

## **ABSTRACT**

Charlene Pittman, **TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF OPPORTUNITY CULTURE IN A SMALL, RURAL NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DISTRICT** (Under the direction of Dr. Travis Lewis). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023.

Providing students access to effective teachers is a challenge that school districts all over the nation face. Students from high poverty environments and rural settings have less access than their counterparts to effective teachers at disproportionate rates. This disproportionality may present as an insurmountable barrier for some youth in receiving a high quality education. However, consistent access to excellent teachers is beneficial in closing the equity gap and increasing long-term achievement among students from rural, high-poverty environments, as well as students of color.

This study examined the challenges of a disproportionality in access to quality teachers for one of the most economically-distressed counties in North Carolina. Such challenges are of particular interest to the small, rural North Carolina school district upon which this study focused, as teachers are an important and necessary factor when striving for student achievement. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement. Opportunity Culture is a coaching and support model that aims to extend the reach of its more effective teachers to more students and more colleagues within the school's normal operating budget. The teacher leaders referenced in this study are those who served in the role of a Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL). Using a mixed-methods approach, the researcher conducted a program evaluation of Opportunity Culture and its effects on teacher performance in two essential standards found within the NC Teacher Evaluation Instrument: Standard III - Teachers

Know the Content That They Teach, and Standard IV - Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students.

While the findings indicate that MCLs impact teacher instructional practices within Standard III and Standard IV, there is evidence that several prominent barriers pose a challenge in the continued effectiveness of MCLs. These barriers to the implementation Opportunity Culture and MCLs, along with recommendations for addressing each, are discussed.



TEACHER LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE: A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF  
OPPORTUNITY CULTURE IN A SMALL, RURAL NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL  
DISTRICT

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by  
Charlene Pittman  
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Director of Dissertation: Travis Lewis, EdD  
Dissertation Committee:  
Daniel Novey, EdD  
Art Rouse, EdD  
Valerie Bridges, EdD

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## **DEDICATION**

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” I am forever grateful that purpose of God will stand!

I dedicate the completion of my dissertation to my dear mother, Mrs. Clydeen L. Williams. Mom, you are a woman of great faith and have prayed for me throughout this process. When I think of how you shower me with your never-ending love and unwavering support, even as an adult, I am speechless! You’re always giving and always making sure that I am “OK”. Know that I am grateful and I’ve “got you back!”

Love you!!

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The road has been a long one and I wish that I could say as the Reverend James Cleveland once did in his song, “I don’t feel no ways tired...”. I am a bit exhausted from the blood, sweat, and tears (figuratively) poured into completing my study. However, every single moment has been worth it. I definitely could not have done it without the support of others along the way.

As a person of faith, I do subscribe to the remainder of the song which states “...I don’t believe He brought me this far to leave me.” So for that reason, I first thank my Lord and Savior for putting those in my path who would be instrumental in helping me to reach my “next”.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Teachers matter more to student academic performance than any other educational input (Oppen, 2019). Access to effective teachers in the classroom significantly impacts the outcomes of our students, both short term as well as over time (Chetty et al., 2014). Hahnel and Jackson (2012) report that not having access to effective and quality instruction over multiple years can create a devastating impact on an otherwise positive trajectory for a student's academic achievement. While non-school factors such as social and economic factors influence a student's ability to be successful, effective teachers are a major catalyst in leveling the playing field. Often, students who have historically been defined as those living in "high-poverty and high-minority communities" are the ones who experience less access to effective teachers (Haycock, 1998, p. 62). Such marginalized "students are consistently and disproportionately saddled with the weakest teachers and seldom have access to the strong instruction they need and deserve" (Almy & Tooley, 2012, para. 1). Failure to have access to quality teachers, who in turn are led by effective principals, is an equity issue that prevents this population of students from experiencing high-quality learning opportunities. Addressing issues of equity in education is paramount, as doing so "contributes to the economic productivity and health of a society, as well as its cultural and political stability" (Reynolds, 2020, para. 1).

However, making certain that all students have equal access to an effective teacher necessitates that there first must be a sufficient number of qualified, well-trained teaching candidates. Haynes (2014) notes that "long-standing concerns remain about whether states have an educator workforce, or the capacity to produce one, with the training and skills needed to ensure that students achieve the learning outcomes essential to succeed in school and beyond"

(p. 1). According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the teacher turnover rate is upward of 16% based on teachers leaving their school or teachers leaving the profession early (Makoto et al., 2021). The attrition rate in North Carolina is measured annually in the State of the Teaching Profession Report. This report looks at the attrition rate at both the state and local educational agency (LEA) levels. For the 2020-2021 school year, the NC state teacher attrition rate was 8.20%. The attrition rate is determined by looking at a “snapshot” of all teachers’ employment measured from March to March (Truitt, 2022).

While high rates of teacher attrition affect all students, historically, it has disproportionately impacted schools with high poverty and a high concentration of students of color. While more than 10% of teachers in high-poverty public schools leave the profession, fewer than 7% in more affluent schools do (Goldring et al., 2014). High-poverty schools are categorized as those with 75% or more of their students receiving free or reduced-price lunches (Goldring et al., 2014). Low-poverty schools are those in which 34% or fewer receive free or reduced-priced lunches (Goldring et al., 2014). Again, this disparity creates concern regarding all children being able to receive an equitable, high-quality education.

To obtain the desired transformation that is needed within the U.S. public education system to provide such equity, it may be helpful to first conduct a closer examination of how the best teaching talent is attracted, developed, and retained (Haynes, 2014). Quality teachers, for the purpose of this study, are those who have a firm handle on both curriculum and pedagogy. Masterful practitioners of what is taught and how it is taught are irrefutable characteristics when defining teacher quality (Nordin & Wahlstrom, 2019). “Evolving definitions of teaching quality around the world increasingly see teaching as rooted in a wide-ranging knowledge base that combines an understanding of content, pedagogy, and learners, which is focused on meeting



students' diverse social, emotional, and academic needs rather than just covering the curriculum” (Darling-Hammond, 2021, p. 307).

Helping all students reach their potential by increasing access to excellent teachers is the focus of many school districts across the nation. As a part of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states created plans to address the disparities that may exist in giving those who are the most vulnerable access to excellent educators. Consistent access to excellent teachers aids in closing the equity gap and increasing long-term achievement among students from rural, high-poverty environments as well as students of color (Ross, 2019).

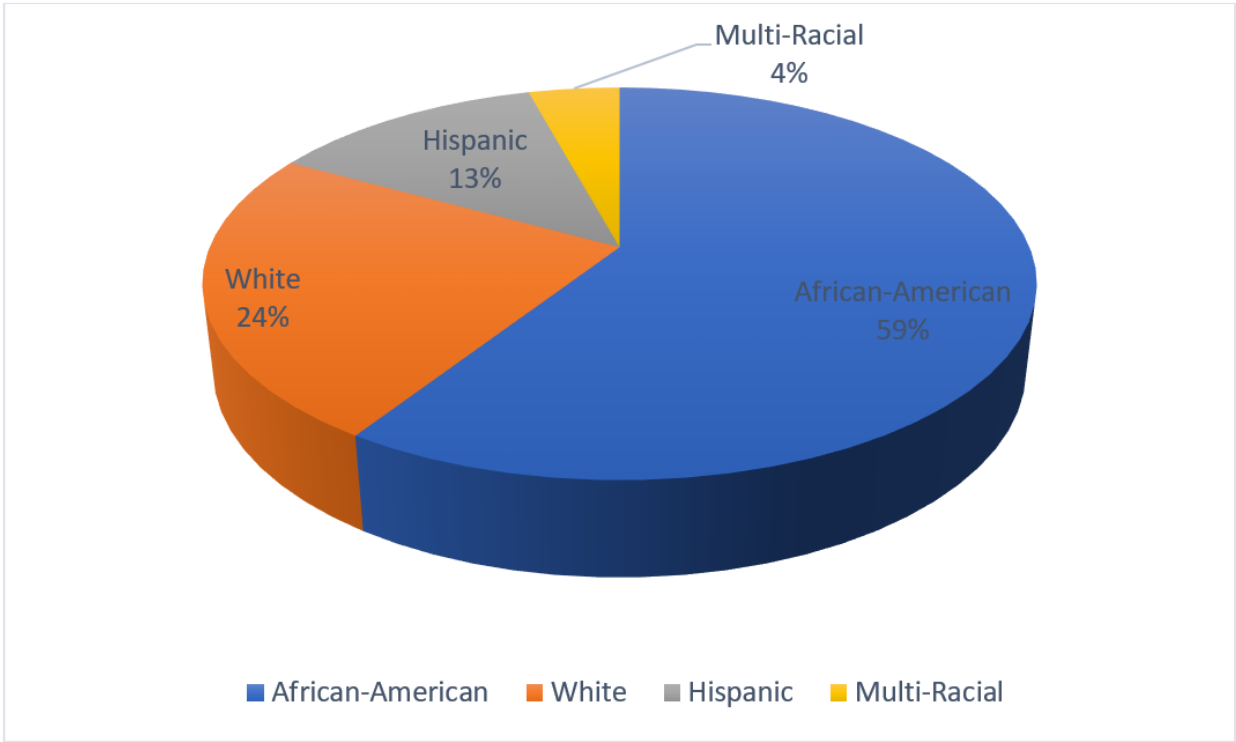
Use of peer coaching models is one type of intervention that is used to improve instructional practice among educators. Traditional forms of professional development are usually models where teachers attend a workshop to gain information about a specific topic, often with the expectation to return and implement. According to a review published by the U.S. Department of Education, this style of professional learning is often of negligible impact on student achievement when additional support is not provided (Yoon et al., 2007). Conversely, peer coaching is a model of professional learning that is built on collaboration and trust. It entails working onsite with someone who is able to support an educator's professional development needs using evidence-based teaching practices. Peer coaches support their colleagues by helping them to apply this body of knowledge and implement so that the ultimate outcome is an increase in student achievement (Knight et al., 2012). Additionally, using a peer coaching and support model, such as Opportunity Culture, creates conditions for developing all teaching talent, lowering school and district attrition rates, as well as increasing achievement rates among students.

### **Background of the Problem**

Northeast Southwest Schools (NESW) is a rural, low-wealth school district located in Best Town, North Carolina, that serves approximately 5,269 students across 14 public schools consisting of six elementary schools, five middle schools, three traditional high schools, one early college high schools, and one K-8 academy school that includes a partial Spanish immersion program. When considering the teacher attrition rate for Northeast Southwest (NESW) School District, the attrition rate was 18.8% for the 2020-2021 school year. Based on 2021-2022 demographic data, 14.9% of the students are enrolled in the Exceptional Children's Program, 5.42% of the students are English Language Learners (ELLs), and 4.60% are Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG). Of the total student enrollment as of October 2022, the racial and ethnic demographics of the district's students were as follows: 58.99% African-American, 23.85% White, 12.68% Hispanic, and 4.21% Multi-Racial and less than 1% Asian or Pacific Islander (see Figure 1).

The leadership of NESW is headed by the superintendent, one deputy superintendent, two assistant superintendents, and 10 directors. The seven-member school board is elected and represents each of the seven zoning districts in Northeast Southwest County. The district has had two superintendents over the past eleven years. The superintendent at the time this study was conducted was in her sixth year of service.

Students across NESW are mostly from economically distressed homes, as 10 of the 14 schools which the students attend qualify for Title I low-income funding. "Title I, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended (ESEA), provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low- income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards" (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, para.1).



*Figure 1.* Northeast Southwest Schools demographics in 2022.

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The North Carolina Department of Commerce ranks counties each year by measures of affluence. “The rankings are based on an assessment of each county's unemployment rate, median household income, population growth, and assessed property value per capita” (Rhoades, 2019, para.3). Tier designations range from one to three. A Tier I designation means that a county is ranked within the most distressed counties (40) in the state. Tier II counties are the next 40 most distressed, and a Tier III designation means that a county is ranked among the least distressed. NESW County has ranked among the most distressed (Tier I) counties since at least 2014 based on the archival records published by the NC Department of Commerce County Tier Rankings (County Tier Rankings, 2022).

Another source of data for Northeast Southwest County is the annual Roadmap of Needs, first published by the Public School Forum of North Carolina and the North Carolina Center for Afterschool Programs in 2010. The Roadmap of Needs provides insight into key areas that are believed to greatly impact the success of young people living in North Carolina’s 100 counties by taking a holistic approach to data analysis. The analysis takes up-close look at health, youth behavior and safety data, education, and economic development (Bryant, 2019). The most recently published 2020 Roadmap of Need cites NESW county as one of the top ten counties in North Carolina for young people being most at risk of not succeeding, whether it is inside or outside of the classroom.

As a Tier I county, teacher retention rates have proven to be a challenge for the school district. Annual attrition rates for 2015-16 through the 2019-20 school years exceeded the state average (Marshall, 2020). Attrition rates are tracked by category or type of teacher. As shown in Table 1, most categories have shown a trend of fewer teachers leaving each year, except Teach for America Teachers. The categories referenced in the 2020-2021 State of the Teaching

Table 1

*Northeast Southwest Schools Attrition Rates by Teacher Category by Year*

| Teacher Category  | '19-'20 | '18-'19 | '17-'18 | '16-'17 | '15-'16 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Experienced Licensed Teachers<br>(Career Status Teachers) | 6.7%    | 6.8%    | 7.3%    | 7.7%    | 8.2%    |
| Beginning Teachers  | 11.7%   | 11.3%   | 12.3%   | 12.3%   | 12.8%   |
| Teach for America Teachers (All)                          | 28.6%   | 20.1%   | 28.3%   | 32.9%   | 32.7%   |
| Teach for America Teachers<br>(Before Contract Term)      | 25.1%   | 16.7%   | 20.1%   | 15.8%   | 15.9%   |
| VIF (International) Teachers<br>(All)                     | 14.0%   | 15.8%   | 16.8%   | 17.2%   | 18.4%   |
| VIF (International) Teachers<br>(Before Contract Term)    | 6.2%    | 11.1%   | 8.9%    | 7.8%    | 10.2%   |
| Lateral Early Licensed Teachers                           | 13.6%   | 13.6%   | 15.5%   | 15.6%   | 15.6%   |

Profession Report (Truitt, 2022) include the following types of teachers:

- Experienced Licensed Teachers - Those who have more than 3 years of teaching experience and have satisfied all licensure requirements for their area of assignment.
- Beginning Teachers - Teachers with fewer than three years of teaching experience.
- Teach for America Teachers - Teachers who are within their first two years of teaching under the Teach for America program to serve high-needs communities.
- Visiting International Faculty Teachers (VIF) - International teachers serving in the United States for a period of up to three years.
- Lateral Entry Teacher - Those pursuing a license in teaching using an alternative pathway.

The NESW system has been plagued with teacher turnover. Table 2 shows a comparison of the rate of teacher attrition at the district level compared to the state level. There is a deficit ranging from 9.64% to 15.02%, placing NESW at a competitive disadvantage with having quality, experienced teachers in every classroom.

In addition to its high attrition rate, the NESW system has been marked by years of underperformance. The greatest indicator of the effectiveness of teaching is found by observing the impact on student learning. North Carolina assesses student learning by using the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) to determine student growth as indicated by their performance on a variety of assessment measures such as North Carolina End of Grade tests, North Carolina End of Course tests, and Career and Technical Education State Assessments, just to name a few. According to the NC Technical Guide for School Accountability and Testing Results, growth is determined by comparing the students' actual performance on the identified assessments to their expected performance (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Table 2

*Northeast Southwest Schools and North Carolina Teacher Attrition Rates by Year*

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| School Year | Teacher Count | NESW Attrition Rate | NC Attrition Rate |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 2015-2016   | 396           | 22.47%              | 9.04%             |
| 2016-2017   | 382           | 20.37%              | 8.70%             |
| 2017-2018   | 397           | 23.12%              | 8.1%              |
| 2018-2019   | 390           | 17.14%              | 7.5%              |
| 2019-2020   | 398           | 17.54%              | 7.53%             |

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[NCDPI], 2022). Of the 14 schools in the NESW system, 83% of the schools met or exceeded growth in the 2018-2019 school year. This was an improvement over the 2016-2017 school year, where only six schools met or exceeded growth. For the 2021-2022 school year, the year for which school performance data was officially reported as a part of the accountability results since 2018-19, nine out of 14 of the district's schools met or exceeded growth.

Low-performing districts and schools in North Carolina are defined by the North Carolina General Assembly and are based on the School Performance Grade and Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) growth. Low-performing schools are those that receive a school performance grade of D or F and a school growth score of "met expected growth" or "not met expected growth" as defined by North Carolina General Statute 115C-83.15. NESW has a history of underperforming students, as noted on statewide End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) assessments. While multiple variables play into this problem, research identifies that of all educational factors, teachers are the most important element (Opper, 2019). "When it comes to student performance on reading and math tests, a teacher is estimated to have two to three times the impact of any other school factor" (Opper, 2019, para. 2). It is the belief of the NESW system leadership and school board that one of the first steps to increasing student achievement is to increase the availability of effective teachers for all students. "Increasing teacher availability requires identifying the talent that we currently have and putting into place mechanisms which would allow us to capitalize on this valuable human resource as our goal is to provide a quality education for all of our students" (Superintendent, personal communication, November, 2020). Given the high attrition rate, teacher availability for NESW may continue to present as a challenge that undermines student performance until teacher recruitment and development is addressed.



Schools focused on for the purpose of this study were the initial implementers of Opportunity Culture in Northeast Southwest school district. Lone Pines Elementary School is a PreK-5 school located in rural Northeast Southwest County. The overall population of the school was approximately 255 students and 15 licensed teachers during the 2022-2023 school year. Of the student population, approximately 60% are African-American, 8% are Caucasian, 25% are Latinx, and 7% are multi-racial. The target population for this study includes two teacher leaders, one in the area of math and one in English Language Arts. Participant data was retrieved for teachers and students in grades K-5 from the 2017-18 to 2021-2022 school years. The ELA teacher leader brought 25 years of teaching experience prior to becoming the school's ELA Multi-Classroom Leader. The math teacher leader brought 24 years of teaching experience prior to becoming the school's math Multi-Classroom Leader.

Southern Middle School serves grades 6-8 and is located in a large geographical area known as the “northside” of Northeast Southwest County. The overall population of the middle school during the 2022-2023 school year for the student population was 68% African-American, 4% Caucasian, 20% Latinx, and 8% multi-racial. This is one of three schools in the “Innovation Zone,” which feeds Northeast High School. Southern Middle School is 92% poverty based and had struggled more than any other school prior to the implementation of Opportunity Culture. In the first year of Opportunity Culture, Southern Middle School increased school performance from 27 to 35. The school hired a Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL), an Expanded Impact Teacher (EIT), and a Reach Associate (RA) to restructure the master schedule. According to the district’s Federal Programs Director, Southern Middle School’s MCL work was described as follows:

Led a team of three and taught students of her own. MCLs are accountable for the learning of all the students on the team. EITs plan and deliver in-person instruction for

more students than a typical teacher and/or take on additional responsibilities. The Science EIT taught science to all students at Southern Middle School, taking on larger class sizes than the average teacher and partnering closely with the RA to minimize the drawbacks of a large class. The RA collaborated closely with the EIT by pulling small groups of students and co-facilitating learning (Andrews, 2020).

Northeast High School serves grades 9-12 and is located in Rural Zone, North Carolina, in Northeast Southwest County. It is also one of three schools in the Innovation Zone located in the “North side” of Northeast Southwest School District. Enrollment for the 2022-2023 school year included 206 students. Over the previous five years, enrollment has dropped by 15% (Colayco, 2022). The majority (92%) of the student body were students of color. African-American students made up 70% of the students, while 8% were Caucasian, 21% were Latinx, and 1% were multi-racial. According to Morse and Brooks (2022), 99% of the students were economically disadvantaged. All of the schools referenced in this study are Restart Schools. Restart Schools are schools who have a history of being consistently low performing over time. This status allows schools a number of flexibilities such as with hiring, their budget, and their school calendar (Truitt, 2023).

### **Problem Statement**

The 2019-2024 Northeast Southwest Schools Strategic Plan points out that the recruitment and development of its staff are central to the success of its students. Therefore, the problem that this study addressed was to evaluate the impact of a program designed to empower effective teachers to become teacher leaders who coach and support their peers to higher levels of performance.

To achieve the vision that all public school “scholars will graduate prepared to design

their own futures, navigate change, and make the world a better place,” the 2019-2024 Strategic Plan lists supporting measures, including talent retention, attendance, restorative and accountable practices, funding, and continuous improvement; additionally, it lists the priorities of academic excellence, talent recruitment and development, equity in action, purposeful partnerships, and resilient foundations. This study focused on evaluating the effectiveness of a programmatic approach NESW has taken to address one of these priorities: talent recruitment and development.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Northeast Southwest Public Schools is focused on cultivating a culture of innovation in its efforts to support its students and teachers. With the state's support, the District Design Team contracted with Public Impact to implement "Opportunity Culture" throughout the school district over a three-year period, effective with the 2017-18 school year. The district's design team consists of various members of both school and district leadership whose primary function was to think about what situation in our district bothered us as leaders, brainstorm ways that we could work collectively to make things better, work to implement the solution, and determine the impact of our solution. This structure is based on the Design for Change model. Designing for Change, also known as design thinking, is a process of solving problems that focuses on meeting the needs of its constituents in innovative ways. Design thinking (Dam & Siang, 2022) is non-linear in nature and consists of five key steps: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. Exhibiting empathy allows one to better understand the needs of its users. The define phase allows for gaining a true sense of what the problem or issue may be. Ideate is the space where problem solvers work collectively to brainstorm possible solutions that are often outside the box in nature. Prototype is the phase in which possible solutions are unpacked, revised, or possibly rejected. Lastly, the testing phase of design thinking allows one to gather feedback.

Public Impact is a national education organization based in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. It was founded in the mid-90s with the express purpose of researching, evaluating, and trying new solutions to better the quality of education for those populations who are the most typically underserved (Barrett, 2021). This initiative, Opportunity Culture, is at the heart of the work of Public Impact. Opportunity Culture aims to extend the reach of its most effective teachers to more students and more colleagues within the parameters of a school's normal operating budget. The premise for the work behind the Opportunity Culture model is to allow teachers who have a proven track record of success in the classroom to become teacher leaders who work with teacher teams to impact overall student learning directly and indirectly (Backes & Hansen, 2018). Design teams at the three Northside "Innovation Zone" schools have developed three key roles using the Opportunity Culture Model: Multi-Classroom Leader, Expanded Impact Teacher, and Reach Associate.

The Northside Innovation Zone is schools within NESW school district that exist on the northern side of the county. NESW school district has a history of low performance; however, the "Northside" schools were historically plagued with performance that was significantly lower than other schools throughout the district. Through the Design for Change model, the NESW public schools committed itself to explore innovative programs and practices, such as Opportunity Culture, in hopes of increasing student performance. The rationale behind this work is that making good or expected growth in an academic year for students who have historically underperformed is not satisfactory. In order for students to catch up or surpass growth expectations, they need access to excellent teachers. It is also critical to have this level of access to quality teachers year after year (Public Impact, 2015).

