 and P102 described during the one-on-one interview that teachers were not provided any data from the central database. Teachers received their data from the building principal.

One teacher commented:

> Our principal is really terrific about getting data to us. After the summer, we each received a binder with our kids from last year and the new kids that we were about to take with all of their student performance…This year, in particular, I really felt like that HAT and PALS scores from the spring for our incoming class (and my class from last year was my same class that moved up this year with the exception of about five new students) really made me feel armed and prepared right from the get go. It was really useful…The data was given to us by students and their scores. She did, however, have some other

> graphing issues for the HATS. It was also listed school by school, so we could see how we compared with other schools within the county, which was an eye opener (T, pp. 6-7, April 20, 2012).

According to the teacher's response during the one-on-one interview, teachers on just one occasion did not receive timely reports from the central database for the semester benchmark tests to assist in making decisions about each student's placement and instruction. Teachers prefer to keep the quarterly and semester tests and perform the item analysis in house to ensure timely access to data to provide remediation and enrichment as indicated in the one-on-one interview with the teacher. P101 and P102 divulged during the one-on-one interview that the principal would download test results as well as other student performance data and place them in a binder or send them out electronically to each grade level team. Observations of the Academic Achievement team meeting at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 revealed that student performance data were disaggregated, analyzed, discussed, and action plans were developed to drive quality instruction, curriculum alignment, and to develop remediation and enrichment groups.

Question 6: Are yearly learning goals set for the school by the Academic Achievement Team, utilizing student learning data? Each principal interviewed (i.e., P101 and P102) used student learning data to set student learning goals for the year. The yearly learning goals referred to as success indicators were mandated by the Department of Education to be embedded into the school improvement plan. Monitoring of learning goals (i.e., success indicators) by district leadership and the district liaison to ensure goals and objectives were aligned with student performance data as was observed at Stellar School 101 and 102 during the Academic Achievement team meeting. One principal commented, "Each grade level presents at the Academic Achievement Team meeting and student learning aligned with success indicators are developed along with remediation groups" (P101, p. 5, April 21, 2012). As stated in a previous section,

Another principal commented:

> We set yearly learning goals for ourselves within the school through our school improvement plan. When we are putting together, as a team, our CIP plan, we look at where we were last year and determine what percentage of growth we would like to make

> for the current year. The administrative team within the school and the leadership team-which consists of teachers (P102, p. 4, April 22, 2012).

The district liaison added:

> Yes, they have to. That is a state requirement. The division develops their INDISTAR plan based upon the school's INDISTAR…if a school had trouble with third grade math as an issue or an area of concern. The division should have somewhere in their plan some supportive strategies for helping that school in math in third grade (L, p. 5, April 9, 2012).

A collaborative approach involving the Academic Achievement Team, district leadership, and recommendations from the district liaison drove the learning goals established for each school as observed and recorded during the Academic Achievement Team observations at each study school, one-on-one interviews (T, L, P101, P102, D1, And D2), and the document review.

Question 7: Does the Academic Achievement Teams at Stellar School 101 and 102 monitor school-level student learning data?

One principal commented:

> Yes. I will give you an example. This year, my director called me and she wanted me to look at two particular classrooms in third grade because there was a discrepancy between the ability and achievement tests. The ability tests they had taken in second grade and the achievement tests that were taken at the beginning of third grade. There was a discrepancy between ability and achievement; therefore, she wanted me to take a look at the teacher and the students within the classroom to see if they were on target (P102, p. 5, April 22, 2012).

Another principal added:

> Yes. The Academic Achievement Team is an effective systematic approach used by the district for accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction…I think that all schools should have such a team…it helps everyone to get a better explanation/interpretation of data (P101, p. 4, April 21, 2012).

The district liaison reported:

> Well, there are two types that we look at. The summative, which are basically the SOLs. They are more like showing… umm… what the students have learned. Then there are the formative, which to me summative can be used as formative. Formative is… umm... assessment for learning and not of learning. So, if it is for learning, I take that same information or others…the benchmarks. I may use it as summative, but it also looks at… So okay, based on this (and hopefully the division has developed benchmarks based upon or according to the SOL pacing guide), I will look at these areas that our students still did not do too well in. So here comes the remediation and intervention brainstorming, because you are not going to hold up a whole grade level because of that. You are just going to pull out the ones (the bubble kids and the kids that did not do that well) and make some kind of decisions that relate to the instructional strategies that you are going to offer these students over and beyond the regular. Of course, at grade level meetings they should be developing, if anything, units that either pre-test students so that it saves them time. Why would I be teaching a fourth or fifth grade SOL skill like 5.5 if I pre-test and everyone already knows it? I would just move on to 5.6 or whatever is next in the pacing guide (L, p. 6, April 9, 2012).

Interviewees (i.e., T, L, P101, P102, D1, and D2) reported that a key practice of the Academic Achievement Team was to monitor student leaning data to enhance and sustain student achievement. The district liaison and principal (i.e., L and P102) explained in the one-on-one interviews that district leaders go beyond looking at school performance, but drill down deeper to compare class to class to assess student performance and teacher effectiveness. The interviews with L, P101, and P102 also revealed that district leaders, principals, and teachers use summative and formative data to build strategic remediation lessons and intervention groups as a corrective action to enhance student performance.

Question 8: Does the Academic Achievement Team at Stellar School 101 and 102 use student learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and instructional strategies?

A teacher commented:

Curriculum and instructional strategies are revised based on student performance from grade level made test. They don't always look the same, but we like to give them balanced assessment strategies, but plenty of practice with multiple choice. We use Test Maker and a few other things, and we try to evaluate on things that we feel we taught effectively over the course of a two-week period. We decide as a team what we will be assessing and what type of assessment we want to use, and how it corresponds with our lesson plans and what we are teaching. We do try to stay together on that as a grade level. Each grade level is expected to do some form of this. It is not a school-wide format (T, p.7, April 20, 2012).

The district liaison added:

The problem comes…when there is an alignment problem. The problem comes… when the division is really not, that they don't have good specialists to go in and develop good benchmarks that are aligned with the SOL. Prime example, there have been situations where certain benchmarks (by hook or crook, I cannot understand if it was on purpose) for SOLS that are supposed have been taught in the third quarter appear on the second quarter test. That causes a problem. That is not giving a good formative assessment to the teacher because I haven't even taught that. Now it would be a whole different thing if that was on the pacing guide and your grade level teachers hadn't gotten to it yet. That would be a different problem- why haven't you gotten to it? Let's look at that. Can't say it is all the students. That is the first thing they say. "Well, they started low. We had them low at kindergarten and they are still low." What have you done for them? It couldn't be a whole class. What have you done for them as it relates to addressing those few? Is there a minority that you didn't need to hold back, but maybe you should have let them go on. It depends on the strengths of the division and their teachers (L, p. 8, April 9, 2012).

One principal commented:

Yes. When we are looking at um… the student data, especially when we are looking at the individual analysis and the strand data, we look at particular questions that the students may be having difficulty in. Looking at the stems within those questions to see if it is something that the student may not just understand- that particular type of

> question. If so, and we have a lot of students that are having difficulty with it, then we might need to teach that particular concept in isolation. Or, if it is based on a particular strand and students are having difficulty with computation and estimation… okay, then what can we do as a school? Usually, an issue like that is school wide. We notice it is school wide for us, so we know that we need to be doing more to teach computation and estimation school wide. That is one of the reasons why we are really concentrating in the lower grades with basic facts. Because as the students go from one grade level to the next without having their basic facts down, then it will impact when we start testing SOL-scores will go down because the students did not have their computation and estimation skills, that they did not develop the prerequisites for (P102, p. 3, April 2, 2012).

The Academic Achievement Team used student learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and instructional strategies as indicated through the one-on-one interviews and observed during the observation of the Academic Achievement Team meeting at Stellar School 101 and 102. The interviewees (i.e., T, L, P102) explained that evaluating strengths and weaknesses in the curriculum was accomplished by ensuring pacing guides, benchmark tests, bi-weekly assessments, and the county's assessments were formatted and aligned with the state curriculum that would be tested at the end of the school year. The observation and review of the meeting minutes from the Academic Achievement Team meeting at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 revealed the Academic Achievement Team monitored student learning data twice per month to make adjustments to the pacing guide, curriculum, and assessment tools as needed.

Question 9: Does the Academic Achievement Team at Stellar School 101 and 102 use student learning data to plan instruction?

One principal commented:

> Yes. I will do another example. In science last year, we were struggling. The teachers were not doing a lot of hands on activities, especially in the area of scientific investigations. So, getting the science specialist in here, making sure… helping me make sure that the teachers were incorporating science experiments into the curriculum, making sure that they were teaching the different processes of scientific investigation. Umm, in that they fully grasp what they are supposed to be doing (P102, p. 9, April 22, 2012).

A teacher shared:

Yes. Quite a bit, and I am going to say formal data that I feel is completely necessary: the bi-weekly performance, PALS testing, benchmark testing to see where they are at the end of each of the nine weeks. Behavior and attendance data are hugely under viewed… I don't think that we recognize that as much of a player as it is. You get so into each day, but sometimes we let things go and let it slip through the cracks- it will hit you like a ton of bricks when you realize how much this child is missing school and how it affects their learning (T, p. 8, April 20, 2012).

It was seen during the observations of the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 that data drove every decision that was made. Captured in the Academic Achievement Team meeting minutes was evidence of data being provided in a timely manner to all stakeholders at strategic points of the academic year to plan instruction to meet the needs of all students except for the one instance when district leadership mandated that the semester benchmark tests and data be scored and analyzed by the division.

Question 10: Does the Academic Achievement Team at Stellar School 101 and 102 use student learning data to identify students in need of instructional support or enhancement?

One principal commented:

Based on the data, we will sit down and look at if we need to readjust our remediation groups. So remediation groups are always flexible because some students may have difficulty in one particular strand, and may not have difficulty in another. So, it is based upon the needs of the child. This year, we identified fourth graders that will be current fifth graders, and we established an accelerated math program, so that those students would be ready for Algebra I by eighth grade (P102, p. 6, April 22, 2012).

The district liaison commented:

The first thing that I recommend to any school is look at your SOLs. If possible, if you are going by individual student, I would go by long term, looking at little Tommy from this year, last year and year before to see what her strengths were, where were her weaknesses. You know… areas. Now grade wise, it is perfect to do longitudinal studies-

> for this year, last year and the year before. What happened with that is that you get one of two stories- you will see there is a weakness here, and it is has been here across the years. OR you might see one group in that time period that bombed out, and you look back and see that this same group took the PALS and bombed out. So you look back and say, what do we do about this group of kids- what are we going to do to close that gap that has been present since third grade and is still causing some difficulty? (L, p. 9, April 9, 2012).

The principal at Stellar School 102, the district liaison, and Academic Achievement Team observations done at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 revealed that the Academic Achievement Team used student learning data to identify students in need of instructional support or enhancement on an ongoing basis. Remediation and enrichment groups were monitored and adjusted as needed following discussions and recommendations made at the bi-weekly Academic Achievement team meetings. Remediation and enrichment groups were set as early as the first 9 weeks of school based on the prior year's Standards of Learning data and other documentation as listed in the documents reviewed. The teacher and principals interviewed (i.e., T, P101 and P102) commented that remediation groups continued to change strategically throughout the year up until the final Standards of Learning test was given.

Question 11: Does the Academic Achievement Team at Stellar School 101 and 102 review the results of unit pre/post tests to make decisions about the curriculum and instructional plans and to "red flag" students in need of intervention and enhanced learning opportunities?

One principal shared:

> Yes, student learning data is used to identify students in need of instructional support and/or enhancement…We red flag students based on data. The Title I teachers support in reviewing pre-post tests and remediation and enrichment is planned based on the outcome (P101, p. 5, April 21, 2012).