Opportunity Culture is based on recruiting, retaining, and developing the most highly effective teachers in the school district. The teachers who have been deemed highly effective are known as Multi-Classroom Leaders (MCLs) and Expanded Impact Teachers (EITs). MCLs and EITs will reach students across all content areas, while at the same time, developing and coaching their colleagues. Opportunity Culture allows a teacher to advance in their careers without having to leave the classroom by taking advantage of career opportunities based on their history of teaching excellence, leadership opportunities, and student impact. Since its inception, the Opportunity Culture roles have expanded within the school district.

While it is imperative that NESW implements various efforts aimed at increasing student outcomes, it is also imperative to establish evaluation measures to determine the effectiveness of these initiatives on increasing student learning. As such, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement.

In order to examine the effect of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices in NESW, this study measured changes in two of the five North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards for Opportunity Culture participants.

According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (Truitt, 2022), the five standards are:

1. Teachers Demonstrate Leadership.
2. Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students.
3. Teachers Know the Content They Teach.
4. Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students.
5. Teachers Reflect on Their Practice.

These standards are the result of the charge given to the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission by the North Carolina State Board of Education. The purpose of the identified standards is to articulate what teachers need to know and be able to do in order to meet the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learners. The standards are evaluated annually, and the rating outcomes are used to inform the teacher's level of performance as compared to the standards. School leaders also use evaluation outcomes to determine the professional development needs of their teachers and to identify coaching and mentoring support for their teaching staff (Cobey, 2018).

While these assessments are conducted routinely and reported back to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, they are not focused on teachers that have participated in Opportunity Culture. This study examined Standards III and IV specifically as teachers knowing the content that they teach and teachers being able to facilitate student learning are foundational standards for increasing student learning outcomes.

### **Research Questions**

In order to help guide this study, the following questions were addressed:

1. How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' knowledge of the content they teach?
2. How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' facilitation of learning for their students?

The research questions for this study were aligned with the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards. The standards are indicative of what teachers should know and be able to do in order to educate North Carolina's youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The standards are (I) Teachers Demonstrate Leadership, (II) Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse

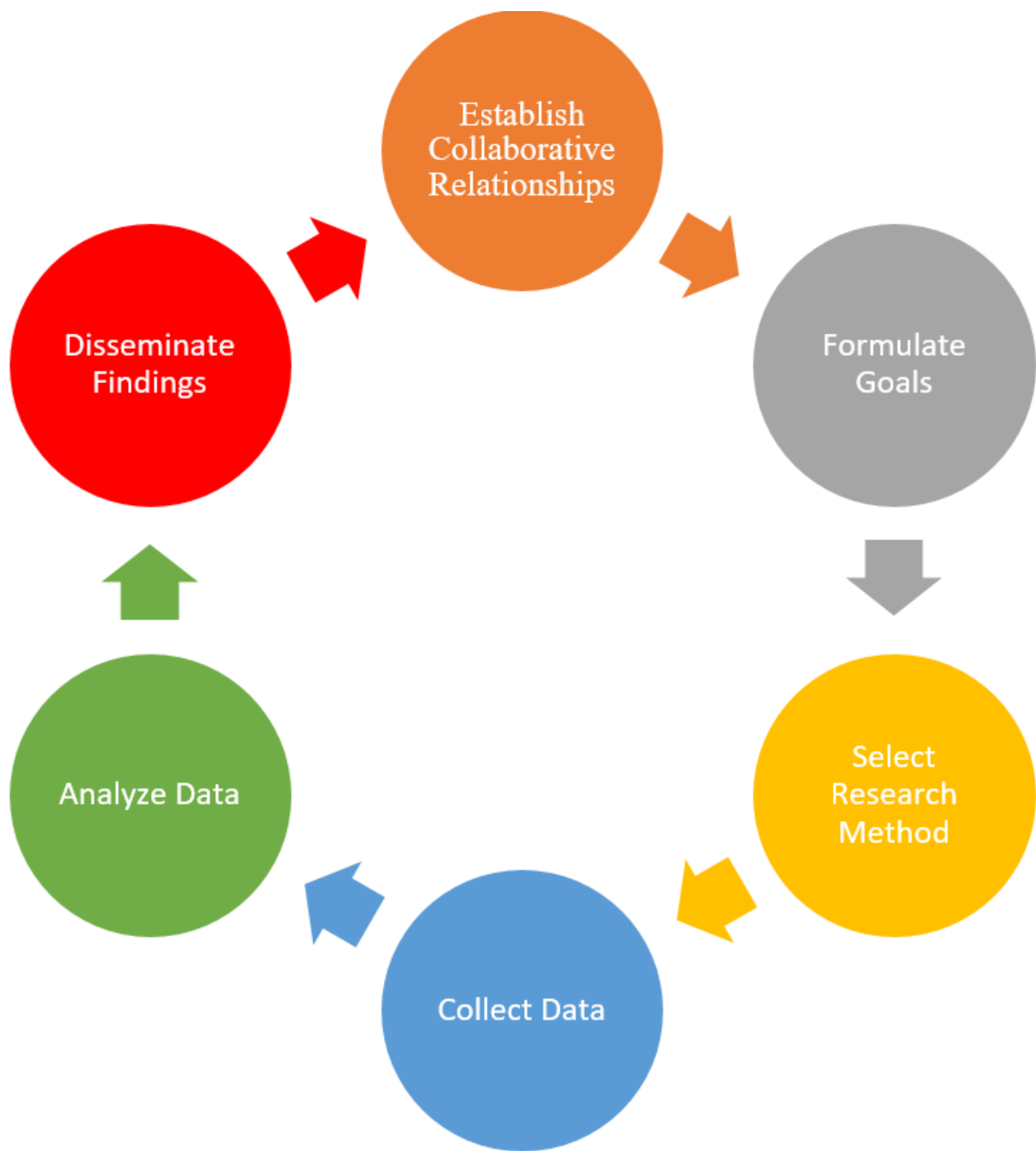
Population of Students, (III) Teachers Know the Content They Teach, (IV) Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students, and (V) Teachers Reflect on Their Practice. Question 1 was specifically aligned with NC Teaching Standard III: Teachers Know the Content They Teach, while Question 2 was aligned with Standard IV: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students.

### **Study Methodology**

This study used the following data collection methods: rubric-based observation data, coaching trackers data, teacher focus groups, and surveys. This mixed-methods program evaluation study consisted of qualitative focus group interviews and a quantitative survey for Multi-Classroom Leaders and the impacted teaching staff at the initial implementer schools. The data collected from these two methods were analyzed to help determine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement. The participants were purposefully selected for this study. Each participant worked with the implementation of Opportunity Culture since its inception during the 2017-2018 school year and were employed at the time of the study with NESW. As of the data collection point, it was the sixth year of implementation.

Secret et al. (2011) provide a methodical approach to a comprehensive program evaluation that uses “guiding principles and collaborative strategies to initiate, design, and implement outcome evaluations” (p. 9). Their research provides the following six steps: establish a collaborative relationship between researcher and practitioner, formulate program evaluation goals with a clearly defined evaluation model, select the research methodology, implement the research/collecting the data, analyze the data, and disseminate findings (see Figure 2). These steps were applied to this study to guide the program evaluation process.

According to Patton (2002), program evaluations often include “focus groups with



*Note.* (Secret et al., 2011).

*Figure 2.* Six step comprehensive program evaluation process.

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diverse program constituencies to determine how much consensus there is among various stakeholders about a program's goals and intervention strategies and to identify where differences lie" (p. 164). Focus groups offered a venue for multi-classroom leaders and classroom teachers who have participated in Opportunity Culture to further explore the overall impact on teacher instructional practices.

In addition to focus group interviews, a quantitative survey was administered. This survey was useful in providing descriptive statistics to learn more about each participant.

The quantitative survey incorporated the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standard III: Teachers Know the Content They Teach and Standard IV: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students by further examining the impact of Opportunity Culture on the execution of the elements within each of these standards.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The terms referenced in this section are key to ensuring that there is clarity in understanding the concepts as presented in the program evaluation of Opportunity Culture. Including key terms help in avoiding a misunderstanding of the essential meanings that are presented throughout this program evaluation. As such, the terms are defined as follows:

**Disadvantaged Student:** Students who are at risk of not reaching their full potential in school due to factors such as race, socio-economic status, and familial challenges.

**Attrition:** The percentage of teachers exiting the profession within a given school year (UNESCO, 2019).

**Expanded Impact Teacher (EIT):** Also known as, team reach teacher, is a teacher who teaches more students than usual, without increasing the size of the groups that they instruct (Public Impact, 2021).

Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL): Teachers with a proven track record of success who exhibit leadership skills by leading a small team of people to meet established standards of excellence (Public Impact, 2021).

Program Evaluation: Determining the effectiveness of a program by assessing in a systematic way the program's outcomes and goal attainment (Sheik et al., 2018).

### **Assumptions**

Assumptions associated with this study include that the Opportunity Culture program has been implemented as intended to fidelity. Additionally, it was assumed that I, serving in dual roles as a member of senior leadership for NESW and as the scholarly practitioner leading this study by conducting the program evaluation, would be able to obtain accurate data from participants that were free of bias. As I considered the other district initiatives that were underway in NESW Public Schools, it was assumed that no other work would impact the results of the study.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The scope of this study was on Northeast Southwest Schools, specifically three schools that were the original implementers schools for Opportunity Culture. Delimitations of this study included the avoidance of schools not included as the three original implementer schools and did not include schools using Opportunity Culture outside of the Northeast Southwest County Public School district. Additionally, this study focused on Standard 3: Teachers Know the Content That They Teach and Standard 4: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Students from the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards. This scope may limit the generalizability of the findings to other school districts or states implementing Opportunity Culture or another educational reform

initiative. However, this focus attempted to provide a thorough review of the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional behaviors.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations may have affected the findings of this study. The first limitation was the attrition of teachers who were members of the original implementation team of Opportunity Culture. Since this population of teachers was no longer engaged in the work of Opportunity Culture in NESW School District, they were not included in this study, thereby reducing the potential number of participants. A second limitation was the strain of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers. After multiple years of working through a worldwide pandemic, many may have been overworked, burned out, or not interested in participating in an activity outside of their work hours or duties. Lastly, I served in a senior leadership role in the district. The impact of this role in the context of the study was addressed by clearly articulating the voluntary nature of participation. Additionally, I emphasized the importance of the voice of the participants in helping to drive programmatic improvement.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research is significant to the profession of education as it examined the impact of an Opportunity Culture in a low-performing school district to determine its impact on teacher instructional practices. Opportunity Culture allows more students to be reached by excellent teachers. Excellent teachers are those who know their content and excel in instructional pedagogy. These top-quintile teachers are those who often produce up to three times the learning gains as bottom quintile teachers (Hassel & Hassel, 2009).

Having increased access to excellent teachers is of priority as teachers matter more to student achievement than any other educational input (Oppen, 2019). Often, historically

disadvantaged students are the ones who are unable to acquire effective teachers (Goldhaber et al., 2015; Isenberg et al., 2013), therefore creating an Opportunity Culture addresses an issue of equity for students in NESW Public Schools.

This study was also significant as Opportunity Culture embeds a coaching model that supports teaching improvement for both novice and veteran educators. According to Galey (2016), peer coaching is a catalyst in improving teacher quality which leads to positive change in classroom instruction. Research has shown that changing instructional practice is no easy feat and requires teachers to participate in extensive professional learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Elmore, 2004; Garet et al., 2001). It is through coaching models that are specific, collaborative, focused on instructional improvement, and school-based that true instructional reform can begin to take place (Coburn & Russell, 2008; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Garet et al., 2001).

Lastly, Batts (2020) sought to determine if the impact of coaching, through the Opportunity Culture Platform, could be linked to teacher self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1994), is the confidence one has to yield desired outcomes or effects; belief in their ability to perform. Batts' (2020) study results found that teachers in a small, rural school district in Northeastern North Carolina believed that the coaching model embedded in Opportunity Culture leads to increased levels of efficacy.

As the district works to ensure that each student experiences success as a learner in NESW Public Schools, the factors that contribute to this success include ensuring the students have access to equitable classrooms, that teacher success is consistently supported and nurtured, and that excellent teaching talent is retained. These are all intended outcomes of Opportunity Culture.

## Summary

Chapter 1 has laid the groundwork for the problem of practice within the Northeast Southwest Schools. In this chapter, I shared one of the primary concerns that impact student learning and the school district's efforts to alleviate this issue through the implementation of Opportunity Culture. Specific questions that allowed me to assess the impact of this initiative as well as any associated assumptions, delimitations, and limitations were shared. I also outlined the significance of this study such that it may help other implementers in establishing a structure for determining the impact of Opportunity Culture on its school district. The next chapter, Chapter 2, explored the relevant literature to provide a deeper understanding of Opportunity Culture, teacher leadership, and the theoretical foundations underpinning this study. Additionally, although limited empirical articles on this topic are available, prior studies were included to demonstrate the findings of Opportunity Culture from other research projects. Chapter 3 looked at the study design and rationale for evaluating the impact of Opportunity Culture in NESW Public Schools, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 focused on data collection, data analysis, and results so that I could share findings, interpretation of the findings and implications for practice and future research in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the impact of Opportunity Culture, an initiative that restructures PreK-12 schools to extend the reach of excellent teachers to more students. Opportunity Culture emphasizes the need for better pay within recurring school budgets in a small, rural, eastern North Carolina school district. When considering historical student performance data and academic growth data, Northeast Southwest school district has a pattern of performance that is well below the state's average. The chapter delved into the community demographics and district performance data justifying the need for use of Opportunity Culture, literature around Opportunity Culture and related metrics of impact, the importance of teachers, and teacher leadership. Additionally, the theoretical framework of this study, which included Lorenz's Complexity "Chaos" Theory and the tenets of Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory, was described.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The search strategy for this problem of practice has been unorthodox as there was very little available within peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical articles, or dissertations on the topic of Opportunity Culture. As such, much of the literature on Opportunity Culture came directly from the public website for Public Impact, developers of the Opportunity Culture initiative. The data for Northeast Southwest Public Schools district came directly from the school or public North Carolina educational websites. Online academic libraries, such as EBSCOhost and ProQuest, were also used to search for keywords. The main keywords for this literature search included Opportunity Culture, Public Impact, Teacher Leadership, Chaos Theory, Social Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, School, and Education. A search for Opportunity Culture in scholarly journals and peer-reviewed journals returned zero results. However, one

available dissertation was found on this topic. It was written by Robert Batts in 2020. Teacher Leadership, on the other hand, had more relevant literature available. There were 1,176 dissertations with Teacher Leadership in the title with dates from January 1, 2008, to February 11, 2022. There were 164,248 results for Teacher Leadership within scholarly journals and peer-reviewed journals.

### **Community and District Data**

Based on the county distress rankings as communicated by the North Carolina Department of Commerce (Rhoades, 2019), the county in which the local education agency is situated in is designated as a Tier I county, which means that it is among the most distressed counties within the state. The factors that are taken into consideration when assigning a ranking to a county include adjusted property tax base per capita, average unemployment rate, percentage growth in population, and median household income.

Following the Tier I designation of 40 counties that are most distressed, are Tiers 2 (the next 40 most distressed out of 100 counties in NC), followed by the last 20, which would be the least distressed (i.e., Tier 3). When reviewing the archived rankings from 2015-2019, the county in which the local education agency is located in has consistently ranked as a Tier I county. Based on the North Carolina Department of Commerce Guidelines, being ranked as a Tier I county for two consecutive years automatically qualifies a county for the same Tier I designation the following year. For 2022, Northeast Southwest County remained a Tier I district with an adjusted per capita of \$66,062, a decrease in population from the previous year by 3.84%, a median household income of \$40,784, an unemployment rate of 8.52%, and an economic distress ranking of #3, with #1 being the most distressed (Cooper, 2021).

The Roadmap of Need (Bryant, 2019) is an assessment that closely looks at four domains to better understand and determine the counties in North Carolina where young people are most at-risk of not succeeding across all 100 counties in the state. Domains ranked include health, youth behavior and safety, education, and economic development. The four domains are broken down into 20 indicators. Through the lens of a whole child assessment, it is believed that enough information can be garnered to help determine whether a child can be successful both inside and outside of the school setting. This local education agency has consistently held some of the lowest rankings in the state (Bryant, 2019).

Based on the factors that surround this county, research shows that children from highly distressed and impoverished backgrounds are more likely to be faced with the challenge of not reaching their goals and ultimate potential throughout their lifetime (Bagaya, 2021). Children growing up in a family whose income is below the poverty line are more likely to experience outcomes that are significantly worse in a number of areas that would be general indicators of future success. These areas would include physical and mental wellness, attainment of postsecondary education, and success in the workplace (Le Menestrel & Duncan, 2019).

This problem of practice was designed to aid the district in its stated pursuit of continuous improvement in student performance and teacher capacity and retention. Tables 3 through 6 are specific to Northeast Southwest Schools. As shown in Table 3, there were 42.9% of the schools performing at an F level based on the NC Schools Report Card in 2015 and by 2019 only 14.3% of the schools remained at an F level. However, there were not more schools moving into the A Performance category over this five-year period, but there was a clear progression of improvement from a letter grade of F to D.



Table 3

*Northeast Southwest Schools Overall School Performance*

| School        | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  | 2019  |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| A Performance | 7.1%  | 7.1%  | 7.1%  | 7.1%  | 7.1%  |
| C Performance | 21.4% | 21.4% |       | 14.3% | 28.6% |
| D Performance | 28.6% | 50.0% | 57.1% | 57.1% | 50.0% |
| F Performance | 42.9% | 21.4% | 35.7% | 21.4% | 14.3% |

*Note.* Data from North Carolina School Report Cards.

Table 4 shows the overall school growth for the Northeast Southwest Public School System. The key indicator with this table is that more schools exceeded the mark in 2019 compared to 2015. Therefore, the metrics are showing improvement as the year's progress.

Table 5 displays the graduation rate for the Northeast Southwest Public School System in comparison to the State of North Carolina and the National Average. Using Iowa as a competitive benchmark, the Northeast Southwest Public School System still has progress to make. However, the 2020 results for Northwest Southwest Schools indicate an 82.7% graduation rate, which shows improvement from the previous five years. When reviewing the comprehensive national data, the two top performing states are Alabama at 91.7% and Iowa at 91.6%.

Table 6 shows the college-ready scores of ACT, SAT, Advanced Placement (AP), and college enrollment for Northeast Southwest Public School District. The ACT and SAT are typical tests high school students take to know if they are prepared for college. The highest ACT score possible is 36. The highest SAT score possible is 1600.

### **Opportunity Culture**

The mission of Opportunity Culture, an initiative of Public Impact, is to dramatically improve education for all students, especially those who have historically been coined as at-risk. This would include students from impoverished backgrounds, students of color, and at times, students in highly rural areas (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). This is accomplished by extending the reach of teachers who have a proven track record of success (Backes & Hansen, 2018).

According to Public Impact (2018), Opportunity Culture is grounded in the following five key principles for teachers:

Table 4

*Northeast Southwest Schools Overall School Growth*

| Rating   | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  | 2019  |
|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Exceeded | 35.7% | 50.0% | 21.4% | 28.6% | 42.9% |
| Met      | 42.9% | 21.4% | 21.4% | 50.0% | 42.9% |
| Not Met  | 21.4% | 28.6% | 57.1% | 21.4% | 14.3% |

*Note.* Data from North Carolina School Report Cards.

Table 5

*Northeast Southwest Schools Graduation Rate*

|                                       | 2015        | 2016       | 2017                  | 2018      | 2019                 |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Northeast Southwest County            | 81.5%       | 78.6%      | 80.7%                 | 77.3%     | 79.2%                |
| State of North Carolina               | 85.6%       | 85.9%      | 86.5%                 | 86.3%     | 86.5%                |
| National Average                      | 83.0%       | 84.0%      | 86.0%                 | 85.0%     | 88.0%                |
| State(s) with Highest Graduation Rate | Iowa, 91.0% | Iowa 91.0% | Iowa & Alabama, 92.0% | Iowa, 91% | Iowa & Kentucky, 94% |

*Note.* Northeast Southwest County and North Carolina Data from North Carolina School Report Cards. National Average from the National Center for Education Statistics.

Table 6

*Northeast Southwest Schools College Ready Scores*

| Score              | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  | 2018  | 2019  | 2020 |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| ACT Performance    | 35.8% | 29.8% | 31%   | 32.2% | 27.5% | N/A  |
| ACT WorkKeys       | 49.2% | 55.5% | 53.4% | 51.5% | 37.5% | N/A  |
| Average SAT        | 883   | 861   | 976   | 954   | 945   | 967  |
| Advanced Placement | 18%   | 19%   | 19%   | 17%   | 13%   | 26%  |
| College Enrollment | 66%   | 54%   | 60%   | 52%   | 53%   | 52%  |

*Note.* ACT Performance represents the percent of students scoring 17 or above. ACT WorkKeys represents the percent of students earning a silver certificate or higher.

1. Reach more students with excellent teachers and their teams
2. Pay teachers more for extending their reach
3. Fund pay with regular budgets
4. Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning, collaboration, and development
5. Match authority and accountability to each person's responsibilities

The goal of the first principle is to enrich more students with high-quality teaching (Public Impact, 2018). This is done by ensuring that excellent teachers reach more students directly or indirectly by leading teams while continuing to teach part-time or full-time. In an Opportunity Culture, reach is when the teacher is held formally accountable for the outcomes of their extra students.

Public Impact (2018) furthered that the goal of the second principle is to pay teachers for their efforts. Schools will accomplish this by paying a lot more to excellent educators who are reaching more students and paying somewhat more, as in the case of Expanded Impact Teachers, to those who extend their reach by up to 33%.

The third principle is to fund teacher pay within regular budgets (Public Impact, 2018). Regular budgets would be those that are recurring, school-level budgets, versus any funding source that may be considered temporary in nature, such as grants. Supplements are funded by trading positions or other costs for more pay for remaining positions, according to the pay plan. See Principle #2. In most cases, this can happen through natural attrition. Pay is in fixed-dollar supplements or is paid on a separate schedule for advanced roles – not percentage add-ons to base pay – to create budget certainty and equal opportunity for educators at all levels of experience.

With the fourth principle, the goal is to provide in-school time for collaboration, development, and planning (Public Impact, 2018). This may be accomplished by having teachers responsible for more students and ensuring that they have time to plan, creating time in the schedule for common planning several times each week so that the team leaders may plan, collaborate, observe, and provide feedback to their team members. Additionally, schools should have clear roles, defined by job descriptions as well as established processes to ensure that the time is used well. Lastly, it is strongly urged that the scheduled time for teaching, planning, and collaborating is protected from general interruptions and other duties.