Another principal added:

> We do pre- and post- testing at the beginning of the year, and with the new Response to Intervention (RtI) remediation programs Moving With Math and Making Connections,

> we have that data to assist us also. After we look at the pre- and/or post-testing what we do is sit down and look at the kids that might qualify for Tier II intervention under RtI, and the kids that qualify for Tier II intervention, we make sure that they get interventionists that work with them using the designated programs Moving with Math and Making Connections for reading to assist them (P102, p 6, April 22, 2012).

One principal shared the following when asked if there were any questions that the interviewer should have asked to better understand the district's use of the Academic Achievement team.

The principal commented:

> In coming into a situation where the school was not making AYP, and having a lot of the resources, the monetary resources needed, and then you have all of those resources and you meet the goals that the Central Office wanted you to meet… In order to sustain that same level of expectation… I understand the "yes, you made it," and the data reflects that you made it. But the same resources are needed to continue to make it and maintain it. I feel those resources shouldn't be taken away. Especially monetary resources when it comes to tutorial programs (P102, p. 7, April 22, 2012).

Principals responses from the one-on-one interviews (i.e, P101 and P102) and documents reviewed indicated that pre/post test were used to make decisions about the curriculum and instructional plans to red flag students in need of intervention and enhanced learning opportunities. Observations done at the Academic Achievement Team meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 allowed the observer to see how the distribution of resources and outcomes were monitored to ensure effective use of money, materials, and/or human resources. The effectiveness of every remediation program, interventionist, and materials allocated were evaluated to assess the impact on student progress and documented in meeting minutes reviewed. The Principal at Stellar School 102 shared during the one-on-one interview that the resources allotted to turn a school around should remain with that school for at least two years after the school has shown growth in student achievement (P102, p. 7, April 22, 2012).

Summary of the Ongoing Monitoring and Analysis of Student Performance Data

District leadership in Stellar County demonstrated a clear vision of student achievement through the use of data that was clearly documented and seen in the review of documents and observed at the Academic Achievement meetings at Stellar Schools 101 and 102. Quality instruction and enhanced student achievement were the focus of the school board, central office leadership, principals, and teachers that was reported by the interviewees (i.e., L, T, P101, P102, D1, and D2) during the one-on-one interviews. The systematic process of the Academic Achievement Team enhanced student achievement through ongoing assessments and progress monitoring, timely access to assessment results, and resource allocation were needed. The Academic Achievement Teams also used attendance, discipline, parent contact, and other forms of student performance data to develop school, grade level, and specific classroom plans to improve individual student performance that was observed in the documents reviewed and during the Academic Achievement team meetings at both schools. The instructional needs of individual students were identified by content and skill level via pre/post tests prior to designing remediation or enrichment programs for students as noted in meeting minutes reviewed. Programmatic and individual instructional adjustments were the result of ongoing progress monitoring as observed during the observations of the Academic Achievement team meetings and documents reviewed. Pre/post testing results, attendance, discipline, and assessment data provided the Academic Achievement team members quantitative information that was charted, reviewed, and analyzed to allow district leadership a clear picture of where resources were most needed. The observer witnessed how students in all groups demonstrated growth through a transparent and consistent charting of student performance that was discussed and refined at each Academic Achievement Team meeting.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

Introduction

The study was conducted to attempt to better understand the specific practices the Academic Achievement Team employs to reduce declines in student achievement and sustain increased student achievement for at least two or more consecutive years at the elementary school level. The research question asked was: What are the specific practices district level leadership employs through Academic Achievement Teams to reduce declines in student achievement and sustain increased student achievement for at least two or more consecutive years at the elementary school level?

In the review of literature, it was noted that Robinson and Buntrock (2011) reported that districts that implement a systematic approach to turning around and sustaining pupil progress at low performing schools saw more than a 40 percent rise in average proficiency. Robinson and Buntrock made the following recommendations for school districts to enhance and sustain student achievement at the school level:

- Develop a comprehensive turnaround plan and implementation strategy.
- Provide clear and visible support for dramatic change from the highest levels.
- Recognize the vital importance of leadership.
- Provide systemic support around instructional strategies, including frequently administered formative assessments, prompt distribution of relevant data and professional development on the effective use of data to drive instruction.
- Provide principals with the freedom to act.
- Recognize that school turnaround must start at the district level (Robinson & Buntrock, 2011, p. 6).

Conceptual Framework of the Findings

The qualitative method used to address the research question did not assess cause/effect relationships between practices of the Academic Achievement Team and student achievement. Rather, the school assistance model (i.e., Academic Achievement Team) one school system employed to increase and maintain high levels of student achievement at the elementary school

level were investigated. The conceptual framework, presented in the image of a three-legged stool in Figure 7, was created based on the analysis of the evidence collected and illustrates the three components of Academic Achievement Team that were identified to support enhanced and sustained student achievement. One leg of the conceptual framework represents the operational and organizational structures of the Academic Achievement Team process, the second leg is composed of principal leadership qualities and practices within the Academic Achievement team process, while the third leg consists of those activities related to ongoing analysis and monitoring of student performance data within the Academic Achievement team process. It is suspected that if any leg of the stool is broken, out of place, removed, or not functioning properly, enhanced and/or sustained student achievement could be compromised.

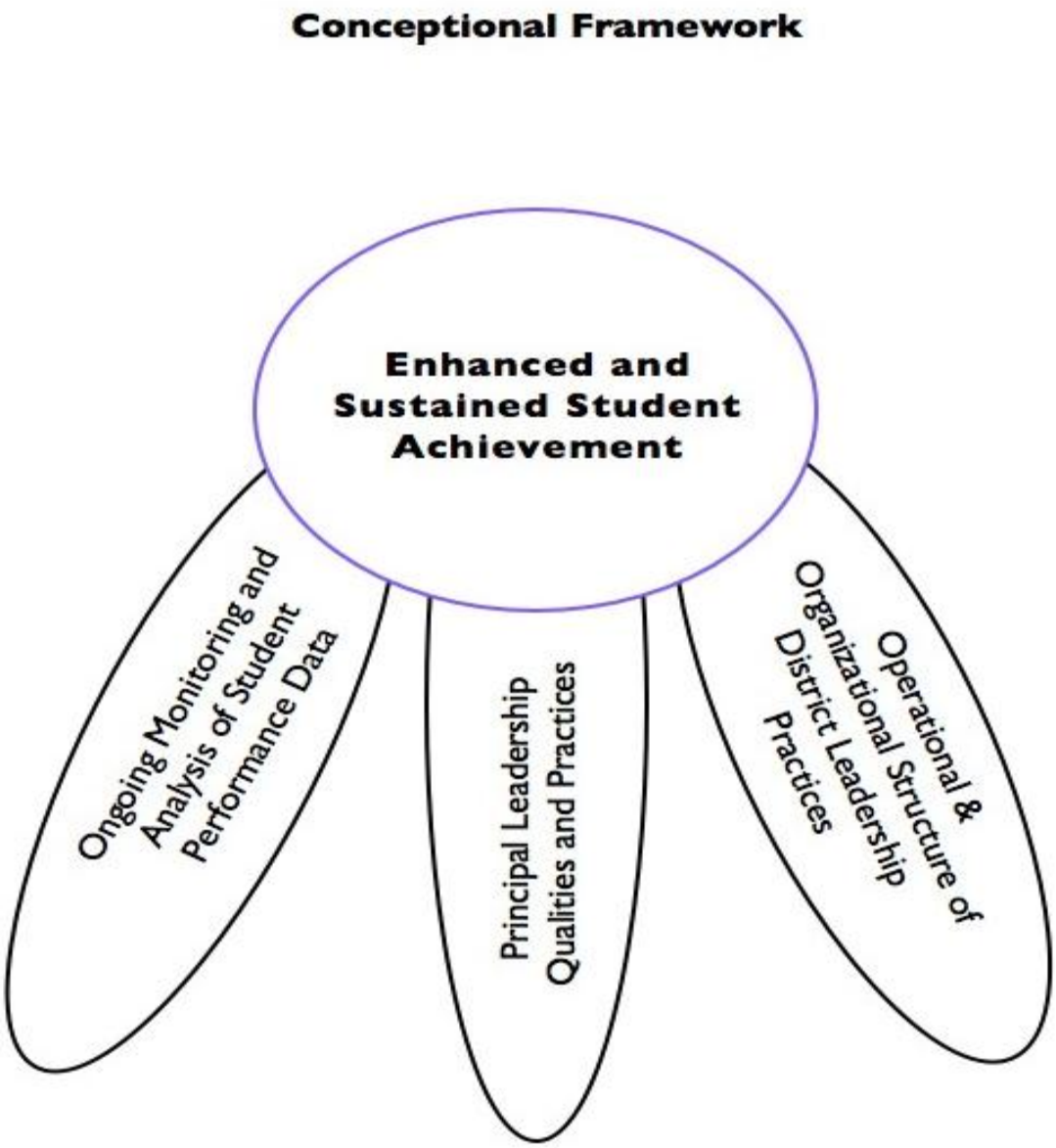

Figure 7. Depicts the conceptual framework illustrating the three categories supporting enhanced and sustained student achievement.

Operational and organizational structure of district leadership practices. The operational and organizational structure of district leadership practices were embodied in the implementation of Academic Achievement Teams. Five key themes were identified relative to the operation of the Academic Achievement Teams: (a) making student achievement the main purpose; (b) prescribing an Academic Achievement Team framework with operational and

organizational structures that empowered teachers, principals, district leadership, and other professionals to think outside of the box for solutions to achieve student success; (c) scheduling time with the appropriate team and non-team members; (d) establishing district leadership's role as partner versus supervisor; and (e) asking the right questions to facilitate school-wide reflective practice through the use of data.

Making student achievement the main purpose. The primary purpose expressed by all stakeholders of the Academic Achievement Team, as evident in interview responses, observations, and document reviews, was to involve key stakeholders in a structured process to improve student achievement. Setting a common goal of increased student achievement for all stakeholders was a key feature of district leadership practices for Academic Achievement Teams. Early on, Brookover and Lezotte (1982) found that effective schools had a clear school mission. More recently, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) suggest that leadership who sets a clear sense of direction can have a significant impact on student achievement. In addition, Robinson and Buntrock (2011) report transformational and sustainable success at scale requires substantial engagement by school district leaders with the capacity and will to initiate, support, and enhance dramatic change. Robinson and Buntrock did not mention setting a common goal as a district leadership practice, but recommended that staff replacements be made where naysayers were hurting the culture by going against the goal, vision, and mission established by the building principal and/or leadership team. In the review of relevant research, setting a clear vision, mission, and purpose involving all stakeholders was found to be a practice long reported that enhanced student achievement (Brookover & Lezotte, 1982; Flath, 1989). However, what is not clear is whether establishing a vision, mission, or goal is the role of the district or the building principal or both. Additional research is needed to clarify this operational feature.

Prescribing operational and organizational structures that empowered teachers, principals, district leadership, and other professionals to think outside of the box. Effective schools capitalize on expertise being generally distributed among many, not concentrated in a single person (Lezotte, 1991). The operational and organizational structures of the Academic Achievement team process prescribed by district leadership allowed all stake-holders an active role in developing, monitoring, and evaluating action plans that enhanced student achievement. This operational and organizational structure of empowering teachers, principals, district leadership, and other professionals to think outside of the box for solutions to achieve student

success is consistent with Connelly's (2001) findings. Connelly simply stated instead of teachers and staff working in isolation or in hierarchies, teachers working in learning communities operating as a team using the expertise of the group to drive instruction and student achievement are more successful. Individuals in a learning community use data to identify student weaknesses or gaps in instruction and become agents of the solution.

Establishing district leadership's role as partner versus supervisor. In some of the leadership models first identified in the Michigan University leadership studies in the 50's, Katz and Kahn (1952) claimed that effective leaders modeled leadership as a way to achieve goals as a community. Katz and Kahn posited that leadership emphasizes the leadership role as being one of leading teams rather than one of leading individuals toward a common goal. More recently Leithwood and colleagues (Leithwood et al., 2008) have posited that school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed. Thus, key operational features uncovered of the Academic Achievement Team process that pertain to district leadership functions include:

- Ensuring appropriate data are being analyzed
- Ensuring resource/support needs are identified and articulated to appropriate individuals in central office
- Ensuring that the work of the committee is communicated to instructional directors and the division improvement team
- Ensuring that the work of the committee is completed as described by the committee and according to the school improvement plan (state or local).

It is not known if each of these features is important to the successful operation of an Academic Achievement Team or if one of these features in more important than others. Additional research is needed to tease apart the cause/effect aspects of the various components and their relationships to one another.

Scheduling time with the appropriate team and non-team members. Brewer (2001) suggests that the role of the instructional leader includes: (a) focusing on instruction, (b) building a community of learners, (c) sharing decision making, (d) sustaining the basics, (e) leveraging time, (f) redirecting resources to support a multifaceted school plan, and (g) creating a climate of integrity, inquiry, and continuous improvement. In this context, it has been suggested that school districts create enabling conditions that turn around schools based on data (Robinson &

Buntrock, 2011). Creighton (2007) reported educational leaders on all levels are realizing that meaningful information can only be acquired through a proper analysis of data and that good decisions are based on a thoughtful process of inquiry and analysis. The available evidence indicated that district leadership expected Academic Achievement Team members to review, analyze, and discuss data with non-Academic Achievement Team members in order to make decisions involving quality instruction and student learning. In addition, after the analysis of data was completed, district leadership apparently worked to ensure resource and support needs were identified and provided to the appropriate individuals. Additional research is needed to better understand how best to structure the team's data analysis and synthesis processes to assure the team's time is spent effectively/efficiently.

Asking the right questions to facilitate school-wide reflective practice through the use of data. Creighton (2007) reported that one of the expected areas of reform is to create data systems that inform decisions and assess in a systematic way the quality of teaching and learning in schools. In other words, the data analysis process should facilitate the asking of the right questions to identify the relevant questions and lead to effective, data-based solutions. The findings would suggest the questions generally fall into four categories: student learning, problem solving, action planning, and implementation. Student learning questions address how, what, and which students may or may not be learning. Problem solving questions explore why certain students are not learning. Problem solving questions explore resources, time on task, types of activities, qualifications of staff, and skills of the people teaching the content and how the content is being assessed. Action planning questions ask who will be assigned to what task and when will the plan be implemented. Additional questions surrounding action planning ask how will the plan impact teaching and learning and how will the effectiveness of the plan be measured. Questions in reference to the implementation of the action plan require ongoing monitoring of student learning data. Data are analyzed and questions are posed to assess the effectiveness of the plan and to determine if adjustments need to be made. More research is needed to determine if these are the right set of questions, how best they might be posed, if order is a factor, and so on.

Principal Leadership Qualities and Practices

Replacing the principal. "The Transformational Reform Model listed replacing the principal as a practice to turnaround low performing schools" (Kutash et al., 2010, pp.4-5). The review of relevant student performance data for the schools studied revealed that increased student performance did not occur until the new principal was assigned to each study school. The notion that replacing the principal to increase student performance is supported by Jacobson's et al. (2007) findings that the practices of the newly assigned principal were the catalyst for the school's success. This observation indicates that the Academic Achievement Team process in isolation may not be the single factor to facilitate increased and sustained student achievement in the schools studied. Earlier research stated, leadership at high-needs schools presents special challenges, but the skills it demands benefit principals everywhere (Johnson & Public Agenda Foundation, 1997). More recently, according to Leithwood et al. (2008), the first factor in creating school turnaround included removal of inept principals and incompetent personnel. Additional research is needed to better understand how the leadership qualities and practices of the newly assigned principals may have been related to improved student achievement. The component of principal qualities and practices includes six themes: setting direction, communicating clear directives, reviewing curriculum and instruction, sharing leadership, responsibilities, connecting family and community, and providing organizational and operational structures.

Setting direction. Leithwood and Riehl (2005) suggest that leaders who set a clear sense of direction have a significant impact on student achievement. It was found that setting direction was just one of many practices displayed by the principals of the schools studied. The two instructional leaders developed a clear vision and highly visible mission statement that was clearly communicated to students, parents, all school employees, central office personnel, and community partners. It appears that the vision and mission statement assisted the school in developing goals, developing a positive school culture, and setting high expectations for all learners. The principals reflected a positive (can do) attitude while communicating the schools' vision and mission. Over thirty years ago, Edmonds (1979) referred to the fact that high-achieving schools reflect clear and consistent communication of the leaders' expectations of high performance from both students and staff. More recently, Ylimaki et al. (2007) has proposed that all leaders should secure the building from unwanted distractions and redefine the school to

focus on teaching and learning as a practice to set direction. However, more research is needed to determine the significance of setting direction in relation to the other practices and qualities that were displayed.

Communicating clear directives. The two principals at the schools studied appear to have consistently communicated goals, assessment targets, benchmark targets, and action plan timelines to measure student achievement. The evidence indicated that the principals inspected what they expected by conducting daily walk-throughs, participating in grade level meetings, reviewing student performance charts displayed in each classroom, and meeting with individual teachers and/or teacher teams to evaluate effectiveness of action plans. The ongoing feedback communicated by each principal established positive connections and relationships with Academic Achievement Team members and non-members, the entire instructional and non-instructional staff, and part-time employees. In short, the communication practices of the principals were consistent with Leithwood and Riehl's research (2005) that found that the emotional intelligence involved in giving personal attention to an employee increases the employees enthusiasm, reduces frustration, communicates a sense of mission, and indirectly increases performance. Additional research is suggested to better understand what key features of quality communication relate to teacher performance and impact student achievement.

Reviewing curriculum and instruction. "School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 29). It has long been known that frequent and careful monitoring of quality instruction and student academic progress is a major attribute of effective principals and their schools (Brookover & Lezotte, 1982; Edmonds, 1979). According to Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), instructional leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning. The principals at the two schools studied were found to be immersed in benchmark testing, data analysis, bi-monthly assessments, progress monitoring, daily walk-throughs, weekly observations, and attending grade level meetings to ensure the curriculum was being properly taught and assessed. In other words, the evidence indicates that the principals expected all teachers to teach and believed that all students could learn. If it discovered that students are not learning, the data indicated that low student performance would be examined by all stake-holders at the Academic Achievement Team meeting. At that meeting, problem solving would occur, ideas would be shared, an action plan would be drafted, and individuals would be assigned to assist that teacher and those students

to remedy the factors blocking of student learning. Knowing the curriculum and being knowledgeable of best practice in the areas of teaching and learning was demonstrated by both principals. Further research is needed to study how the beliefs and expectations of principals are translated into actions of teachers and students to improve achievement and if one approach to accomplishing this task is better than another

Sharing leadership responsibilities. It was found that the principals at both schools studied provided leadership opportunities that were delegated during the Academic Achievement Team meetings. Early on, Flath (1989) described instructional leadership as those actions (e.g.., setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers) a principal takes or delegates to others to promote growth in student learning. Leadership responsibilities delegated by the principals were found to include: developing remediation schedules, hiring remediation staff, providing strategic staff development to teachers when and where needed, assisting the principal in conducting classroom observations, overseeing the implementation of action plans with fidelity, collaborating with teacher teams in analyzing student performance data, and ensuring instruction followed the pacing guide set by the school district. Collaboration and shared leadership practices facilitated by the principals at both schools was consistent with relevant research claiming that school leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed (Leithwood et al., 2008). Further research is suggested to better understand how shared leadership is best implemented in low performing schools to increase student achievement.

Connecting family and community. Powell (2004) claims that constituents and families must be partners with schools working for the success of all students in order to improve pupil progress. Consistent with this claim, the available evidence indicates that the two principals at the two schools studied have worked diligently to gain the confidence of parents and to improve the reputation of the school within the local community. Ongoing communication between the school staff, families and school community was observed to be present in both cases. The principals were found to have used a variety of methods including newsletters, weekly parent folders and reports, school website information, phone calls, emails, and the schools' marquees to connect the programs and services provided by the school to families in the local community. In addition, is discovered that the principals would provide transportation for families to participate in school events and solicit active business partners and community

persons to donate time, money, and other resources to improve the overall instructional program of the schools. These practices are consistent with the findings reported by Harris et al. (2006) that community involvement is critical in at-risk schools as deliberate efforts must be made to gain the confidence of parents and to improve the reputation of the school within the surrounding community. One of the ways the principals of the two schools studied attempted to facilitate community involvement was through the encouragement of parents, business leaders, and community volunteers to participate in the schools' student tutorial and mentoring programs. Further investigation is needed to better understand how best to connect schools with family and community and how these connections influence student achievement, especially when used with other operational practices that have been suggested principals use.

Providing organizational and operational structure. It has been suggested that the principal of a school must convey, by every action, that the first priority of the school is the success of every student (United States Department of Education, 1999). In that context, Ylimaki et al. (2007) has proposed that principals should employ the following operational practices:

- Setting Direction: All leaders should secure the building from unwanted distractions and redefine the school to focus on teaching and learning.
- Redesigning the Organization: All leaders should develop their schools as effective organizations that support and sustain performance of teachers and students in the areas of curriculum, discipline, parent involvement, morale, beautification, and decision making.
- Managing the Instructional program: All leaders should provide instructional support, monitor classroom activity, buffer staff from distractions, and hire staff whose personal priorities aligned with the school mission (Ylimaki et al., 2007).

The principals at the two schools studied appear to have implemented the suggestions advanced by Ylimaki et al. and to have created school environments that included both order and discipline. In addition, the schools' schedules, appearance, and routines reflected organized and structured procedures. Furthermore, all disciplinary standards in place suggested that both schools were places where teachers teach and students learn.

The principals at both Stellar Schools 101 and 102 were very knowledgeable in curriculum and instruction. Both principals inspected what they expected through ongoing

teacher observations and by attending grade level meetings regularly to ensure quality instruction and increased student achievement was occurring daily. In addition, Leithwood and Riehl's (2005) found that the emotional intelligence involved in giving personal attention to an employee increases the employees' enthusiasm, reduces frustration, communicates a sense of mission and indirectly increases performance. The attention the principals gave to individual teachers, grade level teams, and the action plans developed at the Academic Achievement Team meetings held all stake-holders accountable in completing tasks to increase student. In addition to teacher accountability, the principals at both Stellar Schools 101 and 102 based all decisions on what was best for the students and not the adults.

Ongoing Monitoring and Analysis of Student Performance Data

The third leg of the conceptual framework found in Figure 7 represents themes that related to ongoing monitoring and analysis of student performance data. In the 70's, frequent and careful monitoring of student academic progress was found to be a major attribute of effective principals and their schools (Brookover & Lezotte, 1982; Edmonds, 1979). More recently, Creighton (2007) claims that today's educational climate makes it imperative for all schools to collect data and use statistical analysis to help create clear goals and recognize strategies for improvement. Data recorded from the Academic Achievement Team meetings, documents reviewed, and one-on-one interviews revealed that ongoing monitoring and analysis of student performance data was the third component of the conceptual framework that described district practices implemented at the two schools studied.