Public Impact (2018) shared that the fifth principle is to achieve a person-job fit where the teacher is using their skills to the best of their ability and the students reap rewards of having a subject matter expert in class. Reaching this goal may be achieved by ensuring that the “teachers are the formally accountable teachers of record in the district and state. They will be matched to the students and subjects they reach through direct teaching or as a team leader” (Public Impact, 2018). Additionally, the person’s level and span of formal authority will match his/her role, responsibilities, and accountability. In order to obtain the desired results, schools and school districts must adhere to the core principles of Opportunity Culture. According to Public Impact (2018) not adhering to these principles consistently and long-term is almost sure to end in failure.

### **Implementation of Opportunity Culture in Northeast Southwest Public Schools**

Northeast Southwest Public Schools adopted its Opportunity Culture model in the 2017-2018 school year. The implementation of this initiative was based on an opportunity as spelled out in North Carolina Assembly Session Law 2016-94, Section 8.7, which allowed the state board of education to establish a three-year pilot program to develop advanced teaching roles

linking teacher pay to teacher performance (Adams, 2015). Through a rigorous application process, Northeast Southwest Schools took advantage of this opportunity and applied to be a part of this pilot program. The total operating fund increased by \$11,353,357 between 2016 and 2017 (Wilson, 2018). The first three schools to implement Opportunity Culture include Lone Pines Elementary, Southern Middle, and Northeast Southwest High. Models were expanded to the entire district in the 2019-2020 school year. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement.

Research by the Brookings Institute found that Opportunity Culture advanced academic performance dramatically. Barrett (2021) explained that schools in their fourth year of implementing Opportunity Culture are "more than twice as likely to make school-wide high growth as those in their first year, and the odds of making high growth school-wide are over 50 percent higher than other schools in the same states" (para. 5). A study of approximately 15,000 students exposed to an Opportunity Culture intervention for at least one year were found to have scored 11% higher in math than students not exposed to Opportunity Culture (Backes & Hansen, 2018).

### **Assessment of Opportunity Culture in Northeast Southwest Schools**

Assessing the implementation of Opportunity Culture in Northeast Southwest Schools was based on reviewing its impact through the lens of the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards, the North Carolina Educator Evaluation System, and the Characteristics of Quality Teachers. The assessment developed for the purpose of this study was in alignment with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction requirement to evaluate the impact of advanced teaching roles designed to improve the quality of classroom instruction. Similar to the state, this



study used the same or similar data sources: rubric-based observation data, coaching trackers data, teacher focus groups, and surveys. The difference between this study and what the state does on a routine basis was the focus of program evaluation for Opportunity Culture in Northeast Southwest Schools.

### **North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards**

The North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards was the result of the call being answered by a 16-member committee known as the North Carolina Professional Standards Committee whose charge was to align what was the 1997 Core Standards for the Teaching Profession with the North Carolina State Board of Education's new mission. The mission of the state board is that "every public school student will graduate from high school globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and prepared for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Cobey, 2018, p. 2). Based on this mission, the committee recognized that what teachers should know and be able to do to prepare students for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should include the following standards:

- I. Teachers Demonstrate Leadership
- II. Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students
- III. Teachers Know the Content They Teach
- IV. Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students
- V. Teachers Reflect on Their Practice

The standards have become the foundation of the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process, whose purpose is to "assess the teacher's performance in relation to the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards and to design a plan for professional growth" (Cobey, 2018, p.

4).

### **North Carolina Educator Evaluation System**

The North Carolina Educator Evaluation System was based on the NCGS 115C-333.1(a) which requires the annual evaluation of all teachers who are licensed by the NC Department of Public Instruction. A local school board is expected to use the performance standard approved by the state board while also having the latitude of including additional evaluation criteria and standards (Berger, 2022). The rubric for Teacher Evaluation was adopted by the State Board of Education in 2008 as well as the teacher evaluation process. The evaluation instruments are “designed to promote effective leadership, quality teaching, and student learning while enhancing professional practice and leading to improved instruction” (Cobey, 2018, p. 4).

### **Improving Teacher Quality**

Often what is meant by “teacher quality” is ambiguous and often inconsistent in nature. For the purposes of this study, teacher quality was best defined as those teachers whose performance according to the standards of the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards, specifically standard three “Teachers Know the Content They Teach” and standard four “Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students” was rated as proficient, accomplished, or distinguished on the NC Teacher Evaluation Rubric during the teacher evaluation process.

According to Cobey (2018):

Teachers who know the content they teach demonstrate this by (a) aligning their instruction with the NC Standard Course of Study, (b) knowing the content appropriate to their teaching specialty, (c) recognizing the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines, and (d) making instruction relevant to students.

Teachers who facilitate learning for their students, demonstrate this standard by

(a) knowing ways in which learning takes place, knowing the appropriate level of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students; (b) planning instruction appropriate for their students; (c) using a variety of instructional methods; (d) integrating and utilizing technology in their instruction; (e) helping students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills; (f) helping students work in teams and develop leadership qualities; (g) communicating effectively; and (h) using a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned (pp. 9-10).

As we assess the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional behaviors during this study, we identified evidence that was indicative of whether Opportunity Culture teacher leaders (MCLs) both demonstrated and supported other teachers in developing the required knowledge, skills, and dispositions in these key areas.

### **The Importance of Teachers**

According to Schweig (2021) teachers are more important than other aspects of schooling when it comes to student achievement. While many factors contribute to a student's academic performance, amongst educational factors, teachers are the most important element in student achievement. “This growing body of research has shed light on the enormous differences in effectiveness among teachers. Students taught by top-quartile teachers make approximately three times the learning progress of students taught by the bottom 5th of teachers. The effects of having a great teacher—or not—extend for years” (Hassel & Hassel, 2009, p. 5). Hiring teachers who are able to produce up to 3 times the learning gains of teachers who may fall into a lower quintile is no easy feat. There just are not enough to meet the need in our nation’s classrooms (Hassel & Hassel, 2009). While current solutions such as implementing better professional

development, providing incentives to teachers for taking on more disadvantaged students, and improving our recruitment efforts are all admirable strategies, they still do not meet the overall need of providing more students access to great teachers. Therefore, teachers who are the most effective are limited and almost unable based on current structures to impact students on a scale larger than the average teacher. Public Impact, a team of professionals from various backgrounds, has been working since 1996 to improve education for all students. Some of their most notable accomplishments include their focus on helping school districts to find and develop great teachers by expanding their impact and retaining them for this critical work, which are all key components in having great schools.

### **Teacher Leadership**

Teacher leadership is considered one of the strongest levers for improving instructional practice. According to Shelton (2014), teacher leaders are necessary for positive change in the school system. "Teacher leadership is the process through which teachers, individually or collectively, influence colleagues, principals, policymakers, and other potential stakeholders to improve teaching and learning" (York-Barr & Duke, 2004, pp. 287-288). Teacher leadership is something that has existed for quite a while; however, the focus of teacher leaders has come back to the forefront of learning as schools aim at improving their test metrics (Ado, 2016). A key ingredient to student success are teachers, while teachers as leaders recognize the need for a school culture that supports growth and ongoing learning at the teacher level (2016).

There are an estimated 250 schools in the United States that have launched Opportunity Culture within their educational system (Gross, 2018). Opportunity Culture relies heavily on teacher leadership. Opportunity Culture is an initiative where the most effective teachers have an opportunity to lead by coaching other teachers within the school setting (2018). Gross (2018)

proclaims that this innovative approach may solve the issues of recruitment and retention with teachers. Butler (2018), an MCL from Charlotte, NC, was reminded of the proverb, “If you love your job, you will never work a day in your life” and humbly admitted that although she had not “worked” since she was 21, she needed continued inspiration with her quest to build successful students (para. 1). Teacher leadership through Opportunity Culture gave her the inspiration she needed and empowered her to inspire colleagues and students. Duffy (2016), an MCL from Syracuse City Schools, shared her school’s recruitment approach:

Come join the exciting new initiative at Meachem Elementary. We are pursuing proven strategies to increase student achievement by increasing adult leadership and the capacity to more effectively reach all students; this will assist in raising our test scores, and provide teachers with more support by their peers, smaller reading-group sizes, classroom management support, and interventions using technology that engage students in their academic journey. Join the Opportunity Culture team and take part in this enriched opportunity! Help lead your school to success! (para. 1).

Duffy (2016) said that the initial meeting to discuss how to redesign teacher roles at Meachem Elementary was not as crowded as she expected; however, there was likely cynicism as human nature doubts such initiatives as the next best thing that will “come and go” (para. 3). To her delight, this program launched with a design team collaborating on teacher roles. It was nothing like what she had experienced before because teachers were in control of “what was best for” their students (Duffy, 2016, para. 4). Duffy (2016) shared that “anything we wanted to change was at our fingertips” (para. 4).

Brenneman (2016) explained that the recipe for building an effective teacher-leadership

system is one-part trust-building, one-part capacity-building, one-part student-centered coaching, and one-part administrator support. She declared that the most important ingredient was building trust. Brenneman's approach was a slow and steady unassuming collaborative approach to coaching her peers. She first started meetings with a smile and by being vulnerable to let the other teachers know her personally and professionally. As they grew to know each other better and build a sense of community, the ice began to break. Then she offered to co-teach with teachers on any subject they wanted coaching on. Coaching in her district is based on a 9-week cycle with the coach in the classroom 2-3 times per week. This removed a barrier since she was less experienced as a teacher and empowered the recipients to select a subject they were open to sharing. As time went on, more teachers volunteered for the coaching as they could see the benefits. By her second year, Brenneman (2016) saw increased trust with her team, working relationships were better, student achievement increased, plus her "kindergarten team had the highest growth in the district on the state reading and comprehension assessment," and her "first-graders had an average of at least a year's growth on the assessment" (para. 5).

### **Teacher Leadership Model Standards**

The development of Teacher Leadership Model Standards began in 2008. The first draft was released in March 2010 for public comment. The final document was published in 2011 at the Teacher Leadership Model Consortium with the expectation that when we become intentional in our work of developing leaders within the school setting that have not been groomed to meet their highest potential, it is then that we will make those strides in education and move our work as educators forward in a globally competitive manner (Shelton, 2014). The consortium council encourages that "Within every school, there is a sleeping giant of teacher

leadership, which can be a strong catalyst for making change” (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009, p. 2).

Shelton (2014) explained that there are three ways to cultivate teacher leadership which includes carving time and opportunities for teachers to serve as leaders, ensuring that there is a broad array of professional development opportunities provided and building teachers self-efficacy when it comes to leading their colleagues. The Opportunity Culture initiative at Northeast Southwest Schools intentionally sets aside time to do all three.

There are seven domains embedded in the Teacher Leader Model Standards. The first domain involves promoting a collaborative culture to support teachers development and student learning. With this first domain, the “teacher leader understands the principles of adult learning and knows how to develop a collaborative culture of collective responsibility in the school” (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011, p. 14). Within this collaborative culture, the teacher leader promotes collegiality, continuous improvement, respect, and trust. The second domain involves improving teaching and student learning through research. In this second domain, “the teacher leader understands how research creates new knowledge, informs policies and practices, and improves teaching and learning” (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011, p. 15). This is done through systematic inquiry, a critical component of continuous improvement. The third domain involves promoting professional learning for continuous improvement. The Teacher Leader Model Standards (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011) asserts that, “the teacher leader understands the evolving nature of teaching and learning, established and emerging technologies, and the school community” (p. 16). This knowledge is then used to design, facilitate, and promote employee development affiliated with school improvement goals. The fourth domain involves facilitating improvements

in instruction and student learning. This is where “the teacher leader demonstrates a deep understanding of the teaching and learning processes and uses this knowledge to advance the professional skills of colleagues” (Pringle, 2020, p. 17). They do this by “being a continuous learner and modeling reflective practice based on student results” (p. 17). Additionally, this is done by collaborating with other colleagues to match instructional practices to the school’s vision, mission, and goals. The fifth domain involves promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement. The teacher leader is a subject-matter expert on such assessments and is willing to share this information with colleagues. The sixth domain involves improving outreach and collaboration with families and the community. The teacher leader does this by understanding that the educational process is significantly impacted by the internal and external environment, including, but not limited to business leaders, community members and leaders, and families. The seventh domain involves advocating for student learning in the profession. This domain requires the teacher leader to “understand how educational policy is made at the local, state, and national level as well as roles of school leaders, boards of education, legislators, and other stakeholders” (Pringle, 2020, p. 20).

Ado performed a study with 77 pre-service teachers to describe and analyze concepts of teacher leadership and document evidence of the skills and knowledge required to become a teacher leader. Pre-service teachers are those just beginning their teaching journey. The conceptual framework offered by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium in 2011 provided the groundwork for Ado’s study. The Teacher Leader Model Standards consisted of the seven domains described above, which, according to Ado (2016), are “intended to codify, promote, and support teacher leadership” (p. 6).

Ado found that teacher preparation using the seven domains above could provide a



framework for developing future teacher leaders and noted that several pre-service teachers understood they must master their own classroom before leading an initiative such as improving the school system. They also noted that teacher leadership is a career-long journey and a pre-service class with an intentional focus on teacher leadership can pave the way for future leaders.

The introduction of the model was at the 2011 consortium. Since then, the Teacher Leader Model Standards was a conceptual framework used by Shelton in his 2014 dissertation and by Ado to guide her 2016 study. It was also used by Cosenza (2015) in his qualitative study involving 22 teachers from two different schools. Each participant was asked to define or describe what the phrase “teacher leadership” meant to them. The top theme was “collaboration” where 14 of the 22 participants included the discussion of working with colleagues, joint decision making, or providing support. The second theme was “sharing best practices” where 12 of the 22 teachers talked about sharing success stories, sharing knowledge, or supporting teachers who are struggling. There was a tie for the third theme as “role modeling” and “taking action” both had eight teachers discuss these topics. Cosenza then mapped each of these themes back to a domain from the Teacher Leader Model Standards.

Returning to the conceptual framework questions, this study aimed at using the Teacher Leader Model Standards as an integral part of Opportunity Culture. While it is not yet clear if Opportunity Culture was birthed from the 2011 consortium, the language of teacher leadership is heavily laden throughout the Public Impact and Opportunity Culture documentation. This quest was a program evaluation to determine the impact of Opportunity Culture on improving teacher instructional practices.

### **Public Impact Metrics**

Opportunity Culture, an initiative of Public Impact, uses four key metrics including

student reach, student growth, teacher pay, and school culture (Smith, 2021). Student reach is an internal measurement of high-impact instruction and is quantified by the percentage of students reached in certain grades or subjects by qualified teachers. Student growth is an external measurement, similar to peer-reviewed journal articles. Teacher pay is a measure of success for Opportunity Culture as they hope to create a means of promotions for teachers within already defined school budgets. School culture is an all-teacher survey conducted within each implementing Opportunity Culture School. The following sections will provide additional details for each key metric.

### **Student Reach**

High-performance teachers challenge students, thus producing high growth development for students. Public Impact (2021a) show that the estimated number of students reached in the 2020-2021 school year is more than 83,000. Student reach is a measure of high-impact instruction and is typically measured as a percentage of students reached in a certain subject or grade strand by an excellent team of teachers. Smith (2021) offered the following example: If the first school at [district name] had four multi-classroom leaders (MCLs), one for math, reading, science, and social studies, "reach" would be a measure of how many students are impacted by this team of leaders out of all students in the school. If the math MCL, and their team (TRTs, RAs, Team Teachers), were represented in each grade level at the school, then this school will have a 100% reach in math; however, if science teams only cover 3-5 grades, then reach would be around 60%. This metric is reported out by Opportunity Culture on their Data Dashboard as a count of students in the United States that are being reached by these excellent teams of teachers.

### **Student Growth**

To date, student growth has been measured with two reports. The 2018 study examined the act of implementation in three Opportunity Culture districts. The 2021 study examined one district's outcomes in Texas during the 2020-2021 school year. Interesting findings include growth in reading and math achievement when a multi-classroom leader (MCL) is present. Specifically, Public Impact (2021a) reports that an average teacher will have students in the 50th percentile; however, a MCL will move the growth needle from the 50<sup>th</sup> to the 77<sup>th</sup> percentile on average. The study in Texas found that approximately 2000 students had a reading gain of an extra 1.3 years when they were taught by an MCL.

### **Teacher Pay**

Smith (2021) elaborated on teacher pay, explaining that the incentive for a teacher to participate in Opportunity Culture lies in the fact that a teacher may expect to retain the standard salary for a period of time, whereas promotion into Opportunity Culture will advance their pay. In other words, teachers will get paid more money in a shorter period of time. The goals of this incentive are to have a higher level of teacher retainment, increased job satisfaction, and improved school culture within one year. The highest Opportunity Culture supplement for the 2020 - 2021 school year was \$20,000. The average MCL supplement was \$11,893. The range of supplements spanned \$2,250 - \$20,000.

### **School Culture**

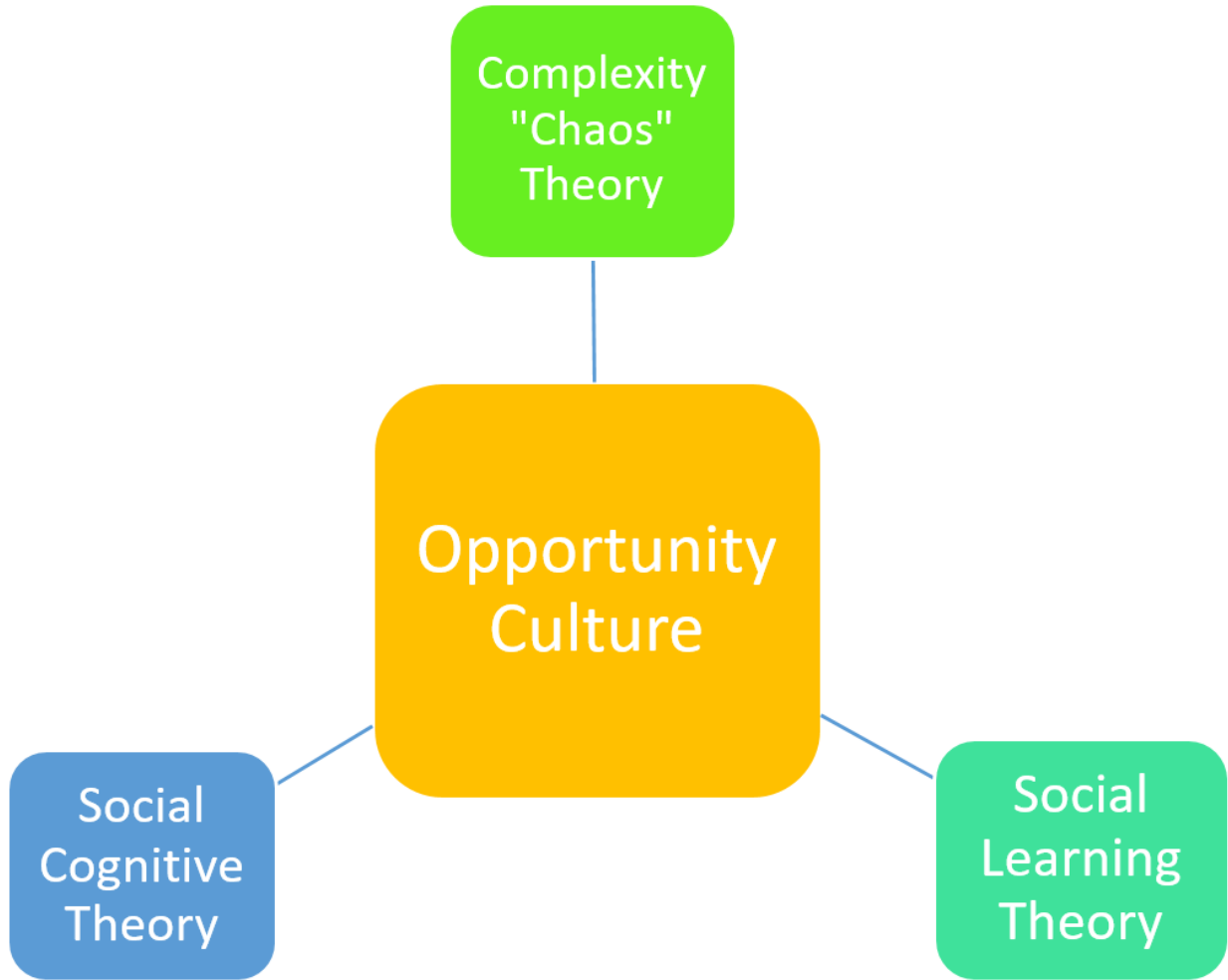
Smith (2021) explained that he is most familiar with the school culture metric and noted that the survey goes out in the early spring with the hope that teachers both in and out of Opportunity Culture teams reflect honestly on the impact that Opportunity Culture has had on their day-to-day working conditions and improvements for students. These results are collected in late spring and reported out to each district in the form of a summative district PowerPoint,

and school-level analysis documents that break out responses based on role (OC, Non-OC, MCL, TRT, etc.). In addition, each school has a collection of anonymous free responses. The headline statistics provided by Public Impact (2021) for all schools in the United States with Opportunity Culture teams are provided below:

- 98% of MCLs (multi-classroom leaders) and 90% of all staff on MCL teams would like Opportunity Culture to continue in their schools
- 97% of MCLs agree that excellent teachers have the opportunity to lead peers in their schools
- 97% of MCLs agree that the supports provided translate into improved instructional practice
- 96% of MCLs report a positive impact on staff collaboration resulting from Opportunity Culture
- 96% of MCLs report that pay opportunities are better with Opportunity Culture
- 95% of educators in all Opportunity Culture roles agree that teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction
- 94% of MCLs agree that Opportunity Culture has improved teacher effectiveness in their schools

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study utilized Lorenz’s Complexity “Chaos” Theory, which considers the impact of making a minor change in order to garner large results. Additionally, the tenets of Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory are applied where appropriate. Together they form the conceptual framework used for this study in support of Opportunity Culture (see Figure 3). These theories and their relevance to this study are explained in the sections that



*Figure 3. Conceptual framework.*

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follow.

### **Complexity “Chaos” Theory**

Einstein is credited with saying, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” When a school, or any organization, is failing, it is necessary for someone to realize that something must be done differently. Philosopher and mathematician Plato wrote, “Our need will be the real creator” around 375 BC in *The Republic: A Socratic Dialogue*.

From that famous quotation, our society knows the phrase, “Necessity is the mother of invention.” As described earlier in this chapter, the Northeast Southwest Schools had a need that needed much attention. The school system was classified with a Tier I designation meaning they were ranked within the most distressed counties in the state. Additionally, according to the 2019 Roadmap of Needs, Northeast Southwest County was one of the bottom five counties (out of 100 counties) where young people were most at risk. Something needed to be done differently from what was done in the past to make the changes needed within this school system. That something did not necessarily need to be a huge change, instead, complexity “chaos” theory suggests that a slight change in weather patterns or human behavior can make a significant difference.