Testing. Several researchers (Bernhardt 2004; Creighton, 2007; Robinson & Buntrock; 2011; Walberg, 2007) have found that annual and yearly benchmark testing is essential to monitoring increased student progress. Further, Walberg (2007) has claimed that the purpose of testing is to see what a student knows and can do, and/or what a group of students know and can do. A finding consistent with these researchers findings, it was noted that efforts to increase student achievement for all students at the two school examined begins by testing every student annually with the same standardized test in basic subject areas so that each student's year-to-year progress can be tracked. In addition to the annual testing, it was found that each student was tested at least three times each year to determine progress toward standards-based objectives. What is not clear is how often students or groups of students need to be formally assessed to

effectively examine progress in student achievement. Additional research is needed to determine the necessary balance with testing and teaching in an efficient monitoring system and whether "one size fits all" or different settings/situations require different methods/procedures.

Receiving timely reports. Walberg (2007) has claimed that districts working to increase productive use of data should make data available in a timely fashion as the district, school, and classroom levels. Consistent with Walberg's claim, it was found that the district leadership in Stellar County has made it a standard practice to ensure principals and teachers receive timely reports of results from standardized and objective based tests. In addition, district leadership maintains and allows principals access to a central database that includes each student's test scores, placement information, demographic information, attendance, behavior indicators, and other variables useful to teachers. The database is maintained by the district's Research and Planning Department and updated daily. The evidence indicates that stakeholders used these data in making informed decisions pertaining to a student's placement and instructional needs. It is not known if receiving timely data through a centrally run database is a key feature for the ongoing monitoring of data to increase student achievement. There may be numerous school districts that may not have the size, money, resources, or infrastructure to support a central database to house data. Therefore, additional research is needed to examine the relationship between the use of a central database and student achievement.

Monitor school-level student learning data. Walberg (2007) has stated that districts working to increase student achievement should use data to focus on student learning and to adjust instruction to better meet the needs of all students. Likewise, Creighton (2007) has observed that educational leaders on all levels are realizing that meaningful information can only be acquired through a proper analysis of data and that good decisions are based on a thoughtful process of inquiry and analysis. In line with Walberg's and Creighton's statements, it was found that the district leadership practices employed at the schools studied resulted in the use of data in the following ways:

- To assess strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and instructional strategies
- To plan instruction
- To identify students in need of instructional support or enhancement
- To set yearly learning goals for the school
- To make decisions about the curriculum and instructional plans and

- To “red flag” students in need of intervention and enhanced learning opportunities.

In addition, it was found that district leadership required all classroom teachers to display student performance charts in each classroom reporting student progress on the Standards of Learning objectives, providing all stakeholders, including the students, a snapshot of individual and classroom performance. The evidence accumulated indicated that remediation and enrichment services were implemented where needed as a response to the results reported on the student performance charts. Furthermore, it was found that student learning within remediation programs was monitored bi-monthly and retesting of students occurred weekly resulting in increased academic achievement. Research is needed to understand how best to present, communicate, and use in monitoring school-level student learning data effectively and efficient.

Implications

If a clear research-based model for turning around low-performing schools existed, there would not be so many of them (Manwaring, 2011). Accordingly, Manwaring notes that researchers have to examine the implementation process of each case, track each model, determine whether student achievement has occurred, and then identify key components of the change process that explain improved student achievement. The study of the Academic Achievement Team process employed by Stellar County was conducted in an attempt to better understand a specific school assistance model a particular district employs to enhance and sustain student achievement at the elementary school level. Based on the evidence accumulated, a conceptual model with three components (i.e., operational and organizational structures of district leadership practices, principal leadership qualities and practices, and analysis and monitoring of student performance data) was presented that summarized the findings. A criticism of the conceptual framework is that it is based on the examination of a school assistance process used in two elementary schools in one urban school district. How applicable the findings and the model based on the findings are to other schools/divisions is not yet known. It is suggested that further research be conducted with respect to the three components and their key features to better understand their impact on improved student achievement in other settings.

Recommendations for Future Research

The evidence gained in the study of two elementary schools in Stellar County that have been successful in increasing student achievement is harmonious with what other researchers

have reported (Bernhardt 2004; Creighton, 2007; Fullan, 2010; Robinson & Buntrock, 2011; Walberg 2007). A review of the findings suggest a variety of additional research studies should be considered to examine research questions like:

- How does the district leadership practice of establishing school-based academic teams (or a similar mechanism) that follow a systematic approach enhance and sustain student achievement?
- What are the most effective leadership practices a building principal might use with a school-based academic team (or a similar mechanism)?
- How can enhanced and sustained student achievement occur in the absence of a school-based academic team (or a similar mechanism)?
- How does enhanced and sustained student achievement solely depend on the principal? And if so, does the principal develop practices employed by district leadership through an Academic Achievement Team (or a similar mechanism)?
- How does ongoing assessment and analysis of data help to enhance and sustain student achievement through the implementation of a systemically mandated school-based academic team (or a similar mechanism)?
- How does other divisions use school-based Academic Achievement Teams (or similar mechanism) and are they effective in enhancing and sustaining student achievement?
- What other divisions have adopted a systematic approach to enhancing and sustaining student achievement through school-based academic teams (or a similar mechanism) and how are those teams structured, managed, supervised, and evaluated?
- Do school districts have a systematic process through the use of school-based academic teams (or a similar mechanism) that continues to enhance and sustain student achievement after the effective principal leaves?

Practice recommendations. Based on both the limitations and delimitations discussed and the nature of the research design, no recommendations for practice based on established cause/effect relationships between components of the assistance model and improved student achievement can be made. It is important to note the study was not based on representative sampling procedure. Only two purposefully selected elementary schools were examined and

both of the schools were in the same school district. Therefore, the results in the study cannot be generalized to elementary schools in different districts, to middle or high schools, and so on.

The delimitations of the study center on the exclusionary decision to limit the inquiry to one division's usage of a single assistance model to increase and maintain student achievement. Other assistance models including providing no assistance at all were not studied. In addition, the scope of the study was restricted by the choice to examine only two elementary schools that had demonstrated improved student performance within the selected division. Schools that had not increased student achievement were not examined.

Concluding Statement

The qualitative inquiry resulted in the creation of the Monroe School Assistance Conceptual Framework that pertains to the use of Academic Achievement Teams to increase student achievement. One component of the framework represents the operational and organizational structures of district leadership practices, the second component is composed of principal leadership qualities and practices, while the third component consists of those activities related to ongoing analysis and monitoring of student performance data. It is suspected, but not established, that if any component described in the framework were out of place, removed, or not functioning properly, enhancing and/or sustaining student achievement would be compromised.

Reflections

An Additional Component. In reflecting on the research conducted, the conceptual framework pertaining to the use of the Academic Achievement Teams to increase student achievement may have a fourth leg consisting of a teacher component. "School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning" (Leithwood et al., 2008, p. 29). The action plans, recommendations for student progress, allocation of resources, testing, and the ongoing monitoring of student performance mandated by the Academic Achievement Team are implemented first by the classroom teacher. Further research needs to be conducted to better understand the effects of the teacher component in enhancing and sustaining student achievement within the Academic Achievement Team operational framework. It is suggested that future research focus on teacher behaviors at schools with an Academic Achievement Team (or a similar mechanism) to gain insight into how those behaviors affect the student achievement within the operational assistance framework being used.

The Academic Achievement Team models the Virginia Department of Education's school improvement model. It is also important to recognize that the Academic Achievement Team process implemented by Stellar County evolved from the Virginia Department of Education's School Improvement Model for schools in need of improvement. The model requires each individual school hold an academic achievement meeting. Each school classified as a school in need of improvement must meet at the end of each marking period. During this meeting, schools and district level teams review a variety of data points and use the information to evaluate the efficacy of the improvement plan strategies. Schools must complete and submits via Indistar a quarterly report or generate a data report using an approved data reporting tool. Next, the division leadership team meets with the building principal to discuss the quarterly data. The following items must be included as part of the discussion:

- A review of strategies and data analysis for students who are at risk of failing a reading or math Standards of Learning Test.
- A review of strategies and data analysis for students who have been identified for Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening intervention
- A review of strategies and data analysis for students who failed the Standards of Learning reading or math assessments in 2011-2012
- A review of strategies and data analysis for students who are below grade level in reading and math based on a disability.
- A review of the districts Indistar improvement plan
- A review of updates needed to the school's Indistar improvement plans
- Minutes from this meeting including the aforementioned agenda items are required to be entered onto the Indistar Website. The minutes should include decisions made as a result of discussions regarding the quarterly meeting (Virginia Department of Education, 2012).

The Academic Achievement Team process used by Stellar County mirrors the school improvement model used by the Virginia Department of Education in several ways. First, there is a set criteria developed by the district leadership of Stellar County that establishes which schools will have an Academic Achievement Team based on student performance on the Standards of Learning Tests. Second, once schools are identified, they are divided into three tiers based on levels of accreditation and student performance. Third, the Academic

Achievement Team provides a formal structure in which central office support and expertise are shared with building level expertise as a partnership to improve student academic performance. Next, the Academic Achievement Team evaluates the quality of the school improvement plan and monitors implementation in the specific content areas of concern. Instructional decisions are guided by data and evaluated by the Academic Achievement Team at the monthly meetings. Finally, the meeting minutes are recorded and a set agenda is used to capture the aforementioned items required of the Academic Achievement Team. The minutes and student performance data are then uploaded to a central database to be monitored and evaluated by the district leadership and liaison coach.

Next steps. The improvement of student achievement at Stellar Schools 101 and 102 for two consecutive years was found to be coincidental with the implementation of Academic Achievement Teams. However, a cause-effect relationship between the use of Academic Achievement Teams and increased student achievement was not established. Further research is recommended to judge that causal relationship as well as the applicability of Academic Achievement Teams (or similar assistance procedures) to other school settings. In addition, other factors not examined in this research effort (e.g., teacher behaviors) should be considered to determine their role, if any, in enhancing student achievement in low performing schools.

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APPENDIX A

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

DOMAINS	FUNCTIONS	PRINCIPAL and DISTRICT LEADERSHIP BEST PRACTICES
Curriculum and Instruction	• Setting Direction • Establishing: Vision, Mission, Goals, and Expectations • Communication • Data Collection • Progress Monitoring	District, schools, and principals have a clear direction and relentless focus on student achievement through instructional improvement in the classroom is the focus of the school board, central office leadership, and principal based on the ongoing analysis of data. District leaders strengthen the core message by increasing teacher's skills and knowledge engaging students in learning, and ensuring curriculum challenges students.
Family and Community Connections	• Involvement Strategies • Forms of communication • Multi-Agency Approach	District, schools, and principals are linked to parents, community, and related agencies to provide support for students and educators and to intervene early in difficulties experienced by students and/or schools.
Leadership Development	• Effective Manager • Organizational Structure • Collaboration • Shared Leadership • Staff/Professional development	District, schools, and principals development of teacher, principal, and district level leadership to share effective practices from each other and from the larger research base. Responses are then developed to deliver job embedded staff development.

APPENDIX B

ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: PRINCIPAL AND DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Study: Case Study of Academic Achievement Teams in Stellar County

Time of the Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Study Description: I am interested in why your school is successful. In particular, I am interested in the qualities and practices of the Academic Achievement Team in enhancing and sustaining elementary student achievement.

I will be recording our interview via Audacity and audiotape to have an accurate transcription. You will be given a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

Confidentiality- pseudonyms will be used and information will not be shared with others.

The tapes will be destroyed after all research has been completed.

What is your current position?

Briefly describe your duties.

How long have you held your current position?

How long have you been in educational leadership?

What is an Academic Achievement team?

Who is on the AAT?

What is the role of the district leadership representative at the AAT meeting?

What is the purpose of the AAT?

How does the AAT work?

How long are the AAT meetings?

How does the AAT provide a formal structure in which central office support and expertise are shared with the principal and teachers?

Do you have a school improvement plan? In what ways does the AAT evaluate the quality of the school improvement plan? May I have a copy?

How does the AAT monitor implementation in the specific content areas of concern in reference to student performance? Are minutes kept? May I have accesses to them?

How are instructional decisions guided by data?

How are instructional decisions evaluated by the AAT?

What type of data are required by the AAT to inform instruction at the building level?

How are those data made available?

When are those data made available?

Who is responsible for providing that data?

Are teachers trained in the use of these data? If so, how is that accomplished?

Are principals trained in the use of these data? If so, how is that accomplished?

What type of data provided by the district do you find most effective in assisting teachers to examine student performance?

What type of data provided by the district do you find most effective in assisting the principal in examining and analyzing student achievement and teacher performance?

What type of data is required to inform instruction in the classroom?

Do these data come from the district? If so, in what type of format?

How are those data made available to teachers?

How are those data made available to principal?

How are those data made available to other stakeholders?

When are those data made available?

How do those who attend the AAT meeting share the information with those who do not attend the AAT meeting?

Is time set aside for non-AAT members to review, analyze, and discuss data with AAT team

members in order to make decisions involving quality instruction and student learning?
How do you check to see if implementation and next steps from the AAT meeting are happening in the classroom and in all areas of the building?

How do district leadership and/or designees from central office or other stakeholders check to see if implementation and next steps from the AAT meeting are happening in the classroom and in all areas of the building?

Do you track year to year student progress? If so, how is it done?

Do you use benchmark tests? How often?

Do you find this helpful?

What do you do with this data?

Do teachers receive timely reports regarding student achievement such as an item analysis of student, classroom, and grade level results from county and state standardized and objectives-based tests?

How are these reports delivered?

Does the principal review the reports with individual teachers? Groups of teachers?

Would teachers prefer to do their own item analysis or would they prefer the district to grade, score, and disaggregate the data for them? Please explain

Do you have a central database? What is in it? Who maintains this? Who has access t it? Who monitors this?

Does the AAT receive timely reports from the central database to assist in making decisions about each student's placement and instruction?

Do you think the Academic Achievement Team is an effective systematic approach used by the district for accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction to address specific student and school academic needs? Please explain.

What are the most beneficial functions of the Academic Achievement Team process?

What are the least beneficial tasks required of the Academic Achievement Team?

What is the format or protocol for AAT from August to June?

What is the goal or function of the AAT during each nine-week period?
1st
2nd
3rd
4th

How does the AAT team, utilizing student-learning data?

How does the AAT monitor school-level student learning data?

What role does district leadership have in monitoring school-level student data?

Does the presence of district leadership hinder or foster courageous conversations at the AAT meetings?

How are resources allocated as a result of the AAT meeting?

Does the AAT use student learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the teacher and/or teacher teams?

Does AAT use student-learning data to plan instruction?

Does the AAT use student learning data to identify students in need of instructional support or enhancement?

Does AAT review the results of unit pre/post tests to make decisions about the curriculum and instructional plans and to “red flag” students in need of intervention and enhanced learning opportunities?

Is there a question that I didn’t ask that I should have that would better help me understand how district level leadership uses the AAT through the use of data to increase and/or sustain student achievement in elementary schools?

APPENDIX C

ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: LIAISON COACH

Study: Case Study of Academic Achievement Teams in Stellar County

Time of the Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Study Description: I am interested in why your school is successful. In particular, I am interested in the qualities and practices of liaison coach in enhancing and sustaining elementary student achievement through the use of data within the Academic Achievement Team.

I will be recording our interview via Audacity and audiotape to have an accurate transcription. You will be given a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

Confidentiality- pseudonyms will be used and information will not be shared with others.

The tapes will be destroyed after all research has been completed.

What is your current position?

Briefly describe your duties.

How long have you held your current position?

How long have you been in educational leadership?

What is an Academic Achievement team?

Who is on the AAT?

What is the role of the liaison coach representative at the AAT meeting?

How are liaison coach members assigned to schools?

How important is it to have the right person assigned to the right AAT?

What is the purpose of the AAT?

How does the AAT work?
How long are the AAT meetings?

How does the AAT provide a formal structure in which central office support and that of the liaison coach are shared with the building principal and teachers?

Do you require a school improvement plan?

Do you evaluate the quality of the school improvement plan?

Do you provide feedback on the school improvement plan with the AAT?

Does the liaison coach monitor implementation of school improvement plan in the specific content areas of concern in reference to student performance? Explain…

How are instructional decisions guided by data?

Are instructional decisions made by the AAT evaluated by liaison coach? Explain.

What type of data does liaison coach expect to be used by the AAT to inform instruction at the building level?

How are those data made available?

Who is responsible for that data?

What data does the liaison coach responsible for?

When are those data made available?

Who is responsible for providing that data?

Are teachers trained in the use of these data? If so, how is that accomplished?

Are principals trained in the use of these data? If so, how is that accomplished?

What type of data provided by the district do you find most effective in assisting teachers to examine student performance?

What type of data provided by the district do you find most effective in assisting the principal in examining and analyzing student achievement and teacher performance?

What type of data is required to inform instruction in the classroom?

Do these data come from the district? If so, in what type of format?

How are those data made available to teachers?

How are those data made available to principal?

How are those data made available to other stakeholders?

When are those data made available?

Does liaison coach have checks in place to ensure those who attend the AAT meeting share the information with those who do not attend the AAT meeting? Please explain..

Does liaison coach check to see if non-AAT members review, analyze, and discuss data with AAT team members in order to make decisions involving quality instruction and student learning?

How does liaison coach and/or designee from central office or other stakeholders check to see if implementation and next steps from the AAT meeting are happening in the classroom and in all areas of the building?

Does liaison coach track year to year student progress? If so, how is it done?

Does liaison coach mandate use benchmark tests? How often?

What data do liaison coach find most helpful in monitoring student progress? If so, how… If not, explain…

What do you do with this data?

Does liaison coach provide teachers with timely reports regarding student achievement such as an item analysis of student, classroom, and grade level results from county and state standardized and objectives-based tests?

How are these reports delivered?

Does the liaison coach review the reports with individual teachers? Groups of teachers?

Do you have access to all data?

Does the AAT receive timely reports from the central database to assist in making decisions about each student's placement and instruction?

Do you think the Academic Achievement Team is an effective systematic approach used by the district for accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction to address specific student and school academic needs? Please explain.

What are the most beneficial functions of the Academic Achievement Team process?

What are the least beneficial tasks required of the Academic Achievement Team?

What is the format or protocol for AAT from August to June?

What is the goal or function of the AAT during each nine-week period?
1st
2nd
3rd
4th

How does the AAT utilize student-learning data?

What role does liaison coach have in monitoring student-learning data as part of the AAT?

What role does liaison coach have in monitoring school-level student data?

Does the presence of liaison coach hinder or foster courageous conversations at the AAT meetings?

How are resources allocated as a result of the AAT meeting? What role does liaison coach have in providing resources and materials?

Does the liaison coach use student-learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the teacher and/or teacher teams? Explain how praise and constructive criticism is delivered and the procedures for accountability are implemented?

Does the liaison coach use student learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the principal and/or teacher teams? Explain how praise and constructive criticism is delivered and the procedures for accountability are implemented?

Does liaison coach use student-learning data to assist school teams in planning instruction?

Does the AAT use student learning data to identify students in need of instructional support or enrichment?

Does the AAT review the results of unit pre/post tests to make decisions about the curriculum and instructional plans and to “red flag” students in need of intervention and enhanced learning opportunities? How do you know?

Is there a question that I didn’t ask that I should have that would better help me understand how district level leadership uses the AAT through the use of data to increase and/or sustain student achievement in elementary schools?

APPENDIX D

ONE-TO-ONE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: TEACHER

Study: Case Study of Academic Achievement Teams in Stellar County

Time of the Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

Study Description: I am interested in why your school is successful. In particular, I am interested in the qualities and practices of the Academic Achievement Team in enhancing and sustaining elementary student achievement.

I will be recording our interview via Audacity and audiotape to have an accurate transcription. You will be given a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

Confidentiality- pseudonyms will be used and information will not be shared with others.

The tapes will be destroyed after all research has been completed.

What is your current position?

Briefly describe your duties.

How long have you held your current position?

How long have you been in educational leadership?

What is an Academic Achievement team?

Who is on the AAT?

What is the role of the district leadership representative at the AAT meeting?

What is the purpose of the AAT?

How does the AAT work?

How long are the AAT meetings?

How does the AAT provide a formal structure in which central office support and expertise are shared with the principal and teachers?

Do you have a school improvement plan? In what ways does the AAT evaluate the quality of the school improvement plan? May I have a copy?

How does the AAT monitor implementation in the specific content areas of concern in reference to student performance? Are minutes kept? May I have accesses to them?

How are instructional decisions guided by data?

How are instructional decisions evaluated by the AAT?

What type of data are required by the AAT to inform instruction at the building level?

How are those data made available?

When are those data made available?

Who is responsible for providing that data?

Are teachers trained in the use of these data? If so, how is that accomplished?

Are principals trained in the use of these data? If so, how is that accomplished?

What type of data provided by the district do you find most effective in assisting teachers to examine student performance?

What type of data provided by the district do you find most effective in assisting the principal in examining and analyzing student achievement and teacher performance?

What type of data is required to inform instruction in the classroom?

Do these data come from the district? If so, in what type of format?

How are those data made available to teachers?

How are those data made available to principal?

How are those data made available to other stakeholders?

When are those data made available?

How do those who attend the AAT meeting share the information with those who do not attend the AAT meeting?

Is time set aside for non-AAT members to review, analyze, and discuss data with AAT team members in order to make decisions involving quality instruction and student learning?

How do you check to see if implementation and next steps from the AAT meeting are happening in the classroom and in all areas of the building?

How do district leadership and/or designees from central office or other stakeholders check to see if implementation and next steps from the AAT meeting are happening in the classroom and in all areas of the building?

Do you track year to year student progress? If so, how is it done?

Do you use benchmark tests? How often?

Do you find this helpful?

What do you do with this data?

Do teachers receive timely reports regarding student achievement such as an item analysis of student, classroom, and grade level results from county and state standardized and objectives-based tests?

How are these reports delivered?

Does the principal review the reports with individual teachers? Groups of teachers?

Would teachers prefer to do their own item analysis or would they prefer the district to grade, score, and disaggregate the data for them? Please explain

Do you have a central database? What is in it? Who maintains this? Who has access t it? Who monitors this?

Does the AAT receive timely reports from the central database to assist in making decisions about each student's placement and instruction?

Do you think the Academic Achievement Team is an effective systematic approach used by the district for accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction to address specific student and school academic needs? Please explain.

What are the most beneficial functions of the Academic Achievement Team process?

What are the least beneficial tasks required of the Academic Achievement Team?

What is the format or protocol for AAT from August to June?

What is the goal or function of the AAT during each nine-week period?
1st
2nd
3rd
4th

How does the AAT team, utilizing student-learning data?

How does the AAT monitor school-level student learning data?

What role does district leadership have in monitoring school-level student data?

Does the presence of district leadership hinder or foster courageous conversations at the AAT meetings?

How are resources allocated as a result of the AAT meeting?

Does the AAT use student learning data to assess strengths and weaknesses of the teacher and/or teacher teams?

Does AAT use student-learning data to plan instruction?

Does the AAT use student learning data to identify students in need of instructional support or enhancement?

Does AAT review the results of unit pre/post tests to make decisions about the curriculum and instructional plans and to “red flag” students in need of intervention and enhanced learning opportunities?

Is there a question that I didn’t ask that I should have that would better help me understand how district level leadership uses the AAT through the use of data to increase and/or sustain student achievement in elementary schools?