The “butterfly effect” was discovered by Edward Lorenz in 1961. As a mathematician and meteorologist with the Army Air Corps, he studied weather patterns. One day, he intended to study one particular weather sequence in more detail. Instead of re-keying the numbers entirely, he started his analysis about halfway. To his surprise, the results were completely different. He discovered that a small variance in his algorithm was similar to a puff of wind or a butterfly flapping its wings. This is referred to as a “sensitive dependence on initial conditions” and is

equated to the metaphor of “a butterfly flapping its wings in Brazil could set off a tornado in Texas” (Chodos, 2003, p. 1).

Sensitive dependence on initial conditions refers to a minor change in a chaotic system that, when done consistently, is magnified due to the system dynamics. In a school system, this becomes very personal as it could result in the success or failure of a single student in preparation for their future. There are many examples where a student who was once good in math eventually turns away from the subject because they had a bad experience in a class years ago. This example can be detrimental to the future of a student, especially one that is gifted in math but may have had a negative experience in elementary, middle, or high school. Similarly, a student that is struggling in science may be ready to give up in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, but when a teacher comes alongside them and offers encouragement, the trajectory may change where the student decides they can continue trying with a new approach recommended by their teacher. Either way, it was likely a conversation between teacher and student that changed the course of direction.

Yuan and Yang (2021) conducted a longitudinal study with two English as foreign language teachers in Hong Kong. They used complexity (chaos) theory as their theoretical foundation. The participants had “elements of chaos and tensions brought by the external environment,” such as negative comments from other teachers and struggle with performance expectations (Yuan & Yang, 2021, p. 22). They also had external pressure, environmental complexities, disruption, and conflict. The scholars found the teachers being “pushed to the edge of chaos” and needing to adapt to their environment with willingness and adaptability to experiment and seek new ways of addressing new challenges and acquiring new knowledge (Yuan & Yang, 2021, p. 19). This necessity to think outside of the box spurred the teachers “to develop their expertise at the edge of chaos” (p. 7). Their practical recommendation was for

teachers to develop “expertise as a complex, adaptive, and evolving system in daily practice” (p. 1).

In the Northeast Southwest Public School district, the “edge of chaos” was being ranked as third on the economic distress rating, with first being the most distressed (Cooper, 2021). Additionally, one can conclude that it also looks like the Tier I designation year after year with a 2021 adjusted per capita of \$66,062, a decrease in population from the previous year by 3.84%, a median household income of \$40,784, and an unemployment rate of 8.52% (2021). The “edge of chaos” is where the decisions are made to do something different and for Northeast Southwest County, that decision was to implement Opportunity Culture in the 2017-2018 school year. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Albert Bandura is credited with social learning theory, social cognitive theory, and self-efficacy theory, which is a subset of social cognitive theory. Bandura (1961) wrote that “human behavior is modifiable through psychological procedures” and insisted that “if one seriously subscribes to the view that psychotherapy as a learning process, the methods of treatment should be derived from our knowledge of learning and motivation” (p. 143). He continued by saying, “such an orientation is likely to yield new techniques and treatment which, in many respects, may differ markedly from the procedures currently in use” (p. 143). While this seminal article by Bandura spoke of counterconditioning, extinction, discrimination learning, methods of reward, punishment, and social imitation, it lays the groundwork for social learning theory which has principles of observation, attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Bandura authored many empirical articles and textbooks throughout the 1960s on this topic including



Psychotherapy as a Learning Process (Bandura, 1961), Behavior Theory and Identificatory Learning (Bandura, 1963), and Social Learning and Moral Judgments (Bandura, 1969). He also presented at the 1962 Social Reinforcement and Behavior Change Symposium. Bandura's hard work and dedication earned him a ranking of the fourth most eminent psychologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, according to the 2002 Review of General Psychology. He follows B. F. Skinner, Jean Piaget, and Sigmund Freud (Haggbloom, 2002).

Bandura, who worked with children and adults, asserted that human behavior can be learned by imitation, modeling, and observation. In 1961 and 1963, Bandura conducted the Bobo doll experiments where an adult would physically and verbally assault a Bobo doll (Cherry, 2020). In the experiment, there were 36 boys and 36 girls between three years of age and six years of age. There were three groups of children: one group of 24 were in the control group and two experimental groups of 24 each. One experimental group of children observed non-aggressive behavior where the adult in the room ignored the Bobo doll and played with tinker toys. The other group observed aggression where the adult in the room laid the Bobo doll on its side, punched it in the nose, lifted the Bobo doll to a standing position and struck it with a mallet. The adult then tossed the doll upward while kicking it. This aggressive physical behavior was followed by verbal assaults such as "kick him" and "pow." Through this experiment, Bandura examined the "role of imitation in social learning among children, in particular examining the premise that children can learn aggressive behavior and engage in aggressive actions toward other individuals as a consequence of observing other individuals engaged in aggressive behavior" (Dillon & Dillon, 2010, p. 299). According to Brown (2020), social learning theory states that "learning occurs in the social context via observing the behavior of a model along with the consequences of that behavior" (para. 7).

The mission of the Northeast Southwest Public Schools community is to collaborate with and graduate all students so they are ready to achieve success in a rapidly changing world. The vision of the school system is that all NESW scholars will graduate prepared to design their own futures, navigate change, and make the world a better place. The equity vision is that NESW will be a place where opportunities are no longer predicted by social, cultural, or economic factors. The priorities include academic excellence, talent recruitment and development, equity in action: the whole child, purposeful partnerships, and resilient foundation. By using the social learning theory, Northeast Southwest Schools has two opportunities. The first is the obvious use of the theory to teach students through observation and imitation, not to be aggressive, but to have the skills needed to succeed in life. The second by school leaders looking outside of their county to find a teaching model that works, such as Opportunity Culture. They observe and imitate that model to obtain the success they seek for their district.

### **Social Cognitive Theory**

Social cognitive theory expands on Bandura's social learning theory as there is a broader theoretical scope. Bandura's work evolved as time went on. In the 1970s he published books and articles titled Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Cognitive Processes Mediating Behavioral Change (Bandura et al., 1977), Social Learning and Cognition (Bandura, 1977), and The Self System in Reciprocal Determinism (Bandura, 1978).

Bandura (1988) explained that social cognitive theory includes "developing competencies through mastery modeling, strengthening people's beliefs in their capabilities so they make better use of their talents, and enhancing self-motivation through goal systems" (p. 276). In his 1988 article, Bandura described that modeling involves developing competencies where complex skills are broken into smaller subskills. Once those subskills are learned, they are "combined into

complex strategies that can serve different purposes” (Bandura, 1988, p. 276). He furthered by saying, “effective modeling teaches general rules and strategies for dealing with different situations rather than only specific responses” (Bandura, 1988, p. 276). Guided skill perfection is the second step to developing competencies. Bandura (1988) stated, “proficiency requires extensive practice” (p. 276) and noted role-playing or simulations are best as one can perfect their skills without fear of making mistakes. To transfer skills from a simulated environment to a work environment, one should continue with guided practices in addition to ongoing feedback to achieve the greatest improvement. Bandura (1988) clarified that “there is a difference between possessing skills and being able to use them well and consistently under different circumstances” (p. 279). Perceived self-efficacy is the strong belief a person has in their own capability “to exercise control over events to accomplish desired goals” (Bandura, 1988, p. 279). Self-efficacy is the culprit when some teachers with the same skillset perform poorly, while other teachers with the same skillset perform extraordinarily. The sources of perceived self-efficacy, according to Bandura (1988) include (a) mastery experiences, (b) vicarious experience, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological state. Bandura (1988) wrote, “the most effective way of developing a strong sense of efficacy is through success experiences” (p. 284).

According to Brown (2020), social cognitive theory states that “learning can occur by observing a behavior and that the manifestation of that behavior in the learner is regulated by the triadic reciprocal determinism between personal (cognitive) factors, the behavior itself, and by the environment (reinforcement)” (para. 7). The four core concepts of social cognitive theory include attention, retention, production, and motivation.

Batts (2020) included social cognitive learning theory as one of his theories in a study on Opportunity Culture. His qualitative study primarily observed the aspect of coaching through the

Opportunity Culture platform. Specifically, he examined the relationship between self-efficacy with teacher quality and teacher attrition. Batts found that Opportunity Culture offered a platform for teachers to develop their professional teacher capacity, thus increasing student outcomes.

### **Summary**

Chapter 2 provided a deeper understanding of the Northeast Southwest Public Schools district, Opportunity Culture, NC Professional Teaching Standards, NC Teacher Evaluation, teacher leadership, complexity “chaos” theory, social learning theory, and social cognitive theory. Additionally, although limited empirical articles on this topic are available, prior studies were included to demonstrate the findings of Opportunity Culture from other research projects. The next chapter provided the details of the mixed methods approach selected for this problem of practice and the procedures applied for conducting this program evaluation study.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized a mixed methods program evaluation research design to determine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices for improved student academic achievement. The data collected and analyzed was used to address how to best utilize the current teacher talent of those who have a proven track record of success to better develop other teachers throughout their school site.

In order to guide this study, the following questions were addressed:

1. How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' knowledge of the content they teach?
2. How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' facilitation of learning for their students?

Question 1 is specifically aligned with NC Teaching Standard III, while Question 2 is aligned with Standard IV.

### **Study Design and Rationale**

Program evaluation is, according to Patton (2002), “the systematic collection of information about activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming” (p. 10). “Knowledge generating involves problem formulation, data collection, data analysis, and reporting as main phases” (Soydan, 2002, p. 298). This study was a mixed methods research design. Mixed methods combine the use of both qualitative and quantitative data in its data collection and even possibly data analysis techniques (Johnson et al., n.d.). Qualitative data sources used for this study will provide a methodical approach to a comprehensive program evaluation that uses “guiding principles and collaborative strategies to

initiate, design, and implement outcome evaluations” (Secret et al., 2011, p. 9). For the purposes of this program evaluation, qualitative data included the feedback obtained during the teacher focus groups and via the coaching trackers. Quantitative data sources included teacher evaluation data based on the NC Teacher Evaluation Rubric as well as survey data. This mixed methods approach was especially pertinent to this study as it allowed Northeast Southwest school district to determine if the Opportunity Culture initiative was resulting in the outcomes desired by the district, such as the improvement in teacher instructional capacity and providing students greater access to excellent educators.

Step one to the comprehensive approach to program evaluation was to establish a collaborative relationship between researchers and practitioners (Secret et al., 2011). This step required a spirit of discovery to “explore, share, and reflect on the values that are important to each other as they enter into an agreement” (Secret et al., 2011, p. 12). Participants needed a desire to understand what interventions worked and why they worked while embracing a willingness to take risks and question conventional wisdom. This first step also required respect for co-leading the research project. Secret et al. (2011) explained that one of the most important predictors of a long-lasting and meaningful collaboration is for the researcher to welcome the practitioner into the world of research; the practitioner’s role cannot be overlooked.

The second step was formulating program evaluation goals with a clearly defined evaluation model. For this study, the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation standards was used. Specifically, Teachers Know the Content They Teach and Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students. Instructional knowledge and instructional practice were the two areas of interest.

The third step is selecting the research methodology. Secret et al. (2011) recommended selecting a research design that is appropriate for the program being evaluated and also matches

the researcher's skillset. They also recommended the scientist-manager-practitioner (SMP) model of program evaluation which provided equal responsibility and status to all members of the team. This model was "consistent with a co-learning approach" (Secret et al., 2011, p. 14).

The fourth step was implementing the research/collecting the data. It was important to have minimal disruption to the program. It was also important to videotape and take notes when possible. The participants in this study were busy with their regular, daily duties in their respective schools. It was necessary to conduct the interviews during their planning periods or off-times to avoid disruption to their daily work. Surveys were done at their leisure as they were distributed via email with a Qualtrics survey link.

The fifth step was analyzing the data. Secret et al. (2011) recommended data visualization and a written narrative that informed all stakeholders of the findings. Qualitative data analysis followed Yin's (2014) 5-steps data analysis process including (a) collecting the data, (b) separating the data into groups, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) assessing the information, and (e) developing conclusions. Quantitative data analysis was achieved utilizing Microsoft Excel. Qualitative data was evaluated with Atlas.ti.

The final step of this project was to disseminate findings to all team members via presentations and written reports. The findings were conveyed in a clear and concise manner to all interested parties. Secret et al. (2011) cautioned that a major barrier to effectively disseminating program evaluation findings is the "disconnect between the generators of the knowledge and those who are expected to use the knowledge" (p. 17). They suggested that the co-learning approach using the scientist-manager-practitioner (SMP) model would help with this final step.

Barriers to collaborative relationships can include personal agendas, lack of flexibility with modifying or changing processes and procedures, lack of time, unclear expectations, overuse of jargon, and resisting change. Facilitators of collaborative relationships include preplanning, participant commitment, respect for one another, and understanding the culture of each person involved. Additionally, practice-research collaborations need agreement from the researcher and the practitioner to commit to scientific rigor, alignment of one another's mission, and "mutually acceptable research conditions" (Secret et al., 2011, p. 10).

### **Sample and Sampling Procedures**

From this population, a purposeful sampling design allowed a small group of participants from the initial implementer schools to be studied. Up to ten teachers from the initial implementer schools that the MCLs have worked with were the target sample in addition to up to four Opportunity Culture teacher leaders among all of the initial implementer schools. Demographic information was asked of each participant to know how long they have worked with Northeast Southwest Schools and in what capacity.

Lone Pines Elementary School is a PreK-5 school located in rural Northeast Southwest County. The school was one of three initial implementers of the Opportunity Culture framework in Northeast Southwest Schools. The overall population of the school is approximately 255 students and 15 licensed teachers. Of the student population, approximately 61% are African-American, 7% are Caucasian, 23% are Latinx, and 9% are multi-racial. The target population for this study included two teacher leaders (MCLs), one in the area of math and one in English Language Arts. Participant data was also retrieved for teachers in grades K-2 from the 2017-18 to 2021-2022 school years. The ELA teacher leader brought 25 years of teaching experience



prior to becoming the school's ELA Multi-Classroom Leader. The math teacher leader brought 24 years of teaching experience prior to becoming the school's math Multi-Classroom Leader.

Southern Middle School serves grades 6-8 and is located in a very spacious, rural area known as the “northside” of Northeast Southwest County. This is one of three schools in the “Innovation Zone,” which feeds Northeast High School. Southern Middle School is 92% poverty based and had struggled more than any other school prior to the implementation of Opportunity Culture. The school has 68% of its population as African-American, 20% Latinx, 8% multi-racial and 4% Caucasian. Seven percent (7%) of the school’s population are English Language Learners (ELLs) and 18% participate in the Exceptional Children’s program. In the first year of Opportunity Culture, Southern Middle School increased school performance from 27 to 35 in its overall performance. The school hired a Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL), an Expanded Impact Teacher (EIT), and a Reach Associate (RA) to redesign the master schedule. The director (Andrews, 2020) also shared the following regarding the Math MCL at Southern Middle School:

[The MCL] led a team of three and taught students of her own. MCLs are accountable for the learning of all the students on the team. EITs plan and deliver in-person instruction for more students than a typical teacher and/or take on additional responsibilities. The Science EIT taught science to all students at Southern Middle School, taking on larger class sizes than the average teacher and partnering closely with the RA to minimize the drawbacks of a large class. The RA collaborated closely with the EIT by pulling small groups of students and co-facilitating learning.

Currently, the school has one MCL. Northeast High School serves grades 9-12 and is located in Rural Zone, North Carolina, in Northeast Southwest County. Enrollment for the 2022-2023 school year includes 206 students. According to Public School Review, enrollment has

dropped by 15% in the past five years. The majority (92%) of the student body are students of color. The school has 70% of its population as African-American, 20% Latinx, 1% multi-racial, 8% Caucasian, and 1% Asian. Twelve percent (12%) of the school's population are English Language Learners (ELLs) and 21% participate in the Exceptional Children's program. And according to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's (2022) report card, approximately 60% of the students are economically disadvantaged. Both Southern Middle School and Northeast High School currently have one MCL each.

### **Instrumentation**

For qualitative data collection within this mixed methods program evaluation study, the instrument was the researcher. According to Patton (2002), "in qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument" (p. 14). This alludes to the fact that the researcher used their own sensory organs and facilitative interaction to observe and describe the phenomenon of lived experiences for the implementation of Opportunity Culture at the three initial schools in Northeast Southwest County. For the quantitative data collection, the teacher standard rubrics were used. Additionally, demographic questions were asked with the survey. Finally, qualitative data sources included focus groups that were conducted using the protocol, as well as information extracted from coaching trackers.

### **Survey**

The survey distributed requested demographic data about the participant. Specifically, the survey asked how long they have worked with Northeast Southwest Schools and in what capacity. Other demographic information included gender, ethnicity, school buildings they have worked in, and educational level.

The questions for the survey were based on the standards found in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Standards as a guide. Survey questions were developed by using the elements under Standard 3: Teachers Know the Content They Teach and Standard 4: Teachers Facilitate Learning for their Students. The elements represent the subcategories for teacher performance that are aligned with the standards. Using these subcategories as a basis, questions were developed to assess the impact on classroom teachers' instructional practices through the implementation of a Likert-type scale continuum for response. Survey validation occurred by administering the survey to various educators within Northeast Southwest school district to gain their feedback as well as information regarding survey clarity. I used their feedback from the survey to determine whether modifications to the survey need to be implemented. The survey data helped to inform the focus group discussions and assisted with answering the research questions.

### **Focus Groups**

According to Patton (2002), program evaluations often include “focus groups with diverse program constituencies to determine how much consensus there is among various stakeholders about a program's goals and intervention strategies and to identify where differences lie” (p. 164). This approach offered a venue for multi-classroom leaders to discuss best practices for utilizing the current teacher talent of those who have a proven track record of success to better develop other teachers throughout their school site. Additional feedback was also gathered from classroom teachers who were the recipients of the support provided by the MCLs. Their participation allowed additional voice to be shared regarding the impact of support received through the Opportunity Culture model. This program evaluation used focus group

interviews to “tell the program’s story by capturing and communicating the participant’s stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 10).

### **Coaching Trackers**

To keep up with what they ask teachers to do, most MCLs used a coaching tracker. The coaching tracker allowed the teacher leaders to have a systematic process for tracking the coaching cycle as well as the implementation of coaching feedback. A variety of models are available for use, while the template as found in Bambrick-Santoyo’s *Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools* was the version most often used. Many MCLs adopted a coaching tracker template and personalized it based on their school’s needs. The coaching trackers allowed the MCLs to communicate next steps as well as the progress that teachers were making.

### **Procedures**

The following section provided step-by-step procedures for conducting this study. Having a methodical and scientific approach to data collection and analysis was necessary for a robust research project. Cozby and Bates (2018) explained that scientific inquiry involves a researcher who will “enthusiastically search for observations that will verify or reject their ideas about the world” (p. 31). Conducting an academic research study, according to Cozby and Bates, also recognizes that scientists are not alone. They present their findings to others who will follow up and conduct further research. Therefore, this section provided details for future scholars to understand exactly what was done to collect and analyze the data.

### **Step 1 – Collaborative Relationships**

Step one to the comprehensive approach to program evaluation is to establish a collaborative relationship between researchers and practitioners (Secret et al., 2011). This first

step was considered with much thought as I am also a senior-level district administrator who was involved with the original implementation of Opportunity Culture in Northeast Southwest County. There were already relationships in place prior to conducting this study. However, I understood the need to separate myself from the study to eliminate bias. While conducting the study, I used a professional and scientific process of contacting the participants and facilitating the data collection. Due to our working relationship, there was already a sense of trust that I had the best interest of Northeast Southwest County at heart and wanted to improve the program for current and future students. However, I ensured that my position was not an obstacle to collecting accurate and credible data.

### **Step 2 – Clearly Defined Evaluation Model**

The second step is formulating program evaluation goals with a clearly defined evaluation model. The participants of the study will already be familiar with the teacher evaluation rubrics. The *Teachers Know the Content They Teach* rubric observes if the Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL) assists colleagues in applying strategies in their classroom, such as modifying instruction to improve student learning and if MCLs collaborate with others to influence school-wide curriculum and teaching practices. The *Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students* rubric observes if MCLs stay abreast of current research about student learning and emerging resources. These two rubrics provided a consistent structure for the program evaluation.

### **Step 3 – Research Methodology Selection**

The third step is selecting the research methodology. Using the scientist-manager-practitioner (SMP) model of program evaluation, I selected a mixed methods approach to include a quantitative survey and a qualitative focus group. These two approaches provided a method for

practitioners to share their experiences since the implementation of Opportunity Culture that began during the 2017-18 school year. The qualitative methodology enabled the participants to share their experience with their own voice; whereas the quantitative methodology overlays a metric system to measure the teacher evaluation process.

#### **Step 4 – Collecting the Data**

The fourth step was implementing the study and collecting the data. Data was collected with minimal disruption to the MCLs schedule. I did my best to offer a flexible schedule to meet the needs of the participants. The focus groups were recorded to ensure accuracy. The recordings were transcribed and checked for validity by allowing the participants to review the transcription and verify it. The survey was sent to the participants via email with a link to the Qualtrics survey. This enabled each participant to take the survey when it is most convenient for them. Patton (2002) explains that the time immediately following a focus group “is critical to the rigor and validity of qualitative inquiry” (p. 383). During this time, the recording was checked to make sure it worked properly. I also maintained a notebook that was updated to include details about the setting and observations of happenings during the focus group. Noting the details about when and where the focus group took place, how the questions were received, rapport with participants, etc., can be helpful with the analyzing process. Patton notes that the time after the data collection process is referred to as a time of quality control.

#### **Step 5 – Analyzing the Data**

The fifth step is analyzing the data. Secret et al. (2011) recommends data visualization and a written narrative that informed all stakeholders of the findings. To analyze the qualitative data, transcripts were obtained from the digital recording using Google Meet’s transcription feature followed by coding of the data with Atlas.ti. I followed Yin’s (2014) 5 step data analysis

process, including (a) collecting the data (b) separating the data into groups, (c) regrouping the data into themes, (d) assessing the information, and (e) developing conclusions. Once the data was cleaned, descriptive statistics provided a detailed description of the participants.

### **Step 6 – Disseminating Research Findings**

The final step of this project was to disseminate findings to all team members via presentations and written reports. A goal of this student was to communicate the findings clearly and concisely. It is understood that this research study was more than a requirement for the completion of the dissertation. It was an opportunity to share the findings with leaders and other interested parties of Northeast Southwest school district who can use this information to make plans for the future.

### **Role of the Researcher**

This study took place within my workplace organization, Northeast Southwest School district, where I serve as a senior-level district administrator. It is my hope that the outcomes of the study were useful to the district's leadership team as future decisions are made regarding the continuation and expansion of the Opportunity Culture initiative. It was imperative that I attempted to remain as neutral as possible and not allow any personal biases into the study as the data are collected, analyzed, and reported.

Steps taken to help minimize potential biases were used to triangulate the data using at least three different data sources in the study. As an example, participants, such as the teacher leaders, reviewed the findings and offered feedback regarding the interpretation of the data extracted from the coaching trackers. They also reviewed findings with a peer to ensure that the findings of this study were both sound and reasonable given the data from the study. These

measures helped keep any biases in check and maintain the integrity of the outcomes of the evaluation.

### **Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent**

Any research which involves human subjects must be reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board before the work begins. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensures that the rights and well-being of human participants are protected when participating in the research process. Prior to granting approval, considerations by an IRB included how the researcher ensured that participants were informed of their rights, what methods were employed to protect the participants, and whether or not the benefits of the study outweighed the risks. Appendix A provided the approval letter from East Carolina University's IRB for me to conduct this study. In addition to seeking IRB approval, I have completed the CITI Modules as a prerequisite to seeking their approval. CITI Training modules ensured that, as a researcher, I upheld the highest levels of meeting all ethical requirements as well as abided by any required regulatory requirements.

Each participant received an informed consent form that was signed to participate in the study. The informed consent discloses relevant information about the research project to the participant, including the purpose of the research. The informed consent also discloses any possible risks or benefits to the participant. A copy of the informed consent is available in Appendix B.

When conducting research with human participants, the American Psychological Association offers five general principles including (a) beneficence and no maleficence, (b) fidelity and responsibility, (c) integrity, (d) justice, and (e) respect for people's rights and dignity. As the scholarly practitioner leading this study, I did everything possible to ensure that



participants were not harmed as a result of my study. The topic was low risk and did not cause the participants stress or angst when talking with me, as the researcher. I am known in the school district, and there was a level of trust already established to allow for open communication. With that said, I acknowledged the threat of my positionality and approached this study as a researcher and not as a senior-level district administrator.

When accessing teacher data, I ensured that all data was housed in password-secured electronic platforms. Accessing data that is in hard copy versus electronic formats, such as the coaching trackers, were obtained by gaining permission from the school-level administrator (principal). If the data accessed has personally identifiable information, it was analyzed at the school level to ensure that no connection to a specific teacher was known by the researcher. While electronic platforms are password protected, all hard copy data was housed and stored in a locked file cabinet when not being directly used or scanned and saved on a flash drive only accessible by the researcher. The informed consent specifically listed how each source of data was accessed, collected, stored, and reported in the most ethical manner.

### **Northeast Southwest Schools Data Analysis Process**

I used focus group interviews and a survey as the means for data collection. Both sets of data were evaluated with different approaches. The qualitative data was coded using Atlas.ti. Microsoft Excel was used to produce descriptive statistic reports for the quantitative data. All data was handled with care and fidelity to ensure a robust scientific process is followed throughout the program evaluation.

Through the framework established by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I ensured credibility in the research, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is confidence being held in the truth of the findings from the research. It represents trust in the researcher's

interpretation of the data and that this interpretation is accurate. In this study, the credibility of the findings and the analysis of the findings helped support decisions regarding program implementation as well as the impact of the program on student learning and staff efficacy. Therefore, I addressed credibility by using multiple sources of data which resulted in the triangulation of the findings. This study used the following data collection methods: rubric-based observation data, coaching trackers data, teacher focus groups, and surveys.

Transferability allowed me to show that the findings are relevant in other contexts (Guba, 1981). Specifically, transferability would address whether or not the strategies employed could work elsewhere and whether or not the findings could apply to other people and time periods. In this study, the researcher aimed to show transferability based on a detailed account of the findings which included the people who are in the study as well as a rich description of where the study took place. This thick description allows others to make a judgment call as to whether the findings could similarly be transferred to their population and their work setting. Dependability (Guba, 1981) ensures that the researcher is consistent in the data analysis as well as the findings. The interpretation of the data should not change over time. I showed the dependability of findings in this study (i.e., that she was consistent in the way that the data are being analyzed by triangulating the data). Through data triangulation as well as code and recode procedures, I demonstrated that the data have been analyzed in a consistent way. Confirmability (Guba, 1981) occurs when the findings of the research study is based on the feedback from the respondent versus the biases of the researcher. Confirmability allows the voice of the participants in the study to take precedence over the voice of the researcher. Due to the need to accurately evaluate the implementation of Opportunity Culture in the school district, the researcher did not rely on one form of data. Data was triangulated so that the participant's reality versus my reality

prevailed, thereby ensuring objectivity in the findings. I also looked for instances in which there may be opposing data that does not support the meaning that has been created so that a thorough analysis may take place.

Preparing for this problem of practice has been a journey. Yin (2014) notes that the first step of preparation is for the researcher to have the “desired skills and values” (p. 130). This involved training, developing a research protocol, screening candidates, and conducting a pilot study. In this preparation phase, the researcher is also concerned with avoiding bias and protecting human subjects. Yin (2014) explained that a research protocol is “an especially effective way of dealing with the overall problem of increasing the reliability in case studies” (p. 130).

Collecting qualitative evidence can involve documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) further explained, “there is no clear cut-off point” in terms of the amount of evidence to collect, but the researcher “should try to collect enough data so that there is confirmatory evidence from more” than one source (p. 175).

A computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was employed to assist with the analysis phase. The researcher coded documentation and focus group interview transcripts using Atlas.ti. The initial coding process, also known as the open coding process, is the first step in coding. After initial coding, I commenced with axial coding, which is more focused. Yin (2014) speaks of five analytic techniques, including pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis.

The final step in the research process was to share. In this problem of practice, the results were detailed in Chapter 4, and a discussion of those results, including recommendations for the

next steps were included in Chapter 5. Yin (2014) recommends that the researcher to consider their audience when writing the final report. Although the initial audience for this study was the dissertation Chair and Committee, this study was also shared with leaders in Northeast Southwest County. While conducting and analyzing a mixed methods study is a challenge on its own, communicating the results is equally as important and the researcher took great care in crafting the narrative around this study for optimal receivership.

### **Summary**

The problem that this study addressed was how to best utilize the current teacher talent of those who have a proven track record of success to better develop other teachers throughout their school site. Since the district has implemented Opportunity Culture, the superintendent has requested a thorough review of Opportunity Culture to examine its impact on teacher instructional behaviors. Therefore, at the request of the Superintendent, the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement. Chapter 3 provided details of the mixed methods study. In addition, to focus group interviews, the researcher used a survey to answer the research questions. This chapter offered details of the qualitative and quantitative data that were collected in this study and elaborated on tools that were used to ensure the study is robust and trustworthy. Chapter 4 provided the results of the study.

## **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement in a small, rural, northeastern school district. Opportunity Culture is based on recruiting, retaining, and developing the most highly effective teachers in a school district to help develop and coach their colleagues. The research questions that guided this study were based on the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Standards. The standards speak to what North Carolina deems that a teacher should know and be able to do in order to meet the learning needs of 21<sup>st</sup>-century student learners. Specifically, Standard III and Standard IV were examined as they address (a) Teachers Know the Content They Teach and (b) Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students. The research questions were:

1. How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' knowledge of the content they teach?
2. How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' facilitation of learning for their students?

The data collection methods implemented for this study included the collection of rubric-based teacher evaluation data as scored on the teacher summary rating form, teacher and teacher leaders survey data, coaching trackers data, and focus groups responses. This mixed methods program evaluation study allowed me to triangulate the data, based on the varied sources that have been collected and analyzed, to determine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices.

### **Pilot Survey**

The survey questions for both classroom teachers and teacher leaders were administered

as part of a pilot study to a group of school leaders from Northeast Southwest Public Schools. These leaders were not eligible to serve as participants in the actual study; however, their familiarity with Opportunity Culture and its use in the district ideally positioned them to provide meaningful feedback about the survey. More specifically, their responses and debriefing thereafter provided insight into the clarity of the survey questions, the validity of the questions and related responses towards answering the study's research questions, and whether any modifications needed to be made. In total, eight school leaders were asked to participate. Four were assistant principals, three were building principals, and one was an MCL from another part of the school district. Out of the eight school leaders asked, three participated and provided their feedback. The feedback was garnered from one principal, one assistant principal, and one MCL. All three determined that the survey was indeed clear and that no modifications were necessary. One respondent shared, "Questions were very clear. I understand why some of the "Do Not" questions were included; however, I think some respondents may not read the question carefully, resulting in inaccurate responses." Based on the feedback, no modifications were made to the survey questions, but emphasis was added in the directions for participants to read the survey questions carefully. While there was a slight risk of the participants not reading the survey carefully, the benefit of having them notice a difference in wording and focus more intently outweighed the risk.

### **Data Collection**

In order to solicit participation in this study, a list of staff at each of the three schools on the Northside was obtained. Reviewing the staff lists and roles of each staff member allowed me to identify who was actively serving as a classroom teacher currently, as well as any who may have been serving in the role of a teacher leader. Once this list was reviewed, an email requesting

the participation of this select group of teachers and teacher leaders in the study was sent to them, along with an informed consent overview (see Appendix C). The email cited the purpose of the research and that the request for participation included a brief survey approximately 15 minutes in length as well as participation in a focus group that would be approximately 45 minutes in length. Providing the link to the surveys for both the teachers and the teacher leaders group in the email allowed those who were consenting to participate in doing so at a time that worked best for their schedule. Of the 35 teachers and four teacher leaders who were invited by email to participate in the study, seven teachers completed the classroom teacher survey and three multi-classroom leaders (MCLs) completed the teacher leaders survey. These teachers and teacher leaders represented all three initial implementer schools in the district. Of the three schools, one is an elementary school, one is a middle school, and one is a high school. As the researcher, I reached out broadly to as many teachers as possible who may have been impacted by an MCL during their tenure at their school of assignment. This is due to the flexibility that schools have when determining which specific teachers would be supported by its MCL based on their content focus areas.

### **Teacher Evaluations**

The teacher evaluation data reviewed for the purposes of this study was collected from each teacher's annual summative evaluation for the two standards examined in this study, Standard III and Standard IV (see Appendix D for the Standard III Teacher Evaluation Rubric and Appendix E for the Standard IV Teacher Evaluation Rubric). A summary data form was used that is based on feedback provided to the teacher throughout the school year by the principal or his/her designee on the teacher evaluation rubric (see Appendix F). Evaluation data from the 2017-2018 school year through the 2021-2022 school year was reviewed for 17

classroom teachers. The 17 teachers were out of 35 initially identified by reviewing the licensed staff lists for each of the initial implementer schools. The 35 were all teachers whom I believed would have interfaced with an MCL due to their teaching assignment. More specifically, I considered the content areas of the teachers in conjunction with the content areas and schools to which an MCL may have been assigned, given the flexibility that administrators have in assigning MCLs. However, based upon responses obtained in the focus groups, the initial data pool may not have interfaced with an MCL for various reasons. Only the elementary school had their MCLs from the inception of Opportunity Culture during the 2017-18 school year. The MCL at the middle school chose not to participate in the study, and the MCL at the high school, who began with the 2017-18 school year, left soon thereafter. She was replaced by a new MCL who, at the time this study was conducted, was in her second year at the school. This new MCL participated in the study.

The teacher's annual summative evaluation rubric data was collected from 17 teachers as shown in Table 7. The hire dates for these teachers ranged from 2003 through 2022, while Opportunity Culture was first implemented during the 2017-18 school year. There were 52 annual summative evaluations for the 17 teachers since the inception of Opportunity Culture, all completed by eight different principals or assistant principals. The summative evaluations are aggregated scores based on the teacher's evaluation rubric. The number of observations for each teacher depends upon the evaluation plan type for the teacher. The three evaluation plan types are comprehensive, standard, and abbreviated (Cobey, 2018, pp. 5-6). The comprehensive evaluation plan is required of beginning teachers and necessitates that the teacher have three formal observations and one observation by a peer. This culminated with their end-of-year summative evaluation based on the scoring of the observations conducted throughout the school



Table 7

*Teachers' Annual Summative Evaluation*

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| Grade Span | Number of Classroom Teachers |
|------------|------------------------------|
| Elementary | 8                            |
| Middle     | 4                            |
| High       | 5                            |
| TOTAL      | 17                           |

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year. The standard evaluation cycle was an option that administrators may have used for teachers who have completed their first three years as a beginning teacher. Lastly, the abbreviated evaluation plan was also for teachers with more than three years of teaching experience and required the evaluator to complete two formal or informal observations on Standards one and four only. A summative evaluation would also be completed for the teacher based on the scoring of the observation rubrics. For example, a beginning teacher who is assigned a comprehensive plan has four observations annually, and a veteran teacher who is not up for their license to be renewed is assigned the abbreviated evaluation plan, resulting in two observations annually. The abbreviated plan requires the educator to be evaluated on standards I and IV only. Table 8 lists the total number of evaluations that were analyzed based upon which teachers should have had access to a teacher leader from 2017-2018 during implementation through 2021-2022. During the 2019-2020 school year, the teacher evaluation process was interrupted due to COVID. In many instances, the traditional summary rating form was not completed due to the interruption in schools schedules, but an alternative document was employed, allowing an administrator to attest that a teacher was at least proficient for the 2019-2020 school year.

Standard III from the Teacher Evaluation Rubric has five elements, while Standard IV has eight elements. Elements are the subcategories for a teacher's expected performance that align with an overall standard. A teacher's end-of-year evaluation required the evaluator to rate them on each element or subcategory, which resulted in an overall rating for the standard. The ratings are developing, proficient, accomplished, and distinguished. An educator who receives a rating of developing means that their performance for this element or overall standard meets growth expectations, but they are not yet competent on this standard. A rating of proficient means that an educator demonstrates a basic level of competence or satisfactory performance. An

Table 8

*Annual Summative Evaluations*

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| School     | Number of Principals/APs | Number of Evaluations |
|------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Elementary | 3                        | 25                    |
| Middle     | 2                        | 9                     |
| High       | 3                        | 18                    |
| TOTAL      | 8                        | 52                    |

---

accomplished rating means that an educator exceeds satisfactory performance consistently, while a distinguished rating means that an educator performs well above what is expected on a consistent basis (Cobey, 2018, pp. 5-6).

The overall ratings for Standard III for elementary school summative evaluations, based on teachers who had a teacher leader (MCL) assigned to their school for their area of assignment at some point during the 2017-18 school year to current, are shown in Table 9. The data in table 9 shows that over time as Opportunity Culture persisted in implementation, teacher performance in Standard III: Teachers Know the Content That They Teach showed an increase in the overall standard rating of proficient. Over time, more teachers were rated proficient than any other rating. The overall ratings for Standard IV for elementary school summative evaluations based on teachers who had a teacher leader (MCL) assigned to their school for their area of assignment are shown in Table 10. Table 10 shows that teachers, over time, have demonstrated proficiency in facilitating learning for their students. The proficiency rating occurred more frequently than any other rating for the teachers.

The middle school evaluations for teachers for Standard III and Standard IV who had a teacher leader (MCL) in their school for their area of assignment are shown in Table 11 and 12. For Standard III, teachers were found to be more frequently rated as proficient and during the most recent years, accomplished in Knowing the Content That They Teach. For Standard IV, again, teachers were more frequently found to be rated as proficient. A proficient rating means that a teacher demonstrates a satisfactory level of performance. In contrast, accomplished means that a teacher performs at a greater level than what is expected consistently.

The high school evaluations for teachers for Standard III who had a teacher leader (MCL) embedded within their school for their area of assignment are shown in Table 13. Table 13

Table 9

*Elementary School Annual Summative Evaluations (Standard III)*

| Year            | Developing | Proficient | Accomplished | Distinguished |
|-----------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 2017-18         | 0          | 1          | 0            | 0             |
| 2018-19         | 0          | 2          | 0            | 0             |
| 2019-20 (COVID) | -          | -          | -            | -             |
| 2020-21         | 0          | 4          | 4            | 0             |
| 2021-22         | 0          | 8          | 0            | 0             |
| TOTAL           | 0          | 15         | 4            | 0             |

Table 10

*Elementary School Annual Summative Evaluations (Standard IV)*

---

| Year            | Developing | Proficient | Accomplished | Distinguished |
|-----------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 2017-18         | 0          | 5          | 0            | 0             |
| 2018-19         | 0          | 5          | 0            | 0             |
| 2019-20 (COVID) | 0          | 0          | 0            | 0             |
| 2020-21         | 0          | 5          | 3            | 0             |
| 2021-22         | 0          | 7          | 1            | 0             |
| TOTAL           | 0          | 22         | 4            | 0             |

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Table 11

*Middle School Annual Summative Evaluations (Standard III)*

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| Principal       | Developing | Proficient | Accomplished | Distinguished |
|-----------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 2017-18         | 0          | 1          | 0            | 0             |
| 2018-19         | 0          | 1          | 0            | 0             |
| 2019-20 (COVID) | 0          | 0          | 0            | 0             |
| 2020-21         | 0          | 1          | 2            | 0             |
| 2021-22         | 0          | 1          | 2            | 0             |
| TOTAL           | 0          | 4          | 4            | 0             |

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Table 12

*Middle School Annual Summative Evaluations (Standard IV)*

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| Year            | Developing | Proficient | Accomplished | Distinguished |
|-----------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 2017-18         | 0          | 1          | 0            | 0             |
| 2018-19         | 0          | 1          | 0            | 0             |
| 2019-20 (COVID) | 0          | 0          | 0            | 0             |
| 2020-21         | 0          | 2          | 1            | 0             |
| 2021-22         | 0          | 2          | 2            | 0             |
| TOTAL           | 0          | 6          | 3            | 0             |

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Table 13

*High School Annual Summative Evaluations (Standard III)*

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| Year            | Developing | Proficient | Accomplished | Distinguished |
|-----------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 2017-18         | 0          | 1          | 2            | 0             |
| 2018-19         | 0          | 1          | 0            | 0             |
| 2019-20 (COVID) | 0          | 0          | 0            | 0             |
| 2020-21         | 0          | 3          | 1            | 0             |
| 2021-22         | 0          | 1          | 1            | 1             |
| TOTAL           | 0          | 6          | 4            | 1             |

---

shows that most teachers were rated as proficient or better in Knowing the Content They Teach. The high school evaluations for Standard IV are shown in Table 14. For this standard, the high school teachers were rated as approximately 56% at exceeding expectations over time.

### **Coaching Trackers**

As instructional leaders, the work of the MCL should help ensure that all teachers, regardless of their circumstances, are able to achieve at levels that are higher than what has been identified as the teacher's current level of performance. In order to support teachers in reaching their professional growth goals, MCLs should recognize the need to differentiate as well as scaffold the support that is provided to the teachers to whom they are assigned. During their New Leaders training, MCLs received professional learning on the coaching cycle and the implementation of coaching feedback. This training was designed to equip MCLs to serve as instructional leaders. One tool shared that MCLs could use to support their ability to monitor the implementation of their coaching feedback by a classroom teacher was the use of coaching trackers. Ultimately, the purpose of the coaching tracker was for the teacher leader to communicate to their coachees the progress that they were believed to be making based upon their coaching conversations as well as their expected next steps in addressing manageable pieces of high leverage instructional strategies that would lead to improved content delivery.

During their initial training, many models were presented to the MCLs. Early on, many of the MCLs began by using the "See It. Name It. Do It" template as their coaching tracker. See Appendix G. This tool was based on the "Leverage Leadership: A Practical Guide to Building Exceptional Schools" text (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). The coaching tracker allowed the teacher leader to specifically indicate observation data, action steps for coachees, and growth made since their last observation. When coaching trackers were collected from the teacher leaders from the

Table 14

*High School Annual Summative Evaluations (Standard IV)*

| Year            | Developing | Proficient | Accomplished | Distinguished |
|-----------------|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 2017-18         | 0          | 2          | 2            | 0             |
| 2018-19         | 0          | 2          | 2            | 0             |
| 2019-20 (COVID) | 0          | 0          | 0            | 0             |
| 2020-21         | 0          | 2          | 2            | 0             |
| 2021-22         | 0          | 1          | 2            | 1             |
| TOTAL           | 0          | 7          | 8            | 1             |

initial implementer schools, the tools used to support coaching conversations were indeed varied. Due to the variation, it was not possible to compare the same data points consistently. Despite the variations in the format, the data indicated key areas of focus that would help to strengthen a classroom teacher's instructional practice. I used Atlas.ti to capture the various coaching documents. Upon uploading the coaching documents in Atlas.ti, I began with the first step of analysis of the qualitative feedback by assigning codes to the various statements. The codes that were primarily used aligned with the headings on the trackers or what best aligned with the headings. There were a total of eight codes identified and then grouped into five themes as shown in Table 15.

Among the three schools, four different coaching trackers were employed. Common among each of the trackers was that they provided a space to capture a goal for the classroom teacher. The goal could be for the week or for a specific lesson. All of the trackers also provided an opportunity for the MCL to celebrate a teacher's successes. In one template, this was referred to as "Things I'm Impressed By", while the others referenced "Seeing a Past Success". Additionally, each template captured the type of coaching that was provided to the teacher. These coaching types included observation/feedback, walkthrough data, video reflection, or a planning session, just to name a few.

Among the key differences in the coaching trackers is that the "See It, Name It, Do It" template provides the coachee with the opportunity to specifically identify the exemplar or desired behavior that they are trying to obtain, as well as what would be considered gaps in reaching the desired state. By identifying the gaps in reaching this desired state, the MCL is then able to support the teacher in naming their action steps and implementing them. This model provides a level of rigor to the coaching cycle. Unfortunately, the other trackers did not include

Table 15

*Themes from Coaching Tracker Analysis*

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| Theme                     | Aggregate Number of Coding References |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Type of Coaching          | 50                                    |
| Goals                     | 39                                    |
| Feedback/Type of Feedback | 25                                    |
| Engagement Level          | 24                                    |
| Praise/Successes          | 17                                    |

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this requested information.

### **MCL Survey**

Two different surveys were released to study participants with the initial recruitment email (see Appendices H and I, respectively). One was for classroom teachers, and the other was for the teacher leaders (MCLs). The MCL survey was completed by three of the four MCLs. The three who completed the survey also participated in the MCL focus group. Of the three that participated in the focus group, all three were female. One identified as Caucasian and two identified themselves as Black/African-American. The tenure of time working with Northeast Southwest Schools ranged from 7 years to 29 years, with an average of 17.33 years and a total of 52 years for the three participants. All three participants had worked inside and outside of the school district for a combined total of 68 years, as shown in Table 16.

The MCL survey asked participants 12 questions, as shown in Table 17. The majority of the MCLs agreed on ten of the 12 items. The primary areas of agreement were regarding Teachers Know the Content They Teach. Of the four questions that aligned with how the MCLs supported teachers in knowing the content they teach, MCLs unanimously agreed that they supported teachers with this standard as indicated by strongly agree or agree responses. Of the questions specifically aligned with MCLs helping Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students, specifically numbers five through 12, the teacher leaders responded positively to six out of the eight questions.