APPENDIX E

STELLAR COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT TEAMS (AAT) PROCESS – 2011/12

Purpose

Academic Achievement Teams will direct and monitor a range of accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction to address specific student and school academic needs. The AAT will provide the mechanism to improve student performance while achieving full accreditation and full AYP status for the school and school district. The AAT will provide a formal structure in which central office support and expertise are shared with building level expertise as a partnership to improve student academic performance. The AAT will evaluate the quality of the school improvement plan and monitor implementation in the specific content areas of concern. Instructional decisions will be guided by data and evaluated by the AAT. Academic Achievement Teams will be established at all Stellar County Public Schools that:

- Receive accreditation with warning because of not meeting current year benchmarks in a specific content area,
- Receive accreditation through three year averaging but not meeting annual benchmark,
- Do not meet AYP with specific student groups in specific content areas.
- Relied on a three year calculation or Met AYP using safe harbor because of continuous growth in a content area but not meeting annual benchmarks.

AAT Tiers

Three AAT tiers will be identified and central office instructional directors will assign schools to a tier. Schools in each tier will be expected to engage in a range of accountability actions appropriate for their tier. Criteria for assignment to the tiers are outlined below.

Tier I schools

Elementary	Secondary
Schools not fully accredited, schools accredited with a three-year average (or just making the target), and Title I schools that did not make AYP for two consecutive years in the same content area and in choice or SES.	Schools not fully accredited, schools relying on three year calculations and/or barely making the target.

Tier II schools

Elementary	Secondary
Schools fully accredited that made AYP but are still involved in school improvement, or elementary schools fully accredited for consecutive years in the same content area or	Schools that experienced a drop in performance or those that have some risk in meeting accreditation.

on the Title I watch list.	

Tier III schools

Elementary	Secondary
Schools that made full accreditation and did not make AYP.	Schools that made full accreditation or AYP based upon three year calculations or safe harbor.

Academic Achievement Team Meetings and Protocol

Composition of team and schedule

- The principal is responsible for establishing meeting times and following AAT protocol outlined in this document.
- The AAT membership and schedule will be established no later than Friday, September 9, 2011 and reported to the supervising instructional director and Penny Blumenthal in Research and Planning. Each Tier I and II team will be assigned a central office support member. Tier III principals will be responsible for implementing the process at their schools.
- Schools should include the following staff on the AAT. Additional staff can be included as needed to address performance and accountability issues.
    - Principal
    - AP/resource teacher
    - Test coordinator/CAR
    - All departmental/grade chairs (including special education)
    - Content coaches/remediation coordinators
    - Title I staff (where applicable)
    - Central office representative(s) for Tier I and II schools (see *Attachment A* for specific AAT school assignments).
- Tier I schools will meet no less than twice a month. Schools in Tier II and III will meet no less than once a month, and more often as needed to analyze data and provide instructional support in a timely manner.
- AAT meetings should last no more than two hours. If agenda items cannot be completed, a follow up meeting will be scheduled to be held within five business days to complete the agenda and begin implementation of the strategies identified.

Meeting organization

- The AAT will agree upon the decision making process (consider consensus of the majority of the members attending the meeting.
- At the beginning of each meeting, the AAT will approve meeting agendas developed by the principal. The principal will consider agenda items from the primary central office representative member of the committee with input from any committee members, teachers, and the director.
- AAT members will have an opportunity to ask questions regarding minutes from the prior meeting.

- Each meeting will include a review of data, instructional program and remediation updates, and a discussion of the effectiveness of resources. Discussion should include data and updates for courses, classes/sections, and students.
- Data to be reviewed at each meeting by tier is outlined in *Attachment B*.
- The primary central office representative will be responsible for:
    1. Ensuring appropriate data are being analyzed,
    2. Ensuring resource/support needs are identified and articulated to appropriate individuals in central office,
    3. Ensuring that the work of the committee is communicated to instructional directors and the division improvement team.
    4. Ensuring that the work of the committee is completed as described by the committee and according to the school improvement plan (state or local).
- Sample agendas, minute documents, and discussion guides are included in *Attachment C.* **A School Space site will be established in September for the submittal of all agendas, minutes, and performance reports.** Submittal of all elementary agendas and minutes will be monitored prior to and within five days respectively of each meeting. All secondary agendas and minutes will be monitored prior to and within five days respectively of each meeting.

Data analysis outcome expectations

- Use various, including but not limited to, student performance, remediation, and benchmark data to develop school, grade level and specific classroom plans to improve individual student performance.
- The instructional needs of individual students will be identified by content and skill level and an individual remediation plan will be developed for each student. Classroom teachers will be responsible for monitoring progress and therefore the effectiveness of remediation programs for each student.
- Data analysis will be ongoing so that programmatic and individual instructional adjustments are made as needed.

Principals involved in the AAT process are required to report quarterly to their instructional director on student outcomes and progress. Information on specific reporting formats, process and timelines will be provided by October 12, 2011.

Required data to be reviewed by meeting. Schools will add other available and relevant data.

Month	Data Topics for Discussion
September Status:	Spring Standards of Learning and Stellar Achievement Test Reports (i.e., bank account, Adequate Yearly Progress Summary, 34 reports) Spring Cogat Results (Elementary) Spring Measures of Academic Performance Results by Fall Location Continuous School Improvement Plan (Due October 3)
October Status:	Fall Measures of Academic Performance Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening Results (Elementary) 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
November Status:	Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) Students At-Risk List
December	4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
January Status:	Measures of Academic Performance Results Attendance Data Student Discipline Data
February *Observed/Not Observed Comments*	Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) PALS Results (Elementary) Continuous School Improvement Plan Update (Due February 17)
March *Observed/Not Observed Comments*	Access for ELL Results Student Discipline Data 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
April	Stellar Achievement Tests and Standards of Learning Writing Prompt Results Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) Students At-Risk List (High)
May	Measures of Academic Performance Results Student Discipline Data Standards of Learning simulation and/or 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)

* Stellar Achievement Test Reports (This is a pseudonym.)

Sample Agenda and Minutes Documents and Discussion Guides

Academic Achievement Team (AAT) Agenda
2011-2012

School Name:	**Meeting Date:**

Agenda:

Item	**Description**
I.	Review/approval of minutes from previous meeting.
II.	Review progress of action plans from previous meeting.
III.	Review new student data to determine if plans and initiatives are working; discuss new plans and initiatives that must be undertaken or adjustments to current plans based on data review. Review student intervention and remediation efforts and their effectiveness on student performance based upon data.
IV.	Review and assign action items from this meeting to the individual responsible to report at the next meeting.
V.	Review additional items captured today that may impact instruction.
VI.	Other agenda items.

Specific data reports to be reviewed:

Academic Achievement Team Minutes
2011-2012

School Name:	**Meeting Date:**

Academic Achievement Team **Members and Guests Present:**

Minutes:

Item	**Description**
I.	Describe the progress of action plans from previous meetings.
II.	Student data: Data reviewed: Plans/initiatives reviewed: Revisions to or new plans needed: Student intervention/remediation effectiveness:
III.	Action items from this meeting assigned to the individual responsible to report at the next meeting.
IV.	Review additional items captured today that may impact instruction.
V.	Other items addressed.

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT TEAM (AAT)
DISCUSSION GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

USING THIS DOCUMENT:
This document is intended to assist you with facilitating your AAT data discussions to identify areas of strength within the instructional program and areas of need. You can use these guiding questions to analyze your school data with your school team to develop strategies to meet areas of need, which should be reflected in your School Improvement Plan. This document is meant to serve as a guide and questions should be added or deleted based on the data from your school. You may want to refer to this document throughout the school year for guidance as you lead the team to reflect on various types of data and the effectiveness of strategies.

Accreditation and AYP Performance:
Directions: Review your SOL Performance Target Bank Account Spreadsheet and AYP Spreadsheet. Use the data to discuss the questions below.

ACCREDITATION PERFORMANCE
Looking at four years of pass rates, what trends do you see across content areas for school-level pass rates?
Were the school-level pass rates similar to your school's benchmark data from the previous school year? If not, explain why there is a discrepancy in the data.
Looking at four years of pass rates, what trends do you see across content areas for each grade level?
Were the grade level pass rates similar to your school's benchmark data from the previous school year? If not, explain why there is a discrepancy in the data.
What are the pass rates for special tests (VAAP, Plain English, etc.)? If scores were lower than you expected, how could they be improved this year?
What other observations do you have about your school's accreditation data?
AYP PERFORMANCE
Is this an increase or decrease over last year's Reading pass rate for each group and for the school?
Looking at three years of Reading pass rates, what trends do you see from one group to the next and for the school?
Is this an increase or decrease over last year's Math pass rate for each group and for the school?
Looking at three years of Math pass rates, what trends do you see from one group to the next and for the school?
How do these results align with results from last year's benchmark tests (as you tracked progress) for the AYP subgroups and the school?
What other observations do you have about your school's AYP data?
Based on accreditation and AYP data, what are the areas of focus for your school?
What are your attendance rates at each grade level and how might they have affected your areas of focus?

Do patterns in discipline referrals seem to have any correlation to the focus areas?
Based on the analysis of your school and grade level achievement data, are any needs evident?

Reporting Category Analysis
Directions: Review your 34 Report Spreadsheets. Use the data to discuss the questions below.

What trends are evident in the reporting categories for the focus area?
How does this year's results compare to trends over the past three years?
What trends are evident across grade levels?
Is there any AYP student group whose performance in the identified reporting category(s) is particularly weak? (use EIMS or State SOL Subgroup performance by reporting categories)
Are there any trends in individual teacher's class scores for this reporting category? (use Stellar 34 report by teacher report)
Based on the analysis of your reporting category data, are any needs evident?

Student Performance by Question Analysis
Directions: Review your SPBQ Reports located on PEMS. Use the data to discuss the questions below.

Are there specific SOL indicators in each reporting category and specifically the target category, that when compared to the district performance, are of concern?
How important is each of these target indicators to the overall student performance?
Have areas of concern been evident for a number of years, or the most recent year?
Based on the analysis of your SPBQ data, are any needs evident?

Benchmark Data

Directions: Review your benchmark data. Use the data to discuss the questions below.

What was the pass rate for each content area for the school (Grades 3-5)?
What was the pass rate for each grade level by content area?
What was the pass rate for each teacher by content area?
What were the pass rates for your AYP subgroups in Reading and Math?
Based on your benchmark assessment results, are the strategies you've put into place at this point effective? How do you know?
Are there strategies that are proving to be effective that can be shared across teachers and grade levels?
How will you modify your remediation supports based on the benchmark assessment data?
Have your teachers conducted an item analysis of the assessment results to identify areas of whole class remediation and areas for individual student remediation?
How will your grade level teachers communicate with remediation staff (PALS, Second Helping, etc.) to ensure remediation efforts are targeting specific skills with individual students based on benchmark data?
Are remediation programs structured to pre-teach as well as following up on skills to support grade/course level performance?
What will your teachers do differently before the next benchmark assessment to address areas of weakness within their classes and individual students?
Based on the analysis of your benchmark data, are any needs evident?

Note: To facilitate a discussion of your school achievement data, you should provide the AAT with copies of your school Bank Account, AYP spreadsheet, 34 reports (school-level), and benchmark data, at a minimum.

Classroom and Instructional Organization

Directions: The following set of questions can be used to facilitate a discussion among your grade level or content area teams. Grade level teams can share a general overview of their team's discussion and the potential needs and gaps identified or they can report back to the AAT on each question. The groups of questions are only meant to guide reflection of the instructional program. Questions should be modified, added, or deleted as appropriate for your school.