### **Classroom Teacher Survey**

The classroom teacher survey was completed by seven participants. While seven teachers responded to the classroom teacher statements, only three of the seven participated in the focus group as well. Interestingly, a total of six participants were in the focus groups, but not

Table 16

*MCL Survey Demographics*

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| MCL Participant | Gender | Ethnicity | District Tenure | Teaching Tenure | Education |
|-----------------|--------|-----------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| MCL1            | Female | Caucasian | 29              | 29              | Bachelor  |
| MCL2            | Female | Black     | 16              | 30              | Master    |
| MCL3            | Female | Black     | 7               | 9               | Master    |

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Table 17

*MCL Survey Results (n=3)*

| MCL Survey Questions  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. I assist teachers with learning to align their instruction with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.   | 2              | 1     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 2. I help teachers know the content appropriate to their teaching specialty.  | 2              | 1     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 3. I help teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.   | 1              | 2     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 4. I help teachers make instruction relevant to students.   | 1              | 2     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 5. I do not assist teachers in knowing the ways in which learning takes place, and knowing the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students. | 0              | 0     | 0                          | 3        | 0                 |
| 6. I assist teachers with planning instruction that is appropriate for their students.  | 2              | 1     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 7. I assist teachers with learning to use a variety of instructional methods.   | 1              | 2     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 8. I assist teachers with knowing how to best integrate and utilize technology in their instruction.  | 0              | 1     | 2                          | 0        | 0                 |



Table 17 (continued)

| MCL Survey Questions  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 9. I assist teachers with developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.                | 1              | 2     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 10. I assist teachers with helping their students work in teams and develop leadership qualities. | 0              | 3     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 11. I do not help teachers communicate effectively.   | 0              | 0     | 1                          | 2        | 0                 |
| 12. I help teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.             | 1              | 2     | 0                          | 0        | 0                 |

all of the participants completed the survey. This section reported the survey data. Focus group data are presented in the following section. Of the seven that completed the survey, all were female. There were three who identified as Black/African-American and four who identified themselves as Caucasian. The tenure of time working with the NESW school system ranged from one year to fifteen years, with an average of nine years and a total of 61 years for the seven participants. These seven participants had worked inside and outside of this school system for a combined 111 years, as shown in Table 18.

The classroom teacher survey asked 12 questions, as shown in Table 19. Of the survey questions asked, the areas of strength were more frequently aligned with MCLs helping teachers to know the content that they teach. These questions were numbers one, two, and four. Questions five through 12 were aligned with how MCLs help teachers to facilitate learning for their students. While there were definitely points of strength, the strongest area of support for this standard was “Working with my MCL has helped me to use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.”

### **Focus Groups**

Based on the initial invitation via email to teachers and teacher leaders, participants were able to communicate the time that they could be available to participate in focus groups using a Focus Group Scheduler. Prospects were provided with five different options to choose from. After receiving input regarding their first, second, and third choice for participation, focus groups were scheduled. All focus groups took place using Google Meet. This platform is most familiar to educators within Northeast Southwest schools. Google Meet also provides a transcription feature that allowed the content of each group to be captured in written form. Using the transcripts, the researcher was able to take the printed word and compare it to the video

Table 18

*Classroom Teachers Survey Demographics*

| Classroom<br>Teacher<br>Participants | Gender | Ethnicity | District<br>Tenure | Teaching<br>Tenure | Education |
|--------------------------------------|--------|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| CT1                                  | Female | Caucasian | 14                 | 41                 | Bachelor  |
| CT2                                  | Female | Caucasian | 15                 | 15                 | Bachelor  |
| CT3                                  | Female | Black/AA  | 4                  | 21                 | Master's  |
| CT4                                  | Female | Caucasian | 14                 | 15                 | Bachelor  |
| CT 5                                 | Female | Black/AA  | 10                 | 6                  | Master's  |
| CT 6                                 | Female | Black/AA  | 1                  | 6                  | Master's  |
| CT 7                                 | Female | Caucasian | 7                  | 7                  | Master's  |

Table 19

*Classroom Teacher Survey Results (n=7)*

| Survey Questions  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 1. Working with my MCL has helped me with aligning my instruction with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.   | 2              | 3     | 2                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 2. Working with my MCL has helped me to know the content appropriate to my teaching specialty.  | 2              | 3     | 2                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 3. Working with my MCL has not caused me to recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.  | 1              | 1     | 3                          | 1        | 1                 |
| 4. Working with my MCL has helped me make instruction relevant to my students.  | 2              | 3     | 2                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 5. Working with my MCL has not impacted me in knowing the ways in which learning takes place, and knowing the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of my students. | 0              | 1     | 3                          | 1        | 2                 |
| 6. Working with my MCL has helped me to plan instruction appropriate for my students.   | 2              | 2     | 3                          | 0        | 0                 |
| 7. Working with my MCL has not impacted my use of a variety of instructional methods.   | 0              | 1     | 2                          | 2        | 0                 |

Table 19 (continued)

| Survey Questions  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|----------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| 8. Working with my MCL has not helped with integrating and utilizing technology in my instruction.                    | 1              | 0     | 2                          | 4        | 0                 |
| 9. Working with my MCL has impacted my ability to help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. | 2              | 2     | 2                          | 1        | 0                 |
| 10. Working with my MCL has prepared me with helping my students to work in teams and develop leadership qualities.   | 2              | 1     | 3                          | 1        | 0                 |
| 11. Working with my MCL has not helped me with communicating effectively.   | 0              | 1     | 3                          | 1        | 0                 |
| 12. Working with my MCL has helped me to use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.            | 2              | 3     | 1                          | 1        | 0                 |

recording to ensure that the data had been cleaned and reviewed for accuracy. A total of five focus groups were held. Two with MCLs and three with classroom teachers. There was a total of ten participants. The participants included one male (10%) and nine females (90%). Five (50%) of the participants were African-American, and five (50%) were Caucasian. Additionally, seven of the ten served at the elementary level (70%), two in middle grades (20%), and one at the high school (10%).

Each focus group ranged from 45 minutes to 1 hour in length. The focus group norms and a review of the informed consent disclaimer were shared at the beginning of the virtual focus groups. The consent reminded those who showed up for the virtual meeting of the opt-out option for all participants without providing any reason and without any consequence. Participants were reminded that all IRB data would be kept confidential and secured. Participants would be given anonymous names and/or code numbers to reflect their contributions to the study while preserving their identity. Table 20 shows the demographics of the focus group participants.

After participants acknowledged their willingness to move forward with the study, I proceeded to ask a series of questions that were aligned with obtaining feedback regarding the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices (see Appendix J). During the focus group, participants were also provided a link through the chat box that allowed them to review each of the elements found under Standards III and IV based on the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Rubric.

Following each of the focus groups, I was able to cross-reference the transcription provided by Google with the video to ensure that the data captured was accurate and to remove any erroneous and inaccurate data. This process is also known as cleaning the data. I then uploaded the transcriptions into Atlas.ti, which is a web-based qualitative data analysis platform.

Table 20

*Focus Group Participant Demographics*


---

| Focus Group Participants<br>(MCL or CT) | Gender | Ethnicity | Grade Span    |
|---|--------|-----------|---------------|
| MCL1                                    | F      | Black/AA  | Elementary    |
| MCL2                                    | F      | Caucasian | Elementary    |
| MCL3                                    | F      | Black/AA  | High School   |
| CT1                                     | F      | Caucasian | Middle School |
| CT2                                     | F      | Caucasian | Elementary    |
| CT3                                     | M      | Black/AA  | Middle School |
| CT4                                     | F      | Caucasian | High School   |
| CT5                                     | F      | Black/AA  | Middle School |
| CT6                                     | F      | Black/AA  | Elementary    |
| CT7                                     | F      | Caucasian | Elementary    |
| CT8                                     | F      | Caucasian | Elementary    |

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Use of this platform allowed me to review the text to determine what was there to help me answer the research questions for the program evaluation to determine the impact that Opportunity Culture has on teacher instructional practices.

Upon reviewing the text, I began to create codes. Coding the data allowed me to identify various categories that were present in the data and appeared essential to answering the research questions for this study and providing information that would be considered essential in assessing the overall impact of Opportunity Culture. This process, also known as open coding, minimizes any potential bias as pre-established codes are not determined based on what the researcher believed would be found in the data. Open coding was conducted by reviewing five different data sets that were obtained from the focus groups. Two were with the teacher leaders (MCLs), and three were with the classroom teachers. I began by reading the transcription for the first document and identifying the codes. As I progressed through each transcribed conversation, additional codes were added, if needed. When establishing codes, I found it critical to ensure that no two codes were too similar in nature or overlapped each other in describing the data. There were fourteen different codes identified overall all. They were grouped into four different themes. The overarching themes from the initial coding process were support, content knowledge, facilitating student learning, and barriers (see Table 21). Additionally, the coding process allowed me to identify both the successes and areas for improvement as captured from the voices of our teachers. An analysis of the themes and focus group participant responses in support of these themes follows.

### ***Support for MCLs***

While the focus of this study was to take a closer look at the impact of Opportunity Culture through its MCLs on changing the instructional practices of teachers so that student



Table 21

*Themes from Focus Group Data Analysis*

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| Theme                         | Aggregate Number of Coding References |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Support for MCLs              | 26                                    |
| Content Knowledge             | 38                                    |
| Facilitating Student Learning | 55                                    |
| Barriers                      | 124                                   |

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achievement would be positively impacted, I was also able to obtain feedback through the focus groups regarding the support that teacher leaders themselves receive. MCLs shared that they mostly participated in New Leaders and Emerging Leaders training during the inaugural year of the program as well as participated in the Standards Institute. The Standards Institute is a learning institute offered by UnboundEd. This professional learning experience equips educators to know how to deliver G.L.E.A.M., or grade-level, engaging, affirming, and meaningful instruction (*What We Offer*, n.d.). Additionally, they had in-depth training on the Get Better Faster modules. District leadership and building principals were also an active part of their support system. There were monthly meetings that often looked like half day sessions as well as connections with other MCLs in the district. One of the MCLs shared, “this afforded us the opportunity to lean on each other and have support from each other as well.” One participant shared, “I know that I can call someone else. If they don’t have the answer, they helped me to figure it out.”

As the leaders continued to share, one noted when speaking of from where she received support, “so pretty much everybody because this was our first year doing it. There was a tremendous amount of support offered.” MCLs also spoke of having coaches themselves, often their principals. They also noted that during their initial years, they participated in role-playing and opportunities to practice their coaching behaviors. One MCL shared that “I’ve grown so much as a leader, and it’s just been a phenomenal experience.”

While the MCLs spoke well of the opportunities to receive training and support, it was frequently noted, “When we first started, it was very consistent. The first two years were very consistent. The focus just is not as heavy as it used to be when we first started.” Based on MCL feedback obtained during the focus groups, MCLs felt as if they were being equipped to support

classroom teachers best during the initial years of implementing Opportunity Culture. While some support still exists, this is not as consistent as when they first began in their leadership role.

### ***Content Knowledge***

Focus group responses indicated that overall, teachers were pleased with the support that their MCLs provide to them in knowing the content that they teach. Participant 11 shared, “I understand math and more about how I should be teaching it and not jumping over steps that children are not ready for.” Participant 9 added that her MCL “helped me with lesson planning. She came in and modeled lessons.” Similarly, Participant 5 shared that “having this real-time feedback helps you from teaching them this concept wrong.”

MCLs perspectives regarding their ability to help teachers know the content they teach indicated that they believe they are instrumental in doing so. Participant 1 shared, “I think we do play an important part in helping teachers realize the alignment of instruction and the content that they should be teaching.” Participant 1 proceeded to share how providing support to a teacher who previously taught upper grades included co-teaching and modeling so that the teacher could learn how to “bring her standards down to a very basic level” for the grade to which she was assigned. Participant 2 shared that she combined her coaching and planning session when working with a teacher. They begin with a twenty-minute coaching session and then move into the planning portion during the time that they are together. Specifically, they would “look at what the upcoming lessons are and what the standards are that they would be teaching.” Then she proceeds to “help them unpack the standard.” Participant 2 went on to share that she was “surprised at how many teachers do not know the standards.” She noted that by being a Restart school:

You do not have to have a teaching certificate to teach, just a four-year degree, and so we have a lot of staff to come in who have never taught before. Teaching teachers the standards and making sure they understand exactly what the standards are is a huge part of what I spend the majority of my time doing.

Participant 1 also shared that “we work really hard with the standards, taking them apart and determining what it is that they are supposed to be teaching based on the grade level that they have.” Throughout the focus group, MCLs indicated that they felt as if they added value to teachers being knowledgeable about the content that they teach and do so through a variety of approaches.

### ***Facilitating Student Learning***

Thematic analysis of focus group discussions indicated that teacher leaders are often supportive of their teachers with appropriate planning instruction. Participant 1 shared that “we have grade-level planning and I’m involved in that. We also have weekly PLCs. I also provide coaching. I can’t say once per week, but my newer teachers are once per week.” She added, “I provide materials, resources, and anything that they may need.” This also includes support in bringing content down to a very basic level for a teacher who previously taught upper grades but now is assigned to a primary grade. Participant 2 shared that she helps teachers to facilitate learning for their students by “planning and leading our data days.” My responsibilities also include “coaching and modeling instruction for teachers. I also lead our PLCs.” Participant 3 shared that as an MCL, she “supported a small team of teachers on data analysis.” She also shared that a large part of her work was “gathering insights about learning experiences themselves” for the scholars “in order to scale.” Participant 3 also noted that part of her

responsibility during the pandemic was to “coach all of our beginning teachers and to support all of our EOC teachers.” We did “lots of data analysis and standards analysis.”

Classroom teachers also shared favorable feedback regarding the support that they received from their MCLs. Participant 7 shared that her MCL helped her to “...find resources. I could not find the time to sit at the computer and pull really good resources.” She went on to share that “she helped me a lot with that.” Further, Participant 5 noted that her MCL would come in during a lesson and offer her real-time feedback. If the student was not understanding a concept, the teacher leader would hold up a small board to give her cues during the lesson regarding next steps. Participant 9 shared that “I was teaching math. If it wasn’t a skill that I was used to, she would stop me...and teach that skill for me...it wasn’t coming off as no, you stop...just a moment for me to reflect and for her to teach me.” Participant 11 shared how there was a math lab that her teacher leader went to and would bring back strategies to share that they would implement together in the classroom.

Overall, teachers indicated that they appreciated their MCLs and the support that they provided to help them facilitate learning for their students. However, as shared by Participant 5, “If they are left alone to do their job, I think that would really benefit us...and not have them do other stuff.”

### ***Barriers***

Of the four different themes derived from the focus groups, the theme with the greatest frequency of occurrences was barriers. Participants generally spoke well of the support that they received from their MCL as well as favorable feedback from the MCLs regarding the support that they provide to teachers. However, most of the feedback was upended by numerous barriers to the success of the program.

Participants shared that the original messaging of Opportunity Culture spoke to the structure of what the work would look like for the MCLs as well as others who would provide support to classroom teachers. Teachers shared that what was originally communicated was short-lived. One participant shared that they were told “you’re going to have an MCL who will pull kids out. You’re going to have that extra added support to help you with the number of kids that you have in your room.” Structures for ensuring that teachers had the opportunity to work with small groups of students while receiving additional support from their MCLs no longer exists. Now “they don’t come. They don’t have time to come in and pull groups.” One MCL shared that “the focus is just not as heavy as when it first started.” One MCL shared the following:

They gave us protected time that we could actually work with our teachers that we were coaching and they gave us protected time to actually take groups of children, to work with them. We would get the children who had the highest deficit, and we would work with those children. That time was protected. But we don’t have that luxury. We have been put in so many different roles.

Other barriers cited during the focus groups included classroom teachers not being certain who was serving as an MCL in their building, administrators who may not fully understand the original implementation plan and the role of the MCL, too many teachers being assigned as coachees to an MCL, and MCLs not being able to carry out their intended duties based on covering classes for teacher absences or vacancies, as well as being assigned administrative duties by their building principal. In almost every instance when speaking of the work of the MCL, classroom teachers had positive things to say, followed by citing a barrier that prevented their consistent support in performing their assignment.

One MCL shared that “now it seems as if we are more in an administrative role. We’re constantly in meetings, we’re constantly being called to handle discipline.” The leader went on to share that the number of teachers who she has been assigned to support has increased to eight. This assignment is not aligned with the tiers to which NESW schools committed to assign teachers to the MCLs. The plan was that an MCL I would lead one teacher with a 10%-15% supplement (\$6,000) to their state salary, an MCL II would lead two-three teachers with a 20%-30% supplement (\$9,000) to their state salary. Following the initial application, a designation for MCL IIIs was put into place. An MCL III would earn up to \$13,000 a year for leading up to six teachers, in addition to their state salary. Table 22 depicts the weighting of the Multi-Classroom Leader Job Responsibilities based on the original RFP.

One teacher leader shared “Let us do what we are trying to do. Give us that time, protect our time, so that we’re able to push in daily and provide the instructional support and that real time coaching and modeling that teachers need in order to be successful.” One MCL shared,

I would consider myself to be the runner in the school. Sometimes people may view us as flexible or just like having so much autonomy. I think it’s really easy to fall into spreading MCLs very thin which can become overwhelming.

She shared that she thought that it would be important to provide a “protective barrier around MCLs so that they can provide the targeted support to teachers and kiddos.” MCLs want to do the work for which they were hired, and teachers likewise desire that MCLs provide the needed support. However, identified barriers prevent this from happening consistently for both groups of educators.

## **Summary**

Chapter 4 has presented the results of this mixed methods study, whose goal was to evaluate the

Table 22

*MCL Job Responsibilities & Weighting of Responsibilities*

| Job Responsibility             | Percent of Total Contract Hours (1,544) | Percent of Total Instructional Hours (1,025) |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Planning and Preparation    | 20%                                     |  |
| 2. Classroom Environment       | 5%                                      |  |
| 3. Instruction                 | 46%                                     | 70%*   |
| 4. Develop Team Teachers       | 24%                                     |  |
| 5. Professional Responsibility | 5%                                      |  |

*Note.* \*In accordance with H.B. 1030, the teacher-leader is responsible for instruction in the classroom 70% of the instructional day. Of the 1,544 hours in a teacher contract year, 1,025 are instructional hours. Multi-classroom leaders contribute to instructional activity at least 70 percent of those instructional hours, equal to 717.5 hours per year. This amounts to 46% of all contract hours.



impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement in a small, rural, northeastern school district. The outcomes of the study were presented using both qualitative and quantitative data sources to answer the research questions that were posed. The results of the study indicate that MCLs generally have a positive impact on teachers knowing the content that they teach and teachers being able to facilitate learning for their students. However, from the voice of both teachers and teacher leaders, the barriers of time, lack of fidelity to the original implementation plan, and teacher attrition and staffing vacancies, among other barriers, have prevented the work from impacting teacher instructional practices over time. Chapter 5 provides a more nuanced discussion of the findings of the study, implications for practice, and recommendations for future study based on the results of this program evaluation.

## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS**

Providing students access to effective teachers is a challenge that school districts all over the nation face. Students from high-poverty environments and rural settings have less access than their counterparts to effective teachers at disproportionate rates. This disproportionality sometimes presents as an insurmountable barrier to our most valuable commodity, our youth, receiving a high quality education. However, according to Ross (2019), consistent access to excellent teachers aids in closing the equity gap and increasing long-term achievement among students from rural, high-poverty environments as well as students of color. This same consistent access is also what's needed as whenever students have experienced years of underperformance. According to Public Impact (2015) it is critical to have this access to quality teachers year after year.

This study shared how the students in Northeast Southwest County reside in one of the most distressed counties in their state based on rankings by the North Carolina Department of Commerce. Another data source for the state, the annual Roadmap of Needs, lists Northeast Southwest County as one of the top ten counties in North Carolina where young people are most at risk for not succeeding. Teacher retention also continues to be a challenge as the teacher attrition rate for NESW more than doubles the state's attrition rate over a number of years. Therefore, its youth are at a major disadvantage for accessing quality and experienced teachers in every classroom. This noted challenge of disproportionality in access was especially of interest to this small, rural North Carolina School district as teachers matter more to student achievement than any other educational input (Oppen, 2019).

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement. Opportunity

Culture is a coaching and support model that aims to extend the reach of its more effective teachers to more students and more colleagues within the school's normal operating budget. The teacher leaders referenced in this study are those who served in the role of a Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL). The research questions used for this study in order to determine impact were:

- Research Question 1: How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' knowledge of the content they teach?
- Research Question 2: How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' facilitation of learning for their students?

In this chapter, the reader should expect a summary of the findings, implications of the study, recommendations for future studies, the conclusion, and my reflections as the researcher.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The implementation of Opportunity Culture as an advanced teaching roles initiative in Northeast Southwest Public Schools appeared to have a positive impact on MCLs helping teachers to know the content that they teach as well as to facilitate learning for their students. Review of teacher evaluation data provided the school administrator's perspective on how teachers were performing on these two standards as found in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation instrument. Reviewing the data across the grade spans at the initial implementer schools showed that teachers were generally performing proficient or better on the end-of-year summative evaluations. Through the use of survey data, focus groups, teacher evaluation data, and a review of coaching trackers, I was able to triangulate my findings to determine if the data was consistent. While the findings appeared to speak to the benefit of having teacher leaders (MCLs) in place, the greatest finding was that most expressed the profound barriers that were impeding successful implementation of the program. MCLs were cited as being helpful in so

many ways, when teachers could have access to them. Likewise, MCLs expressed the reduced access that they have to teachers whom they should be coaching due to other barriers such as administrative type duties, covering classes, and coaching more teachers than originally agreed upon to name a few. The findings relative to each respective research question follows.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question was, “How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers’ knowledge of the content they teach?” Assessing teachers’ knowledge of the content that they teach entails ensuring that teachers have a firm understanding of the NC Standard Course of Study for their content area. This understanding should be evident as teachers prepare their lesson plans, link the content that they teach vertically as well as across other disciplines, and make instruction relevant to their students. Data that were obtained from teacher evaluations indicated that teachers who interact with an MCL are primarily rated as “proficient” on Standard III from the NC Teacher Evaluation Instrument. A rating of “proficient” is when a teacher demonstrates the expected level of performance, while an accomplished rating indicates that a teacher has exceeded the basic level of performance on a consistent basis. Over the past five years, proficient ratings exceeded any other category on the teacher evaluation data for teachers who had access to MCL support at each of the initial implementer schools.

Additionally, teacher survey data, focus group feedback, and coaching tracking data were all reviewed. This data indicated that teacher leaders, through the Opportunity Culture initiative, had a positive impact on teachers’ knowledge of their content. Among the positive feedback, the focus group data pointed to a larger finding. More specifically, numerous barriers were identified that impeded an MCL’s ability to have a positive impact; however, when they were available, they were able to add value to a teacher’s knowledge base. The Teacher Leader Model Standards

(Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2011) speak to how teacher leaders understand that teaching and learning are ever evolving and then use their knowledge as a foundation when supporting the development of other teachers. When available, the MCLs worked to foster a collaborative culture of support, leaned on using the most current research to improve practice for teachers whom they were supporting, and had a narrow focus on how they could best help teachers on their team improve instruction and student learning – all essential domains as noted in the Teacher Leader Model Standards (2011).