CLASSROOM AND INSTRUCTIONAL ORGANIZATION
How much time is devoted to teaching in the focus areas?
What is the experience level of the teachers teaching the focus area?
Do the teachers have a strong personal understanding of the concepts in the curriculum?
What time of day is this focus area taught?
How is the student enrollment in classes organized?
How do teachers promote a positive, caring atmosphere in the classroom that supports learning?
How do the faculty and staff demonstrate high expectations for all students into their actions daily?
Potential Needs Identified:

School Demographics:
Directions: Review your student demographic data by grade level and AYP subgroup and your school profile data. Use the data to discuss the questions below.

During the past 5 years, how have the demographics of your student population changed?
How has staff been prepared to respond to the needs of students within growing demographic groups?
Which AYP subgroups (White, Black, Hispanic, LEP, Disabilities, Disadvantaged, Asian) will contain 50 or more students? *(These subgroups will be counted for AYP calculations.)*
Do student demographics seem fairly consistent across grade levels? Explain any differences.
What other observations do you have about your school's student demographic data?
Based on the analysis of your school demographic data, are any academic, social, emotional, or programmatic needs evident?

Resources and Strategies
Directions: The following sets of questions can be used to facilitate a discussion among your grade level or content area teams. Grade level teams can share a general overview of their team's discussion and the potential needs and gaps identified or they can report back to the AAT on each question. The groups of questions are only meant to guide reflection of the instructional program. Questions should be modified, added, or deleted as appropriate for your school.

RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES (to address a specific need)
What strategies are used to teach this focus content? Are they recognized as research-based or best practices?
What learning resources are used including textbooks, technology, hands on activities? Are these resources effective?
How are skills, concepts, and content in this focus area assessed? Are the assessments an accurate reflection of student learning?
How are teachers developing activities that engage students in their own learning? Do these engaging activities include higher order, critical thinking, and problem solving?
What opportunities are there in the learning environment for students to collaborate and solve authentic problems?
What opportunities are there for students to carry on the learning in this focus area beyond the classroom?
Potential Needs Identified?

PLANNING FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING
How do leadership, faculty, and staff plan for learning experiences using state and division resource and pacing guides?
How are teachers planning for learning beginning with the desired end result in mind?
How are teachers planning for learning activities that take into consideration different learning needs of the students?
How do teachers work together to build engaging learning activities in this core content area?
How do teachers actively share results on an ongoing basis and plan together to address underachievement?
How do teachers take into consideration the home-school connection when developing learning activities?
What communication strategies exist between teachers and interventionists to ensure appropriate supports are provided for students? How is this communication monitored for effectiveness?
Potential Needs or Gaps Identified:

TESTING SKILLS AND INTERVENTION/REMEDIATION
How are students made familiar with the vocabulary for this content area being used on the state assessment?
How are test taking skills incorporated into the learning activities?
Are teacher-made tests well aligned with the taxonomy level and performance expectations of the SOL being tested and how is this validated?
What are teachers doing in this focus area when students are not displaying mastery of the content?
How is the school organized to ensure success of the students taking the VGLA?
Potential Needs or Gaps Identified:

Identification of Strategies:
Directions: Once the needs and gaps have been identified for your school, select strategies that can be included in the school improvement plan. Add rows below as needed.

IDENTIFIED NEEDS/GAPS	STRATEGIES BASED ON RESEARCH/BEST PRACTICE
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT	
CLASSROOM AND INSTRUCTIONAL ORGANIZATION	
STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS	
RESOURCES AND STRATEGIES	
PLANNING FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING	
TESTING SKILLS AND INTERVENTION/REMEDIATION	

APPENDIX F

OBSERVATION GUIDE: ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT TEAM

Proposed Study: Leadership Qualities and Practices that Enhance and Sustain Student Achievement at the Elementary School Level Through the Use Academic Achievement Teams

Time of Observation:
Date:
Place:

Academic Achievement Teams will direct and monitor a range of accountability actions to improve student performance, curriculum, and instruction to address specific student and school academic needs. The AAT will provide the mechanism to improve student performance while achieving full accreditation and full AYP status for the school and school district. The AAT will provide a formal structure in which central office support and expertise are shared with building level expertise as a partnership to improve student academic performance. The AAT will evaluate the quality of the school improvement plan and monitor implementation in the specific content areas of concern. Instructional decisions will be guided by data and evaluated by the AAT. Academic Achievement teams will be established at all Stellar County Public Schools that:

- Receive accreditation with warning because of not meeting current year benchmarks in a specific content area,
- Receive accreditation through three year averaging but not meeting annual benchmark,
- Do not meet AYP with specific student groups in specific content areas.
- Relied on a three year calculation or Met AYP using safe harbor because of continuous growth in a content area but not meeting annual benchmarks.

Meeting Organization Tasks

- The AAT will agree upon the decision making process

Observed/Not Observed
Comments:

- At the beginning of each meeting, the AAT will approve meeting agendas developed by the principal. The principal will consider agenda items from the primary central office representative member of the committee with input from any committee members, teachers, and the director.

Observed/Not Observed
Comments:

- AAT members will have an opportunity to ask questions regarding minutes from the prior meeting.

Observed/Not Observed

Comments:

- Each meeting will include a review of data, instructional program and remediation updates, and a discussion of the effectiveness of resources.

Observed/Not Observed
Comments:

- The primary central office representative will be responsible for:
  Ensuring appropriate data are being analyzed,

Observed/Not Observed
Comments:

Ensuring resource/support needs are identified and articulated to appropriate individuals in central office,

Observed/Not Observed
Comments:

Ensuring that the work of the committee is communicated to instructional directors and the division improvement team.

Observed/Not Observed
Comments:

Ensuring that the work of the committee is completed as described by the committee and according to the school improvement plan (state or local).

Observed/Not Observed
Comments:

- Use various, including but not limited to, student performance, remediation, and benchmark data to develop school, grade level and specific classroom plans to improve individual student performance.

Observed/Not Observed
Comments

- The instructional needs of individual students will be identified by content and skill level and an individual remediation plan will be developed for each student. Classroom teachers will be responsible for monitoring progress and therefore the effectiveness of remediation programs for each student.

Observed/Not Observed
Comments

- Data analysis will be ongoing so that programmatic and individual instructional adjustments are made as needed.

Observed/Not Observed
Comments

- Principals involved in the AAT process are required to report quarterly to their instructional director on student outcomes and progress.

Observed/Not Observed
Comments

Data to be reviewed at each meeting.

Month	Data Topics for Discussion
September Status:	Spring Standards of Learning and Stellar Achievement Test Reports (i.e., bank account, Adequate Yearly Progress Summary, 34 reports) Spring Cogat Results (Elementary) Spring Measures of Academic Performance Results by Fall Location Continuous School Improvement Plan (Due October 3)
October Status:	Fall Measures of Academic Performance Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening Results (Elementary) 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
November Status:	Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) Students At-Risk List
December	4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
January Status:	Measures of Academic Performance Results Attendance Data Student Discipline Data
February *Observed/Not Observed* *Comments*	Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) PALS Results (Elementary) Continuous School Improvement Plan Update (Due February 17)
March *Observed/Not Observed* *Comments*	Access for ELL Results Student Discipline Data 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)
April	Stellar Achievement Tests and Standards of Learning Writing Prompt Results Benchmark Assessment Results (optional) Students At-Risk List (High)
May	Measures of Academic Performance Results Student Discipline Data Standards of Learning simulation and/or 4.5 Benchmark Results (where administered)

* Stellar Achievement Test Reports (This is a pseudonym.)

APPENDIX G

DOCUMENT REVIEW CHECKLIST

Proposed Study: Leadership Qualities and Practices that Enhance and Sustain Student Achievement at the Elementary School Level Through the Use of Data

Documents reviewed:
Date:
Place:

Date of Document	Title of Document
2007-2008	Grades 3, 4, & 5 Standards of Learning Results
2008-2009	Grades 3, 4, & 5 Standards of Learning Results
2009-2010	Grades 3, 4, & 5 Standards of Learning Results
2010-2011	Grades 3, 4, & 5 Standards of Learning Results
2010-2011	Fall Quarterly Benchmark Data for Grades 3, 4, & 5
2010-2011	Winter Quarterly Benchmark Data for Grades 3, 4, & 5
2010-2011	Spring Quarterly Benchmark Data for Grades 3, 4, & 5
2010-2011	Adequate Yearly Progress Report
2011 February	AAT Minutes
2011 February	Action Plans from AAT Meeting
2010-2011	Continuous School Improvement Plan
2011 February	Bi-Weekly Assessment Results for Grades 3, 4, & 5
2011 February	Classroom Student Performance Charts for Grades 3, 4, & 5

Additional Comments:

APPENDIX H

INFORMED CONSENT

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

Informed Consent for Participants
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Interviews

Title of Project: Leadership Qualities and Practices Enhance and Sustain Student Achievement at the Elementary School Level Through the Use of Data

Investigator(s): Herb Monroe and Dr. Jim Craig

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The proposed study identifies the leadership qualities and practices that enhance and sustain student achievement at the elementary school level through the use of data.
This researcher believes that the proposed study will provide an opportunity for effective instructional leaders to share specific behaviors, practices, qualities, and characteristics elementary instructional leaders and district level leadership employ to reduce declines in student achievement and sustain increased pupil progress for at least two or more consecutive years.

II. Procedures

You will be involved in a 45-60 minute one-on-one interview. The interview will be audio taped for research purposes however, participant's names, school, and school district will not be used in the report. Rather pseudonyms will be created to protect all participants' identities. The researcher will arrange a convenient time and place for participants. You will be asked questions related to qualities and practices of district leadership in enhancing and sustaining elementary student achievement through the use of student learning data. The questions will ask for your input in identifying the types of data are required to inform instruction at the building and district level that ensure quality teaching and learning is taking place. Sub questions will examine how those data are made available, when those data are made available, and how Academic Achievement Teams use student learning data to assess the effectiveness of the overall instructional program in enhancing and sustaining student achievement.

Following the interview, the researcher will have the recording transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. You will be asked to member check your responses and send back your edited comments in the self-addressed envelope provided. This study has been approved by VA Tech's Institutional Review Board and your local school district. However, please note this research is not being conducted by the school system but rather for a dissertation project as a requirement for a doctoral degree. There for the interview will not take place during instructional time.

III. Risks

There are minimal risks associated with this study. Interviewee name, school, and school district information will be kept anonymous, and participants will be referred to by pseudonym in the interview discussion such as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C. After explaining the purpose of the study, participants will be asked to sign an informed consent form that meets Virginia Tech's Institutional Review Board guidelines and approval. Your verbal responses to questions will be heard by the researcher and recorded. Only participants on the researcher's committee, the transcriptionist, and the researcher himself will have access to your comments. Pseudonyms will be used to identify each participant in all written documents. Direct quotes from participants will be used in the study. Participants may decline to answer any questions during the interview process. In addition, participants may select to end the interview at any time.

IV. Benefits

The proposed study will provide an opportunity for effective instructional leaders to share specific qualities and practices elementary instructional leaders and district level leadership employ to reduce declines in student achievement and sustain increased pupil progress for at least two or more consecutive years. The researcher believes that the proposed study will highlight and further define the effective work that the school district is doing in turning around and sustaining academic success at the most challenging elementary schools. This information is crucial being that it could serve as a road map for the new principal if there were a sudden change in leadership. The researcher believes that if there is a blueprint that emerges it would not only benefit schools in need of turnaround, but all schools and school leaders in the challenging endeavor of enhancing and sustaining student achievement in the pursuit of making Adequate Yearly Progress.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher will make every effort possible to maintain your anonymity in any written documentation resulting from the interview. Interviewee's name, school, and school district information will be kept anonymous, and participants will be referred to by pseudonym in the interview discussion such as Participant A, Participant B, Participant C. After explaining the purpose of the study, all participants will be asked to sign an informed consent form that meets Virginia Tech's Instructional Review Board guidelines and approval. Only participants on the researcher's committee, the transcriptionist, and the researcher himself will have access to your comments. Pseudonyms will be used to identify each participant in all written documents. Copies of transcripts may be viewed by members of the researcher's dissertation committee. It is also possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in the research.