Additionally, according to Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1961), people learn by observing the behaviors of others around them. It is essential that classroom teachers have access to their MCLs, as observing those who have a proven track record as it relates to student achievement could have a profound impact of the behaviors of those who are in need of additional support to increase their ability in knowing the content that they teach. Bandura said, "such an orientation is likely to yield new techniques and treatment which, in many respects, may differ markedly from the procedures currently in use" (1961, p. 143). As Bandura speaks of counterconditioning, extinction, discrimination learning, methods of reward, punishment, and social imitation, he lays the groundwork for his Social Learning Theory. Social Learning Theory holds principles of observation, attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation, much of which were found in the participants' responses.

Furthermore, Chaos Theory postulates that a small change, when done consistently, can produce a different outcome. This was also alluded to by study participants as they indicated that Opportunity Culture is effective; however, the MCLs often did not have the protected time to devote to the effort and therefore lacked consistency in their changes. Shelton (2014) explained that there are three long-term ways to cultivate teacher leadership, which includes dedicating

time and opportunities for teachers to serve as leaders, ensuring that there is a broad array of professional development opportunities provided, and building teachers self-efficacy when it comes to leading their colleagues. Therefore, by not adhering to the core principles of Opportunity Culture consistently and long-term, it is almost sure to end in failure (Public Impact, 2018). The findings of this study are a reminder of the importance for Northeast Southwest Public Schools to provide protected time during the school day that allows the teacher leaders (MCLs) to work collaboratively, plan, and focus on the development of their teachers.

Classroom teacher survey data indicated that 71% of teachers strongly agree that working with their MCLs helps them align their instruction with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, helps them to know the content appropriate to their teaching specialty, and helps them to make instruction relevant for their students. The subcategory which needs additional focus according to the teachers' feedback, would be recognizing the interconnectedness of their content areas with other disciplines. Based on the survey feedback from the classroom teachers, only 29% reported that working with their MCL helped them recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines. In summary, Opportunity Culture, through its engagement of those teacher leaders who have a proven track record of success to impact classroom teachers, has a positive effect with regard to classroom teachers knowing the content that they teach when the classroom teachers have consistent access to them. However, while focus group members spoke to the ability of MCLs to help teachers make connections with the content in the grades above or below them, there still appears to be room for growth through strengthening these links.

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question was, "How is Opportunity Culture affecting Northeast Southwest Schools teachers' facilitation of learning for their students?" Facilitating instruction,

according to the North Carolina teacher evaluation rubric, should be evident of a teacher knowing how students think and learn. Based on their knowledge of their students' developmental levels and their areas of strengths and weaknesses, the educator should differentiate instruction. This standard is also based upon the use of data to drive both short- and long-range planning as well as the use of a variety of instructional methods. Teachers should have knowledge of how to use and integrate technology into their lessons, support students in the development of their critical thinking and problem-solving skills and help students exemplify their leadership qualities through opportunities to work as a part of a team. Teachers should also vary their methods of communication with all students, even if language is a barrier. Successful teaching is underpinned by a student's learning; therefore, teachers should use multiple measures to inform them of their students' progress which includes both formative and summative data. Obtaining this information is intended to inform their next instructional steps.

Again, in reviewing the impact of MCLs on teachers' ability to facilitate learning for their students, the same data sources were used as employed to answer Research Question 1: teacher evaluation data, teacher survey data, focus group feedback and coaching tracker data. For this area, a positive impact of MCLs was once again detected.

Data regarding the ability of classroom teachers to facilitate learning for their students, Standard IV, were obtained from the summary evaluation data of teachers who should have interacted with an MCL beginning with the 2017-2018 school year through the 2021-2022 school year. Over the past five years, the most common rating received by teachers for their ability to facilitate instruction for their students was proficient. The proficient rating was followed by accomplished as the next rating most common for teachers on their summative evaluation data. Proficiency speaks to the teacher's ability to perform at an expected level while

accomplished means that a teacher performs consistently at a level beyond what is expected.

Classroom teacher survey data regarding whether their MCLs help them to facilitate learning for their students was reviewed through the various elements or subcategories. The elements for which classroom teachers provided the most positive feedback were working with my MCL has helped me to use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned, has impacted my ability to help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, plan instruction appropriate for my students, and to integrate technology. Based on the number of respondents, each of these areas was favorably scored at 57% or greater. The elements reflecting the least amount of positive feedback and possibly a level of indifference as indicated by Neither Agree nor Disagree were: working with my MCL has impacted me in knowing the ways in which learning takes place and knowing the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social and emotional development of my students. Additionally, several elements were also areas for improvement: working with my MCL has prepared me to help my students to work in teams and develop leadership qualities and working with my MCL has helped me with communicating. Notably, not all participants responded to the question regarding the impact that their MCLs have had on them using a variety of instructional methods.

Conversely, MCL survey data revealed that MCLs unanimously believe that they impact teachers positively in knowing the ways in which learning takes place and knowing the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students. Additionally, they believed that they assist teachers with planning instruction that is appropriate for their students, learning to use a variety of instructional methods, developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills, assisting teachers with helping their students work in teams and



develop leadership qualities, as well as using a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned. Each of these areas had a positive response rate of 100% based on the number of MCLs who participated in the study as indicated by strongly agree or agree. The areas for personal growth and development recognized by MCLs include assisting teachers with planning instruction that is appropriate for their students and helping teachers to communicate effectively.

Focus group feedback regarding how MCLs impact classroom teachers in facilitating learning for their students was most commonly captured as teacher leaders provide resources and materials, lead PLCs, model instruction for teachers, and provide opportunities for collecting and analyzing data. MCLs also support teachers with implementing different instructional methods and practices to ensure that “all students are fully engaged,” as shared by Participant 2. As recipients of this support, classroom teachers such as Participant 9 shared that “We went over our data from mClass. Then she helped us separate our students into groups and talked about what levels they were on and what we needed to do next. That was a big help”. Through the eyes of both the MCLs and the classroom teachers, the support provided by the teacher leaders was helpful and had a positive impact.

Bandura (1988) spoke to the importance of modeling and how modeling allows one to break skills into smaller subskills in order to “be combined into complex strategies that can serve different purposes” (1988, p. 276). Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory aligns with the work of the MCLs, especially during the coaching cycle, as a key component to the support that they provide to their assigned classroom teachers is hinged upon identifying desired instructional behaviors also known as the exemplar, identifying any gaps between their performance and the desired behavior, and then identifying the specific gaps that the teacher needs to work on in order for them to perform the desired behavior optimally.

## **Limitations**

Entering the study, I had questions regarding what impact serving as a member of the senior administration team would have on recruiting participants for my study. These reservations began to dissipate as I completed the CITI training modules and learned how to structure my study based on voluntary participation and ensuring that this message was shared among all so that they could make an informed decision. During the recruitment phase, of the four MCLs assigned to our initial implementer schools, one did not participate. Classroom teachers and MCLs who did participate were very forthright in all that they shared and seemed to enjoy adding voice to this study.

Another anticipated limitation going into the study was not having access to those who either had served as an MCL or those who had received MCL support. Attrition and internal promotion did impact the data that was collected. At least two of the former MCLs had left the district, and several teachers who received support had left as well. There were also a few of the classroom teachers who had since been promoted to a district level MCL role themselves. My study focused on gathering data from those who were still actively serving at the initial implementer schools.

Teacher responses to the surveys did not include all of those who may have been able to add voice to the conversation. A couple of reminder emails regarding the opportunity were presented. Therefore, the conclusion that I have drawn as the researcher is that teachers may have felt overextended with other responsibilities or possibly just not interested.

## **Implications for Practice**

The results of the findings point to the importance of fidelity with program implementation. Overwhelmingly, both teacher leaders and classroom teachers spoke highly of

the opportunity that Opportunity Culture was designed to provide them. Admittedly, teachers have a lot on their plates, and many other nuances impact their ability to be the best instructional leaders in their classrooms that they desire to be. Increases in the beginning teacher population as well as staff coming in without teacher licensure due to hiring flexibilities, all point to the need for increased instructional support. Turnover among administration as well as staff in general, sometimes causes the original intent for Opportunity Culture not to be understood by all.

According to Public Impact (2018), Opportunity Culture is grounded in five key principles.

These principles are:

1. Reach more students with excellent teachers and their teams
2. Pay teachers more for extending their reach
3. Fund pay with regular budgets
4. Provide protected in-school time and clarity about how to use it for planning and collaboration, and development
5. Match authority and accountability to each person's responsibilities.

More importantly, according to Public Impact (2018), not adhering to these principles consistently and long term is almost sure to end in failure. Based on the data obtained regarding the implementation of Opportunity Culture in NESW school district, there is currently a disconnect between the written plan and the implemented plan. The specific barriers that both classroom teachers and teacher leaders often identified were time constraints, being reassigned to duties that were more administrative in nature, lack of adherence to the original implementation plan and structure, and covering classes based on staffing shortages and larger teams of teachers than originally planned.

Time constraints were most often referenced when the MCLs were reassigned to other

duties, including administrative roles, such as helping with student discipline or covering classes when staff were absent or positions were not filled. The lack of adherence to the original structure of the work for the MCLs was based on MCLs exceeding the number of teachers served, failing to allow the teacher leaders to work with small groups of students, and serving as a “runner” based upon the flexibility of their schedule. For MCLs, these ever-changing duties and lack of fidelity to the structure of work planned was described as being “overwhelming.”

In order to ensure that this program evaluation results in actions that are meaningful for both the schools and the district overall, sharing the findings with those who have the authority to make changes is necessary for a “reset.” A reset would be an opportunity for the district and the schools to revisit the original plan for implementing Opportunity Culture from both the district’s perspective and the schools’ perspectives. Both the district and the individual schools had design teams that worked collaboratively to craft what this work needed to look like based on their area of oversight. The intent of the design teams was to ensure that each of the Opportunity Culture principles was operational as well as to provide space for schools to address any site-based needs. The data collected clearly pointed to the need for improvement versus tossing the initiative, as this study has shown that adherence to the plan that was communicated to teachers and teacher leaders is not being operationalized as originally intended.

Once the stakeholder groups have convened and unpacked the data from this program evaluation, an opportunity should be provided to exercise their collective genius and collaboratively come up with a plan for removing the barriers to success. This includes ensuring that all staff know what Opportunity Culture is in their schools and who the teacher leaders are. Stakeholders also need to know the plan for implementation of Opportunity Culture, be involved in creating structures to ensure the plan is carried out as intended and be engaged in revisiting

better ways to utilize other staff and funding to ensure that teacher leaders can continue the work that they are intended to do. Additionally, the implications for future work in Northeast Southwest Public Schools would be to implement an annual program evaluation structure to ensure that the intended outcomes regarding teacher and student impact are met. Identifying, communicating, and monitoring agreed-upon metrics for success would be advantageous to all. Overall, implementing these steps should aid in refreshing everyone on the established expectations so that the success of Opportunity Culture is not left up to chance, resulting in the district and the schools getting back on track.

Lastly, I would recommend including all of the schools implementing Opportunity Culture in Northeast Southwest Public Schools in a program evaluation that mirrors this study. This will allow stakeholders to possibly gain greater insight regarding the impact that the work of MCLs is having on the instructional practices of their district's classroom teachers. This would be beneficial in determining if the need for a reset exists throughout the district or if it is limited to those locations that have been implemented the longest.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Based on the results of the program evaluation at the initial implementer schools in Northeast Southwest School District as conducted during this study, I would recommend that a future study of this work includes a comparative analysis to determine what teacher ratings were for Standard III and Standard IV prior to the implementation of Opportunity Culture as compared to following the implementation. This would allow the researcher to have greater insight regarding how school administrators previously perceived the performance of teachers within these standard areas prior to interacting with the teacher leaders. Any indications of performance that were already at a satisfactory or beyond rating would create a space for determining if there

were any concerns of evaluation inflation among the evaluators, leading to work around ensuring interrater reliability for the district's administrative team.

Additionally, due to the changing role of teacher assignments, sometimes within the context of their assigned school, I would recommend that the researcher obtain a log of which teachers MCLs specifically were assigned to for each year being studied. This would help to ensure that clean data is better obtained based on any possible yearly changes in assignments for either group of educators.

Based on the NC Teacher Evaluation Process, some teachers may not be rated on Standard III annually. For future studies, it would be helpful to ensure that if an impacted teacher were not on a plan type that would allow them to have evaluations in both Standard III and Standard IV, district decisions regarding how to best obtain rating information for both standards should be established since these two standards are more directly correlated to instructional practice. Lastly, it would be interesting to examine the performance of the classroom teachers on Standards III and IV to determine if there appears to be any alignment with their principal's and superintendent's performance on Standard II: Instructional Leadership to determine the impact that school and district leaders' performance in this area may have on their classroom teachers.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the implementation of Opportunity Culture in the initial implementer schools in Northeast Southwest School District has had a positive impact on the school having teachers who are proficient on the North Carolina Teaching Standard III: Teachers Knowing the Content They Teach, and Teaching Standard IV: Teachers Facilitating Learning for Their Students. This was most evident as the teacher leaders worked with classroom teachers to unpack the standards, and provide them real-time feedback, planning support, and support in locating

resources, just to name a few. Of the positive feedback regarding the collaboration between the two groups and the overall impact, the identification of barriers such as being assigned duties that are more administrative in nature, covering classes as needed, and having a caseload of teachers to support that exceeds the amount originally intended gives cause for concern for the effectiveness of Opportunity Culture moving forward.

Leading this study as a senior administrator in the district has been an eye opening experience for me. Engaging the staff who work directly with our students daily has afforded me the opportunity to better understand the needs of our teachers. These interactions have left me inspired and challenged to do the best that I can in making the Opportunity Culture initiative a success. Our teachers cannot do it alone. I have a professional obligation to serve as a remover of barriers. For this experience and the opportunity to add voice to the work of our teachers, I am most grateful.

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## APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**  
**University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board**  
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building- Mail Stop 682  
600 Moye Boulevard - Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914 - Fax 252-744-2284  
[rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/](http://rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/)

### Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB  
To: [Charlene Pittman](#)  
CC: [Travis Lewis](#)  
Date: 2/16/2023  
Re: [UMCIRB 23-000046](#)  
A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF OPPORTUNITY CULTURE IN A SMALL, RURAL NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DISTRICT

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 2/16/2023. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1, 2b.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

| Document                            | Description                             |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Informed Consent(0.01)              | Consent Forms                           |
| Study Proposal IRB(0.01)            | Study Protocol or Grant Application     |
| Teacher Focus Group Protocol(0.01)  | Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions |
| Teacher Recruitment Email.pdf(0.01) | Recruitment Documents/Scripts           |
| Teacher Survey Questions(0.01)      | Surveys and Questionnaires              |

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

## **APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT**

### **A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF OPPORTUNITY CULTURE IN A SMALL RURAL NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Principal Investigator: Charlene Pittman

You are being invited to participate in a research study entitled: “A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF OPPORTUNITY CULTURE IN A SMALL RURAL NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL DISTRICT,” being conducted by Charlene Pittman, a doctoral student at East Carolina University in the College of Education. The goal is to survey and interview 10 individuals at Northeast Southwest Schools that were involved with the implementation of Opportunity Culture in the 2017-2018 school year and have remained in the school system to the current date. Participants for this study will have worked with at least one of the original implementer schools as a Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL) or as a classroom teacher receiving support from an MCL. The original implementer schools include Lone Pines Elementary, Southern Middle, and Northeast High. The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Focus Groups will take up to 45 minutes to complete. Interviews will be audio and/or video recorded and kept confidential. Names will not be utilized. Your responses will remain confidential. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. You may stop at any time. You will not be paid for your time to volunteer as a participant in this study. There is no penalty for not participating in this study. Please call Dr. Travis Lewis at 252-328-5485 for any research-related questions or the Institutional Review Board at 252-744-2914 for questions about your rights as a research participant.

\*By showing up and participating in the Focus Group or moving forward within the online survey, I provide my consent for my information to be used in this study.

## **APPENDIX C: TEACHER RECRUITMENT EMAIL**

Hello ECPS Teachers and Teacher Leaders,

As a part of our district's work to evaluate the impact of Opportunity Culture in our district beginning with the 2017-2018 school year, I have elected to complete this study for our district by researching it for my doctoral dissertation. Specifically, I will seek to determine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices for improved student academic achievement. I am very excited as this allows me the opportunity to connect with each of you as a researcher by engaging in conversations and using our time together to learn and grow regarding how to maximize the work that we do in our school district! This study will specifically focus on our initial implementer schools. Participation in this study involves: ·  
Completing a 15- minute online survey and participating in a 45 -minute focus group. If you agree to participate, please click on the link below to complete the survey. Your participation in this study would allow you to add your voice to our work. For more information, please feel free to reach out to me at any time!

Thank you,

C. Pittman

**APPENDIX D: NC TEACHER EVALUATION PROCESS – STANDARD III:  
TEACHERS KNOW THE CONTENT THEY TEACH**

North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process

**Standard III: Teachers Know the Content They Teach**

| Observation   | <b>Element IIIa. Teachers align their instruction with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.</b> In order to enhance the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> , teachers investigate the content standards developed by professional organizations in their specialty area. They develop and apply strategies to make the curriculum rigorous and relevant for all students and provide a balanced curriculum that enhances literacy skills. Elementary teachers have explicit and thorough preparation in literacy instruction. Middle and high school teachers incorporate literacy instruction within the content area or discipline. |   |  |               |  |
|---|---|---|--|---------------|--|
|   | Developing  | Proficient  | Accomplished   | Distinguished | Not Demonstrated<br>(Comment Required) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates an awareness of the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> and references it in the preparation of lesson plans.<br><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Elementary:</i> Begins to integrate literacy instruction in selected lessons.<br><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Secondary:</i> Recognizes the importance of integrating literacy strategies within the content areas. | . . . and<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Understands the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> , uses it in preparation of lesson plans, and applies strategies to make the curriculum rigorous and relevant.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Elementary:</i> Integrates effective literacy instruction throughout the curriculum.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Secondary:</i> Incorporates a wide variety of literacy skills within content areas to enhance learning.  | . . . and<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Develops and applies strategies based on the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> and standards developed by professional organizations to make the curriculum balanced, rigorous and relevant.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Elementary:</i> Evaluates and reflects upon the effectiveness of literacy instruction.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Secondary:</i> Evaluates and reflects upon the effectiveness of literacy instruction within content areas. | . . . and<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Assists colleagues in applying such strategies in their classrooms.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Elementary:</i> Makes necessary changes to instructional practice to improve student learning.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> <i>Secondary:</i> Makes necessary changes to instructional practice to improve student learning. |               |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates a basic level of content knowledge in the teaching specialty to which assigned.  | . . . and<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates an appropriate level of content knowledge in the teaching specialty to which assigned.   | . . . and<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Applies knowledge of subject beyond the content in assigned teaching specialty. Motivates students to investigate the content area to expand their knowledge and satisfy their natural curiosity.   | . . . and<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Extends knowledge of subject beyond content in their teaching specialty and sparks students' curiosity for learning beyond the required course work.   |               |  |

|   |   |  |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|---|--|--|
| Observation   | <b>Element IIIc. Teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.</b> Teachers know the links and vertical alignment of the grade or subject they teach and the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> . Teachers understand how the content they teach relates to other disciplines in order to deepen understanding and connect learning for students. Teachers promote global awareness and its relevance to subjects they teach. |  |   |  |  |
|   | <b>Developing</b>   | <b>Proficient</b>  | <b>Accomplished</b>   | <b>Distinguished</b>   | <b>Not Demonstrated<br/>(Comment Required)</b> |
| ✓   | <input type="checkbox"/> Understands the links between grade/subject and the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> .   | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge of links between grade/subject and the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> . | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge of the links and vertical alignment of the grade or subject area and the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> .<br>Relates content to other disciplines. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborates with teachers from other grades or subject areas to establish links between disciplines and influence school-wide curriculum and teaching practice. |  |
| ✓   | <input type="checkbox"/> Displays global awareness.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Promotes global awareness and its relevance to the subjects.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Integrates global awareness activities throughout lesson plans and classroom instructional practices.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Promotes global awareness and its relevance to all faculty members, influencing curriculum and teaching practices throughout the school.                                    |  |
| <b>Element IIIId. Teachers make instruction relevant to students.</b> Teachers incorporate 21 <sup>st</sup> century life skills into their teaching deliberately, strategically, and broadly. These skills include leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, people skills, self-direction, and social responsibility. Teachers help their students understand the relationship between the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> and 21 <sup>st</sup> century content, which includes global awareness; financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; and health awareness. |   |  |   |  |  |

|   |  |   |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| <b>Element IIIId. Teachers make instruction relevant to students.</b> Teachers incorporate 21 <sup>st</sup> century life skills into their teaching deliberately, strategically, and broadly. These skills include leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, people skills, self-direction, and social responsibility. Teachers help their students understand the relationship between the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> and 21 <sup>st</sup> century content, which includes global awareness; financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; and health awareness. |  |   |   |   |  |
| ✓   | <input type="checkbox"/> Identifies relationships between the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> and life in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Identifies relationships between the core content and 21 <sup>st</sup> century content. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Integrates core content and 21 <sup>st</sup> century content throughout lesson plans and classroom instructional practices. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Deepens students' understandings of 21 <sup>st</sup> century skills and helps them make their own connections and develop new skills. |  |

**Comments:**

**Examples of Artifacts:**

- |   |  |                                |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Display of creative student work   | <input type="checkbox"/> Content standards | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use of NC Standard Course of Study | <input type="checkbox"/> _____             | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson plans                       | <input type="checkbox"/> _____             | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |



**APPENDIX E: NC TEACHER EVALUATION PROCESS – STANDARD IV:  
TEACHERS FACILITATE LEARNING FOR THEIR STUDENTS**

North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process

**Standard IV: Teachers facilitate learning for their students**

| Observation  | Element IVa. Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students. Teachers know how students think and learn. Teachers understand the influences that affect individual student learning (development, culture, language proficiency, etc.) and differentiate their instruction accordingly. Teachers keep abreast of evolving research about student learning. They adapt resources to address the strengths and weaknesses of their students. |   |  |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|---|--|
|  | Developing  | Proficient  | Accomplished   | Distinguished   | Not Demonstrated<br>(Comment Required) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Understands developmental levels of students and recognizes the need to differentiate instruction.<br><br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/>   | <input type="checkbox"/> Understands developmental levels of students and appropriately differentiates instruction.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Assesses resources needed to address strengths and weaknesses of students.  | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Understands developmental levels of students and appropriately differentiates instruction.                      | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Identifies appropriate developmental levels of students and consistently and appropriately differentiates instruction.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Reviews and uses alternative resources or adapts existing resources to take advantage of student strengths or address weaknesses. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Encourages and guides colleagues to adapt instruction to align with students' developmental levels.<br><br><input type="checkbox"/> Stays abreast of current research about student learning and emerging resources and encourages the school to adopt or adapt them for the benefit of all students. |  |
| <b>Element IVb. Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students.</b> Teachers collaborate with their colleagues and use a variety of data sources for short- and long-range planning based on the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> . These plans reflect an understanding of how students learn. Teachers engage students in the learning process. They understand that instructional plans must be consistently monitored and modified to enhance learning. Teachers make the curriculum responsive to cultural differences and individual learning needs. |   |   |  |   |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Recognizes data sources important to planning instruction.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of data for short- and long-range planning of instruction. Monitors and modifies instructional plans to enhance student learning.   | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Monitors student performance and responds to individual learning needs in order to engage students in learning. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Monitors student performance and responds to individual learning needs in order to engage students in learning.  | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Monitors student performance and responds to cultural diversity and learning needs through the school improvement process.  |  |
| <b>Element IVc. Teachers use a variety of instructional methods.</b> Teachers choose the methods and techniques that are most effective in meeting the needs of their students as they strive to eliminate achievement gaps. Teachers employ a wide range of techniques including information and communication technology, learning styles, and differentiated instruction.   |   |   |  |   |  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates awareness of the variety of methods and materials necessary to meet the needs of all students.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates awareness or use of appropriate methods and materials necessary to meet the needs of all students.  | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Ensures the success of all students through the selection and utilization of appropriate methods and materials. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Ensures the success of all students through the selection and utilization of appropriate methods and materials.  | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Stays abreast of emerging research areas and new and innovative materials and incorporates them into lesson plans and instructional strategies.   |  |



| Observation | <b>Element IVd. Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction.</b> Teachers know when and how to use technology to maximize student learning. Teachers help students use technology to learn content, think critically, solve problems, discern reliability, use information, communicate, innovate, and collaborate. |   |  |  |                                     |
|-------------|--|---|--|--|-------------------------------------|
|             | Developing   | Proficient  | Accomplished   | Distinguished  | Not Demonstrated (Comment Required) |
| ✓           | <input type="checkbox"/> Assesses effective types of technology to use for instruction.  | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge of how to utilize technology in instruction. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Integrates technology with instruction to maximize student learning. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Provides evidence of student engagement in higher level thinking skills through the integration of technology. |                                     |

| <b>Element IVe. Teachers help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.</b> Teachers encourage students to ask questions, think creatively, develop and test innovative ideas, synthesize knowledge, and draw conclusions. They help students exercise and communicate sound reasoning; understand connections; make complex choices; and frame, analyze, and solve problems.      |  |  |  |   |  |
|---|--|--|--|---|--|
| ✓   | <input type="checkbox"/> Understands the importance of developing students' critical thinking and problem solving skills.      | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates knowledge of processes needed to support students in acquiring critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills. | ... and<br>Teaches students the processes needed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> think creatively and critically,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> develop and test innovative ideas,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> synthesize knowledge,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> draw conclusions,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> exercise and communicate sound reasoning,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> understand connections,</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> make complex choices, and</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> frame, analyze and solve problems.</li> </ul> | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Encourages and assists teachers throughout the school to integrate critical thinking and problem solving skills into their instructional practices. |  |
| <b>Element IVf. Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities.</b> Teachers teach the importance of cooperation and collaboration. They organize learning teams in order to help students define roles, strengthen social ties, improve communication and collaborative skills, interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and develop leadership qualities. |  |  |  |   |  |
| ✓   | <input type="checkbox"/> Provides opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and leadership through student learning teams. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Organizes student learning teams for the purpose of developing cooperation, collaboration, and student leadership.               | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Encourages students to create and manage learning teams.   | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Fosters the development of student leadership and teamwork skills to be used beyond the classroom.  |  |

|  |   |  |  |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Observation</b>   | <b>Element IVg. Teachers communicate effectively.</b> Teachers communicate in ways that are clearly understood by their students. They are perceptive listeners and are able to communicate with students in a variety of ways even when language is a barrier. Teachers help students articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively. |  |  |  |  |
|  | <b>Developing</b>   | <b>Proficient</b>  | <b>Accomplished</b>  | <b>Distinguished</b>   | <b>Not Demonstrated<br/>(Comment Required)</b> |
| ✓  | <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates the ability to effectively communicate with students.   | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Uses a variety of methods for communication with all students.                               | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Creates a variety of methods to communicate with all students.                               | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Anticipates possible student misunderstandings and proactively develops teaching techniques to mitigate concerns.                  |  |
| ✓  | <input type="checkbox"/> Provides opportunities for students to articulate thoughts and ideas.  | <input type="checkbox"/> Consistently encourages and supports students to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively. | <input type="checkbox"/> Establishes classroom practices which encourage all students to develop effective communication skills. | <input type="checkbox"/> Establishes school-wide and grade appropriate vehicles to encourage students throughout the school to develop effective communication skills. |  |
| <b>Element IVh. Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.</b> Teachers use multiple indicators, including formative and summative assessments, to evaluate student progress and growth as they strive to eliminate achievement gaps. Teachers provide opportunities, methods, feedback, and tools for students to assess themselves and each other. Teachers use 21 <sup>st</sup> century assessment systems to inform instruction and demonstrate evidence of students' 21 <sup>st</sup> century knowledge, skills, performance, and dispositions. |   |  |  |  |  |

|   |   |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| ✓ | <input type="checkbox"/> Uses indicators to monitor and evaluate student progress.  | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Uses multiple indicators, both formative and summative, to monitor and evaluate student progress and to inform instruction. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Uses the information gained from the assessment activities to improve teaching practice and student learning. | ... and<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teaches students and encourages them to use peer and self-assessment feedback to assess their own learning.  |  |
| ✓ | <input type="checkbox"/> Assesses students in the attainment of 21 <sup>st</sup> century knowledge, skills, and dispositions. | <input type="checkbox"/> Provides evidence that students attain 21 <sup>st</sup> century knowledge, skills and dispositions.                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Provides opportunities for students to assess themselves and others.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages and guides colleagues to assess 21 <sup>st</sup> century skills, knowledge, and dispositions and to use the assessment information to adjust their instructional practice. |  |

**Comments:**

**Examples of Artifacts:**

- |  |  |                                |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lesson plans                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Documentation of differentiated instruction                     | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Display of technology used    | <input type="checkbox"/> Materials used to promote critical thinking and problem solving | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Professional development      | <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative lesson planning                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use of student learning teams |  | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

## APPENDIX F: TEACHER SUMMARY RATING FORM

North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process

### Teacher Summary/End-of-Year Rating Form (Required)

This form is to be jointly reviewed by the teacher and evaluator or designee during the Summary Evaluation Conference conducted at the end of the year. Principals are required to complete this form for Initially Licensed/Beginning Teachers. The principal's designee may complete it for New Teachers who are not Initially Licensed Teachers and for Experienced Teachers.

Name:

School:  School Year:

Evaluator:  District:

Date Completed:  Evaluator's Title:

Beginning Teacher (Initially Licensed)     
  New Teacher (Not Initially Licensed)     
  Experienced Teacher (Please check one)

#### Standard I: Teachers Demonstrate Leadership

| Elements  | Developing               | Proficient               | Accomplished             | Distinguished            | Not Demonstrated         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. Teachers lead in their classrooms.             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Teachers demonstrate leadership in the school. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Teachers lead the teaching profession.         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Teachers advocate for schools and students.    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. Teachers demonstrate high ethical standards.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Overall rating for Standard I</b>              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Comments:<br><input style="width: 95%; height: 60px;" type="text"/>                                   | <b>Evidence or documentation to support rating:</b><br><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson Plans<br><input type="checkbox"/> School Improvement Planning<br><input type="checkbox"/> Teacher Working Conditions<br><input type="checkbox"/> Surveys<br><input type="checkbox"/> Journals<br><input type="checkbox"/> Service on Committees<br><input type="checkbox"/> Professional Learning Communities<br><input type="checkbox"/> National Board Certification<br><input type="checkbox"/> Student Handbooks<br><input type="checkbox"/> Relevant Data<br><input type="checkbox"/> Membership in Professional Organizations<br><input type="checkbox"/> Discipline Records<br><input type="checkbox"/> Student Work<br><input type="checkbox"/> Class Rules and Procedures<br><input type="checkbox"/> Formal and Informal Mentoring<br><input type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 80%; height: 15px;" type="text"/><br><input type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 80%; height: 15px;" type="text"/><br><input type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 80%; height: 15px;" type="text"/> |
| Recommended Actions for Improvement:<br><input style="width: 95%; height: 60px;" type="text"/>        |  |
| Resources needed to complete these actions:<br><input style="width: 95%; height: 60px;" type="text"/> |  |

**Standard II: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students**

| Elements  | Developing               | Proficient               | Accomplished             | Distinguished            | Not Demonstrated         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Teachers treat students as individuals.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. Teachers work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students.         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Overall rating for Standard II</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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|--|--|
| <p>Comments:</p> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; height: 60px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Recommended Actions for Improvement:</p> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; height: 60px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Resources needed to complete these actions:</p> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; height: 60px;"></div> | <p><b>Evidence or documentation to support rating:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student Profiles</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Documentation of Referral Data and Use of IEPs</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Student Surveys</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Communications with Parents/Community</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation with ESL Teachers</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lessons that Integrate International Content</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use of Technology to Incorporate Cultural Awareness into Lessons</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

**Standard III: Teachers Know the Content They Teach**

| Elements  | Developing               | Proficient               | Accomplished             | Distinguished            | Not Demonstrated         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. Teachers align their instruction with the <i>North Carolina Standard Course of Study</i> . | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Teachers know the content appropriate to their teaching specialty.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Teachers make instruction relevant to students.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Overall rating for Standard III</b>  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| <p>Comments:</p> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; height: 60px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Recommended Actions for Improvement:</p> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; height: 60px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <p>Resources needed to complete these actions:</p> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; height: 60px;"></div> | <p><b>Evidence or documentation to support rating:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Display of Creative Student Work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Use of Standard Course of Study</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson Plans</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Content Standards</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> |
|--|--|

**Standard IV: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students**

| Elements  | Developing               | Proficient               | Accomplished             | Distinguished            | Not Demonstrated         |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Teachers use a variety of instructional methods.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. Teachers help students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| F. Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| G. Teachers communicate effectively.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| H. Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>Overall rating for Standard IV</b>   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Comments:</p> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; height: 80px; margin-bottom: 10px;"></div> <p>Recommended Actions for Improvement:</p> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; height: 80px; margin-bottom: 10px;"></div> <p>Resources needed to complete these actions:</p> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; height: 100px;"></div> | <p><b>Evidence or documentation to support rating:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson Plans</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Documentation of Differentiated Instruction</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Display of Technology Used</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Materials Used to Promote Critical Thinking and Problem Solving</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative Lesson Planning</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use of Student Learning Teams</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

### Standard V: Teachers Reflect on Their Practice

| Elements  | Developing | Proficient | Accomplished | Distinguished | Not Demonstrated |
|---|------------|------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| A. Teachers analyze student learning.                               |            |            |              |               |                  |
| B. Teachers link professional growth to their professional goals.   |            |            |              |               |                  |
| C. Teachers function effectively in a complex, dynamic environment. |            |            |              |               |                  |
| <b>Overall rating for Standard V</b>                                |            |            |              |               |                  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Comments:</p><br><br><br><p>Recommended Actions for Improvement:</p><br><br><br><p>Resources needed to complete these actions:</p><br><br><br> | <p><b>Evidence or documentation to support rating:</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Lesson Plans</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Completion of Professional Development</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Formative Assessments</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Participation in Professional Learning Community</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Student Work</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Formative and Summative Assessment Data</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development Plan</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> _____</p> |
|---|--|

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Teacher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Principal/Evaluator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Date

Comments Attached:  Yes  No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Principal/Evaluator Signature

(Signature indicates question above regarding comments has been addressed).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Date

*Note: The teacher's signature on this form represents neither acceptance nor approval of the report. It does, however, indicate that the teacher has reviewed the report with the evaluator and may reply in writing. The signature of the principal or evaluator verifies that the report has been reviewed and that the proper process has been followed according to North Carolina State Board of Education Policy for the Teacher Evaluation Process.*

## APPENDIX G: COACHING TRACKER



### GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK: See it. Name it. Do it.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Prepare<br/>During<br/>observation</b> | <b>Prepare</b>   |
|   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Have your tools in hand:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Get Better Faster Scope &amp; Sequence, teacher lesson plan, video tool, observation tracker</li></ul></li><li>● Select the highest leverage, measurable, bite-sized action step</li><li>● Plan your feedback while observing:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Fill out planning template</li><li>○ Videotape while you observe: mark the time stamps in your planning template</li></ul></li></ul> |
| <b>See It</b><br>2-8 mins                 | <b>See it: Success, Model, &amp; Gap</b>   |



**See the Success:**

- “We set a goal last week of \_\_\_\_\_ and I noticed how you [met goal] by [state concrete positive actions teacher took].”
- “What made that successful? What was the impact of [that positive action]?”

**See the Model:**

- Narrow the focus: “Today, I want to dive into [specific element of lesson, action step area].”
- Prompt the teacher to name the exemplar:
  - “What are the keys/criteria for success to \_\_\_\_ [action step/skill]? What is the purpose?”
  - “What did you ideally want to see/hear when \_\_\_\_?”
  - “What was your objective/goal for \_\_\_\_ [activity/lesson]? What did the students have to do to meet this goal/objective?”
- (If unable to name the exemplar) Show a model—choose one:
  - Show video of effective teaching: “What actions did the teacher take to do \_\_\_\_?”
  - Model: “What do you notice about how I \_\_\_\_?” “What is the impact and purpose?”
  - Connect to PD: “Think back to the PD on \_\_\_\_; what were the keys required for \_\_\_\_?”
  - Debrief real-time feedback: “When I gave real-time feedback, what did I say? What did I do? What was the impact of the real-time feedback?”
  - Read a one-pager or prompting guide: “What are the essential elements of \_\_\_\_?”

**See the Gap:**

- “What is the gap between [the model/exemplar] and class today? What keys were missing?”
- “What was the challenge in implementing [technique/content] effectively during the lesson?”
- (If unable to name the gap) Present the evidence:
  - Present time-stamped video from observation: “What are the students doing? What are you doing?” “What is the gap between what we see in this part of the video and the [exemplar]?”
  - Present classroom evidence: “Two students in the front row had their heads down during independent practice. How does this impact student learning?” “What is the gap between [the exemplar] and class today?”
  - Present student work: “What is the gap between the [exemplar] and [student work] today?”

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Action Step: What &amp; How</b> |   |
| <b>Name it</b><br>2 mins           | <p><b>Name the Action Step:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “Based on what we discussed today, what do you think your action step should be?”</li> <li>● “What are the key steps to take to close the gap?”</li> </ul> <p><b>Punch it:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “So your action step today is _____”--state clearly and concisely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>what</u> the teacher will work on (e.g., what-to-do directions)</li> <li>○ <u>how</u> the teacher will execute (e.g., “1. Stand still, 2. Give a what-to-do direction, and 3. Scan”)</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Have teacher restate the action step; then write it down</li> </ul> |

|  |
|--|
| <b>Plan, Practice, &amp; Follow Up</b> |
|--|

**Do It**  
Rest of  
meeting

**Plan before Practice:**

- Script the changes into upcoming lesson plans
  - “Where would be a good place to implement this in your upcoming lessons?”
  - “What are all the actions you need to take/want to see in the students?”
  - “Take three minutes to write up your plan.”
- Push to make the plan more precise and more detailed
  - “What prompts will you use with students that we can practice today?”
  - “Now that you’ve made your initial plan, what will do you if [state student behavior/response that will be challenging]?”
- (If struggling to make a strong plan) Model for the teacher and debrief:
  - “Watch what I do and say as I model \_\_\_\_.” “What do you notice about how I did \_\_\_\_?”
- Perfect the plan
  - “Those three steps look great. Let’s add \_\_\_\_ to your [script/lesson plan].”

**Practice:**

- Round 1: “Let’s Practice” or “Let’s take it live.”
  - [When applicable] Stand up/move around classroom to simulate the feeling of class
  - Pause the role play at the point of error to give immediate feedback
  - Repeat until the practice is successful.
- Additional Rounds: master it while adding complexity:
  - “Let’s try that again, but this time I will be [student x who is slightly more challenging].”
- (Once mastered) Lock it in:
  - “How did what we practice meet or enhance the action step we named?”
  - “Where did our practice fall short or meet the exemplar at the start of the meeting?”

**Follow up:**

- Plan for real-time feedback:
  - Agree on a predetermined cue for next observation: “When I come in, I will observe for \_\_\_\_\_. If I see you struggling I will [give you a cue].”
- Set dates—both teacher and leader write them down:
  - Completed Materials: when teacher will complete revised lesson plan/materials.
  - Observation: when you’ll observe the teacher
    - “When would be best time to observe your implementation of this?”
    - “When I review your plans, I’ll look for \_\_\_\_\_.”
    - (Newer teacher): “I’ll come in tomorrow and look for this technique.”
  - (When valuable) Teacher Observes Master Teacher: when they’ll observe master teacher in classroom or via video implementing the action step

- o (When valuable) Self-Video: when you'll tape teacher to debrief in future meeting

## **APPENDIX H: CLASSROOM TEACHER SURVEY ON OPPORTUNITY CULTURE**

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. The purpose of this survey is to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement. Ultimately, this program evaluation is to identify ways to best utilize the current teacher talent of those who have a proven track record of success to better develop other teachers throughout their school site. Please know that the information provided will be confidential and your name will not be shared with anyone beyond this project's researcher.

By continuing to participate, you're giving permission for your data to be collected and used for this study. Again, thank you for sharing your voice through survey feedback!

### **Demographic Information**

1. Name:
2. To which gender identity do you most identify?
3. What race or ethnicity best describes you?
4. How long have you worked for Northeast Southwest Schools?
5. How long have you been teaching altogether?

What schools have you worked in since the 2017-18 school year?

6. Positions you have had with Northeast Southwest Schools since 2017-18?
7. Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received?

**Instructions: Please read the following questions carefully and answer accordingly.**

Likert-Type Scale Survey Questions

“Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree”, “Strongly Disagree”, “Neither Agree nor Disagree”

**Classroom Teachers**

1. *Working with my MCL* has helped me with aligning my instruction with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.
2. *Working with my MCL* has helped me to know the content appropriate to my teaching specialty.
3. *Working with my MCL* has not caused me to recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.
4. *Working with my MCL* has helped me make instruction relevant to my students.
5. *Working with my MCL* has not impacted me in knowing the ways in which learning takes place, and knowing the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of my students.
6. *Working with my MCL* has helped me to plan instruction appropriate for my students.
7. *Working with my MCL* has not impacted my use of a variety of instructional methods.
8. *Working with my MCL* has not helped with integrating and utilizing technology in my instruction.
9. *Working with my MCL* has impacted my ability to help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.
10. *Working with my MCL* has prepared me with helping my students to work in teams and develop leadership qualities.
11. *Working with my MCL* has not helped me with communicating effectively.
12. *Working with my MCL* has helped me to use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.

## **APPENDIX I: MCL SURVEY ON OPPORTUNITY CULTURE**

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. The purpose of this survey is to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement. Ultimately, this program evaluation is to identify ways to best utilize the current teacher talent of those who have a proven track record of success to better develop other teachers throughout their school site. Please know that the information provided will be confidential and your name will not be shared with anyone beyond this project's researcher.

By continuing to participate, you're giving permission for your data to be collected and used for this study. Again, thank you for sharing your voice through survey feedback!

### **Demographic Information**

1. Name:
2. To which gender identity do you most identify?
3. What race or ethnicity best describes you?
4. How long have you worked for Northeast Southwest Schools?
5. How long have you been teaching altogether?

What schools have you worked in since the 2017-18 school year?

6. Positions you have had with Northeast Southwest Schools since 2017-18?
7. Education: What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received?

**Instructions: Please read the following questions carefully and answer accordingly.**

Likert-Type Scale Survey Questions

“Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Disagree”, “Strongly Disagree”, “Neither Agree nor Disagree”

**Multi-Classroom Leaders (MCLs)**

1. I assist teachers with learning to align their instruction with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study.
2. I help teachers know the content appropriate to their teaching specialty.
3. I help teachers recognize the interconnectedness of content areas/disciplines.
4. I help teachers make instruction relevant to students.
5. I do not assist teachers in knowing the ways in which learning takes place, and knowing the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students.
6. I assist teachers with planning instruction that is appropriate for their students.
7. I assist teachers with learning to use a variety of instructional methods.
8. I assist teachers with knowing how to best integrate and utilize technology in their instruction.
9. I assist teachers with developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
10. I assist teachers with helping their students work in teams and develop leadership qualities.
11. I do not help teachers communicate effectively.
12. I help teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.



## APPENDIX J: TEACHER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

**Title of Study:**

**Date & Time of Focus Group:**

**Location of Focus Group:**

**Facilitator:**

**Note Taker:**

**Focus Group Participants (Names or Identifiers):**

### **Introduction Text**

My name is Charlene Pittman and I will be the facilitator for today's Opportunity Culture focus group. The purpose for our time together is to examine the impact of Opportunity Culture on teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement.

Ultimately, this program evaluation is to identify ways to best utilize the current teacher talent of those who have a proven track record of success to better develop other teachers throughout their school site. Please know that the information discussed in this focus group will be confidential and your name will not be shared with anyone beyond this project's researcher.

By showing up and participating, you are proving your consent to participate in the Impact of Opportunity Culture focus group. If you feel uncomfortable for any reason with participating, you are free to leave at any time. Please take a moment to read it over the form as shared with you via email.

Before we begin, I would like to share that I will use the transcribe feature of Google Meet.

Using the transcription feature will help to ensure that I am accurately capturing your responses.

[INSERT HERE NOTIFICATION IF AUDIO/VIDEO RECORDING]. I would like to go over a few ground rules for the focus group. These are in place to ensure that all of you feel comfortable sharing your experiences and opinions.

### **Ground Rules:**

1. *Confidentiality* – Please respect the confidentiality of your peers. As facilitator, I will only be sharing the information from this focus group anonymously.
2. *One Speaker at a Time* – Only one person should speak at a time in order to make sure that we can all hear what everyone is saying.
3. *Use Respectful Language* – In order to facilitate an open discussion, please avoid any statements or words that may be offensive to other members of the group.
4. *Open Discussion* – This is a time for everyone to feel free to express their opinions and viewpoints. You will not be asked to reach consensus on the topics discussed. There will be no right or wrong answers.

5. *Participation is Important* – It is important that everyone’s voice is shared and heard in order to make this the most productive focus group possible. Please speak up if you have something to add to the conversation!

Thank you, now let’s begin.

1. Have you served as Teacher/Multi-Classroom Leader (MCL) since the implementation of Opportunity Culture in the 2017-2018 school year? If not, what roles have you served in and when?
2. Please provide examples of how you are supported as teachers/teacher leaders within Northeast Southwest Schools.
3. How has Opportunity Culture impacted teacher instructional practices that may result in improved student academic achievement?
4. How can we best utilize the current teacher talent of those who have a proven track record of success to better develop other teachers throughout their school site?
5. To what extent, if any, is Opportunity Culture impacting Northeast Southwest School teachers’ ability to know the content they teach?
6. To what extent, if any, is Opportunity Culture impacting Northeast Southwest School teachers’ ability to facilitate learning for their students?
7. Please describe your experiences as an MCL/Classroom Teacher.