All research data with any participant identification will be held by the researcher and then destroyed immediately after coding of the interview participants. All information will be stored on the researcher's computer which will be password protected. When information is transcribed, a security agreement will be obtained from the transcriber to ensure confidentiality; and information will be given to the researcher in the original form, and no other copies will be

maintained on the transcriber's computer. Both the researcher's and transcriber's computers are password protected. All recorded interviews, field notes, data collection logs, and other confidential files will be destroyed upon completion of the study (dissertation defense). There may be professional publications, articles, and presentations resulting from this study.

VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation given to you for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw or stop participation in this study at any time. You may choose not to answer any or all questions during the interview.

VIII. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I will have the following responsibilities:

- I agree to answer the interview protocol questions honestly. Initial _____
- I agree to allow the researcher to record the interview. Initial _____
- I will member check and review the transcript for accuracy and and return it to the researcher within 5 days of receipt in the self-addressed envelope provided. Initial _____

IX. Subject's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____ _____

Subject signature Date

Should you have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct and research subjects' rights you may contact:

Herb Monroe 804-937-2084/herbie1@vt.edu
Investigator Telephone/e-mail

Dr. Jim Craig 540-231-1631/jimcraig@vt.edu
Faculty Advisor Telephone/e-mail

Departmental Reviewer/Department Head 540-231-4991/moored@vt.edu
David M. Moore Telephone/e-mail
Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects Office of Research Compliance
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, VA 24060

APPENDIX I

2012 FINAL SOL RESULTS – STELLAR SCHOOL 101

FINAL

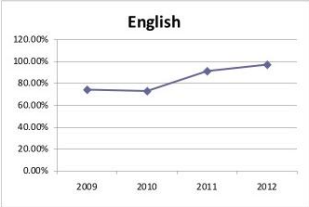
2012 SOL Tests
Stellar Shool 101

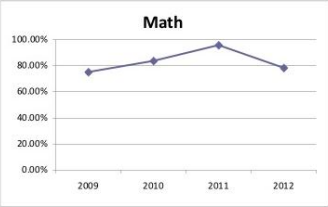
English	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 4 Reading	Grade 5 Reading	Grade 5 Writing	English Subtotal	Remed. Recov.	English Sub-Total w/RR	VGLA	VAAP	**English Total**	**Pass Rate**
Percent Passing 2009	71.21%	74.42%	79.37%	64.62%	72.50%	100.00%	74.16%	0.00%	100.00%	74.00%	**74.00%**
Percent Passing 2010	64.79%	75.00%	76.47%	70.45%	71.79%	100.00%	72.84%	100.00%	100.00%	73.09%	**73.09%**
Percent Passing 2011	86.59%	96.72%	96.92%	82.09%	90.18%	100.00%	91.09%	100.00%	100.00%	91.21%	**91.21%**
Percent Passing 2012	**96.88%**	**97.18%**	**96.97%**	**95.59%**	**96.65%**	**100.00%**	**96.84%**	**100.00%**		**96.97%**	**96.97%**
# Passing	62	69	64	65	260	16	276	12		288	
# Taking the Test	64	71	66	68	269	16	285	12		297	

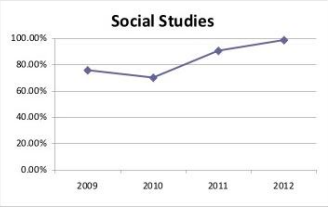
Math	Grade 3 Math	Grade 4 Math	Grade 5 Math	Plain English Math Gr 3	Gr 3 Math w/Plain English	Plain English Math Gr. 4	Gr. 4 Math w/ Plain English	Plain English Math Gr 5	Gr 5 Math w/Plain English	3,4, & 5 Math (incl Pl Eng)	Remed. Recov.	**Math Sub-Total w/RR**	VMAST	VAAP	**Math Total**	**Pass Rate**
Percent Passing 2009	73.77%	82.89%	79.31%	40.00%	71.21%	0.00%	73.26%	33.33%	75.00%	73.15%	100.00%	75.11%		100.00%	75.21%	**75.21%**
Percent Passing 2010	82.35%	79.69%	92.31%	100.00%	83.10%	0.00%	77.27%	0.00%	84.71%	81.98%	100.00%	83.47%		100.00%	83.81%	83.81%
Percent Passing 2011	90.79%	98.28%	96.77%	100.00%	91.46%	100.00%	98.33%	100.00%	96.88%	95.15%	100.00%	95.43%		100.00%	95.56%	95.56%
Percent Passing 2012	**83.33%**	**80.30%**	**78.57%**	**12.50%**	**74.19%**	**77.78%**	**80.00%**	**100.00%**	**79.66%**	**78.06%**	**100.00%**	**78.50%**	**75.00%**		**78.43%**	**78.43%**
# Passing	45	53	44	1	46	7	60	3	47	153	4	157	3		160	
# Taking the Test	54	66	56	8	62	9	75	3	59	196	4	200	4		204	

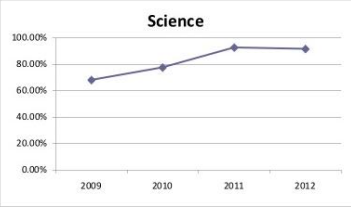
Social Studies	Grade 3	Virgina Studies	**Social Studies Sub-Total**	VGLA	VAAP	**Total Grades 3 and 5**	**Pass Rate**
Percent Passing 2009	76.56%	74.60%	75.59%			75.59%	**75.59%**
Percent Passing 2010	80.56%	64.71%	69.78%		100.00%	69.91%	**69.91%**
Percent Passing 2011	84.34%	98.28%	90.07%	100.00%	100.00%	90.34%	**90.34%**
Percent Passing 2012	**98.36%**	**98.59%**	**98.48%**	**100.00%**		**98.61%**	**98.61%**
# Passing	60	70	130	12		142	
# Taking the Test	61	71	132	12		144	

Science	Grade 3	Grade 5	**Science Sub-Total**	VGLA	VAAP	**Total Grades 3 and 5**	**Pass Rate**
Percent Passing 2009	72.13%	64.06%	68.00%			68.00%	**68.00%**
Percent Passing 2010	76.39%	78.16%	77.36%		100.00%	77.50%	**77.50%**
Percent Passing 2011	94.12%	90.77%	92.67%		100.00%	92.72%	**92.72%**
Percent Passing 2012	**91.04%**	**92.42%**	**91.73%**			**91.73%**	**91.73%**
# Passing	61	61	122			122	
# Taking the Test	67	66	133			133	









Updated: data from 7/31/12

APPENDIX J

2012 FINAL SOL RESULTS – STELLAR SCHOOL 102

FINAL

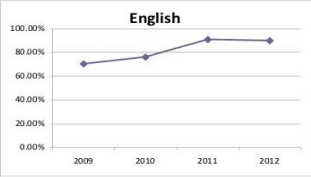
Elementary Pass Rates
2012 SOL Tests
Stellar School 102

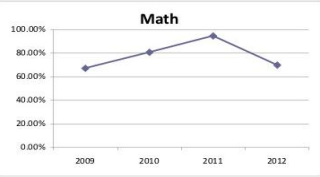
English	Grade 3 Reading	Grade 4 Reading	Grade 5 Reading	Grade 5 Writing	English Subtotal	Remed. Recov.	**English Sub-Total w/RR**	VGLA	VAAP	**English Total**	**Pass Rate**
Percent Passing 2009	89.47%	63.41%	67.53%	56.41%	69.01%	100.00%	69.69%	72.22%		**70.35%**	**70.35%**
Percent Passing 2010	84.88%	78.75%	71.60%	64.71%	75.00%	100.00%	75.94%	100.00%	100.00%	**76.08%**	**76.08%**
Percent Passing 2011	91.46%	88.61%	88.75%	92.41%	90.31%	100.00%	90.88%		100.00%	**90.91%**	**90.91%**
Percent Passing 2012	**90.41%**	**84.81%**	**94.44%**	**89.33%**	**89.63%**	**100.00%**	**89.94%**	**100.00%**	**100.00%**	**90.06%**	**90.06%**
# Passing	66	67	68	67	268	9	277	2	2	**281**	
# Taking the Test	73	79	72	75	299	9	308	2	2	**312**	

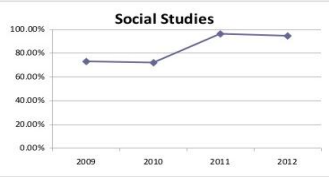
Math	Grade 3 Math	Grade 4 Math	Grade 5	Plain English Math Gr 3	Gr 3 Math w/Plain English	Plain English Math Gr. 4	Gr. 4 Math w/ Plain English	Plain English Math Gr 5	Gr 5 Math w/Plain English	3,4, & 5 Math (incl Pl Eng)	Remed. Recov.	**Math Sub-Total w/RR**	VGLA	VAAP	**Math Total**	**Pass Rate**
Percent Passing 2009	87.18%	53.16%	58.33%	50.00%	85.37%	25.00%	50.57%	40.00%	57.14%	64.23%	100.00%	65.63%	100.00%		**67.04%**	**67.04%**
Percent Passing 2010	89.02%	78.57%	72.60%	100.00%	89.53%	66.67%	77.22%	42.86%	70.00%	79.18%	100.00%	80.61%	100.00%	100.00%	**80.75%**	**80.75%**
Percent Passing 2011	96.34%	94.94%	91.14%		96.34%		94.94%		91.14%	94.17%	100.00%	94.53%		100.00%	**94.55%**	**94.55%**
Percent Passing 2012	**55.38%**	**69.74%**	**82.86%**		**55.38%**		**69.74%**		**82.86%**	**69.67%**	**100.00%**	**69.81%**		**100.00%**	**69.95%**	**69.95%**
# Passing	36	53	58		36		53		58	147	1	148		1	**149**	
# Taking the Test	65	76	70		65		76		70	211	1	212		1	**213**	

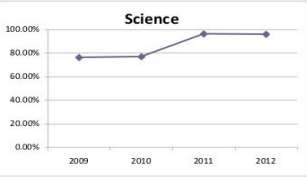
Social Studies	Grade 3	Virginia Studies	**Social Studies Sub-Total**	VGLA	VAAP	**Total Grades 3 and 5**	**Pass Rate**
Percent Passing 2009	95.06%	49.38%	72.22%			**73.05%**	**73.05%**
Percent Passing 2010	90.70%	62.26%	72.24%		0.00%	**71.95%**	**71.95%**
Percent Passing 2011	96.30%	96.15%	96.23%		100.00%	**96.25%**	**96.25%**
Percent Passing 2012	**98.59%**	**91.03%**	**94.63%**			**94.63%**	**94.63%**
# Passing	70	71	141			**141**	
# Taking the Test	71	78	149			**149**	

Science	Grade 3	Grade 5	**Science Sub-Total**	VGLA	VAAP	**Total Grades 3 and 5**	**Pass Rate**
Percent Passing 2009	82.93%	67.90%	75.46%			**76.19%**	**76.19%**
Percent Passing 2010	90.48%	62.50%	76.83%	100.00%	100.00%	**77.11%**	**77.11%**
Percent Passing 2011	96.34%	96.15%	96.25%			**96.25%**	**96.25%**
Percent Passing 2012	**95.71%**	**95.83%**	**95.77%**		**100.00%**	**95.80%**	**95.80%**
# Passing	67	69	136		1	**137**	
# Taking the Test	70	72	142		1	**143**	









Updated: data from 7/31/12